

School dropout: causes, effects, prevention and intervention strategies

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Abstract: There are few published articles analyzing the school dropout and offering a broad imagine of the phenomenon. Most of these studies are focused on testing concrete programs of intervention or on meta-analyzing the efficiency of several programs applied to students with a high risk of dropout. The article above may be framed in a series of scientific interests materialized in a research project focused on investigating school violence situations in the Romanian schools and its relationship with sports activities and the percentage of dropouts². This article contains a synthesis about types, causes and effects of youngsters leaving school early and possible prevention/intervention strategies. Thus, we have made a short review of the risk factors in the school dropout rate on the basis of the main behavioural models which may lead to school failure. We, also, have tried to analyze the personal and social effects of the dropout and offer concrete examples of specific intervention strategies. The three main categories of intervention in school dropout, identified by Martin *et al.* (2002): unspecific, specific and individualized intervention are detailed and reinforced with examples of the most efficient and most frequent intervention programs used by educators and counsellors.

Keywords: school dropout, models of school dropout, students with high dropout risk, effective prevention and intervention programs.

1. Introduction

The school dropout is usually defined as the situation when a person leaves school without being awarded a degree corresponding to the educational cycle and is not registered the following year (Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, Royer, & Joly, 2006). From an even broader perspective, the school dropout represents a premature disengagement and termination of education (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001).

Scientific preoccupations regarding the dropout phenomenon have intensified in the last couple of years due to the constant training and educational demands imposed by the technological development of our society. Starting in 1970, high school was no longer an option for professional development but became the

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² Grant ID 1146/2007-2010 (The benefits of sports activities in reducing school violence) financed by The National Council of the Scientific Research from the Higher Education (CNCSIS), Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation.

minimum level of education that needed to be achieved in order for a person to efficiently adapt to the societal requirements. Even so, the percentage of dropouts is currently considered to be an important problem which requires serious research and scientific intervention programmes.

Statistics from the United States of America show that between 1972 and 2001, 11% of the young people (16 to 24 years of age) were not enrolled in or had not yet graduated from any type of high school (National Centre for Education Statistics, Kaufman, Alt & Chapman, 2004).

Statistics are similar for Europe where the dropout rate also continues to be an important social issue. In 2007, the average rate for dropout in the EU was 14.8 %; the countries with the highest rates were Spain (31 %) and Portugal (36.3 %). The empirical and theoretical studies regarding the school dropout phenomenon can generally be structured in two directions. The first direction is based on statistical data (school dropout rates) correlated with different social variables. The second one is focused on identifying risk factors, evaluating potential risks by assessing personality, social, economic and environmental variables. As regards to the first aspect, the indicators for school dropout rates are calculated by analyzing the differences between the number of students registered at the beginning and at the end of an academic year. Basically, it is expressed as a percentage relation against the number of students registered at the beginning of the school year. The indicator may suggest how efficient the educational system is; the ideal number towards which the tendency should be is 0; high values indicate the major dysfunctions within that educational system. If we would limit school dropout research to this first direction, it would only serve us to acknowledging the existence and gravity of the dropout, offering little information about possible prevention and intervention strategies.

Therefore, the second research direction offers us a deeper understanding of the school dropout in relation with other psychological, pedagogical and social variables in order to elaborate adequate intervention strategies.

2. Typologies of school dropout

Scientific literature describes several types (or models) of a school dropout. Here are a few of them which we consider relevant. Finn (1989) describes two behavioural models which lead to abandoning school. The first model, *frustration-self-esteem model*, refers to the students who have accumulated a negative experience in school, consisting of repeated failures, low grades and low self-esteem. All of these elements create a state of frustration, which little by little leads to inadequate behaviours at school such as: skipping classes and avoiding school tasks that finally determine withdrawal. The second model, the *participation-identification model*, refers to students who, although get good marks and actively participate in school tasks, manifest problems such as difficulties in identifying

with their student status, the incapacity of internalizing these statutory dimensions at the level of self-concept.

Kronick & Hargis (1990, 1994) proposed a classification of a dropout divided in four categories using two criteria: difficulties in learning and types of adapted behaviours. The first of them, *quiet dropouts*, comprises the students who acquire knowledge with difficulty, are slow in learning and experience constant failure in their school activities. They do have behavioural problems, their reactions to repeated failure are not open and they do not ask for help either. The second category includes *low achievers*, who react openly, disruptively, showing their annoyance and frustration. They usually skip classes in order to avoid punishment and confrontation with failure and end up abandoning the educational institution in which they are enrolled. *Non-curricular dropouts* are the third category. This consists of the students whose problems are rooted outside school, based on a palette of extremely different circumstances: poverty, drug abuse and smoking, divorce and parental conflicts, parents' precarious health etc. The students from this category are confronted with material and health difficulties; they come to school too tired, sometimes hungry and poorly dressed. Due to difficulties in dealing with the school's requirements and because they feel humiliated and marginalized, most of them are tempted to skip classes and leave school forever. The fourth category regards *the persistent dropouts* which includes students with poor school performance but who are capable of elaborating compensatory behaviours in order to maintain themselves in schools. Among these adaptive behaviours we can mention avoidance and deceit as well as involvement in sports or art etc.

Fortin *et al.* (2006) proposed another classification of school dropout cases taking into account three aspects referring to students: personal, family and school context. The authors identified four subgroups: (1) *the antisocial hidden behaviour type*, (2) *the uninterested in school type*, (3) *school and social adjustment difficulties type*, and (4) *the depressive type*.

The first type refers to students who have good academic results and their teachers describe their behaviours as being positive, without any discipline problems. However, Fortin's results indicate certain antisocial hidden behavioural problems such as: a low level of family cohesion, difficulties in emotional expression, difficulties in managing and organizing concrete activities and reduced emotional support. Regarding their families, results show that these students have little or insufficient parental control, their rules of co-living and life routines are chaotic or nonexistent.

The second category, *the uninterested in school type*, includes students who have good academic results as well, but, they lack school motivation, manifesting depressive tendencies and boredom towards current activities; their relationships with teachers are positive and their family creates a positive climate. Even so, these

students report a more reduced emotional support. This category presents the lowest risk of the school dropout. This type would correspond to the *quiet dropouts*' category from the type proposed by Kronick & Hargis (1990).

The third category is represented by the *school and social adjustment difficulties type* which is characterized by poor academic results, severe behavioural problems, high levels of depression and sometimes a tendency towards delinquency; teachers have negative attitudes in relation to these students and their family problems include disorganization and lack of emotional support. This category would correspond to the *low achiever's* type in the classification made by Kronick & Hargis (1990).

The students from the last category, *the depressive type*, are characterized by average academic results, reduced externalization of behavioural problems and a positive relationship with their teachers. However, these students report a high frequency of negative emotions, such as sadness, discouragement, suicidal thoughts, permanent feelings of failure, crying, etc. As regards to their relationship with their family, this group registers severe problems such as: a low level of family cohesion, a high level of parental control and a lack of emotional support.

We have given all these categories an overview as we believe that it is important to elaborate different prevention and intervention strategies adapted to the characteristics of each group.

3. Risk factors

The first scientific studies regarding the school dropout were focused on identifying risk factor characteristics associated to students with potential risk for dropout (Suh & Suh, 2007). In a study regarding risk factors in the school dropout, Fortin *et al.* (2006) proposes three axes of analysis for risk factors: personal, family and school context.

The personal risk factors have been analysed from a cognitive, emotional and behavioural perspective. Thus, empirical studies on the school dropout frequently reported risk factors like *learning difficulties* (LD), poor informational acquisitions (Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs, 1997), lack of basic learning abilities (Holt, 1995). Other studies mention *lack of motivation* and *interest in school* (Vallerand, Fortier & Guay, 1997); low level of engagement in activity strongly correlates with high rates of school dropout (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003). In addition, adherence to a certain system of values such as a lack of appreciation of school success also correlates with the school dropout (Alexander, Entwistle, & Horsey, 1997). Low qualifications and a lack of pleasure for school activities, also alienate students from school (Coley, 1995, as cited in Suh & Suh, 2007).

Other factors that may contribute to the school dropout are inappropriate social behaviours, the lack of social competences and a certain early disruptive profile (Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992). Behavioural problems like drug

consumption, alcohol abuse, school violence and delinquency are also mentioned (Jimerson, Egeland, Stroufe, & Carlson, 2000).

The second category of risk factors is given by the impact of family variables; dysfunctional families confronted with negative or traumatic events are often a favourable environment for future children's failure. In addition, reduced expectations regarding school, poor child supervision and reduced appreciation may contribute to a potential school dropout.

Several characteristics of these families are analysed and mentioned in different empirical studies: non-conventional lifestyles (Fortin *et al.*, 2006), mono-parental families (Walker *et al.*, 1998). Inadequate parental styles, vicious parental practices, traumatic events (McCubbin & Figley, 1983) lack of emotional support, chronic strains (Billings & Moos, 1984) lack of involvement in the child's academic activities (Finn & Rock, 1997; McNeal, 1999) lack of surveillance (Howell & Frese, 1982; McNeal, 1999) lack of attention, daily hassles (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982) marital conflicts (Walker *et al.*, 1998), frequent changes when it comes to the parents' workplace (Orthner & Randolph, 1999). The socioeconomic status of the family remains one of the most important risk factors (Frank, 1990).

The third risk category is represented by school factors as many authors believe that dropout rates may vary from one school to another (Fortin *et al.* 2006). Therefore, studies have underlined school factors among which we have mentioned: the classroom climate (Pierce, 1994), discipline management, the quality of teacher-student interactions, students' engagement in school tasks, their stimulation and involvement in specific activities. Adequate organization of the activities in the classroom, task stimulation and orientation encourages better performances and implicitly diminish the tendency for dropping out. On the contrary, excessive focus on rules, unclear and inconsistently formulated rules, focus on punitive interventions and punishments, may encourage dropping out of school (Fortin *et al.*, 2006).

The students who drop out of school see their teachers as being too punitive, excessively authoritarian, uninterested in students' problems and incapable of giving the necessary support in school activities (Vallerand & Senecal, 1991).

Other authors believe that we may consider a fourth risk category which should include interpersonal factors. Interpersonal relationships focus on two components: rejection or affiliation with deviant, delinquent students (Vitaro, Larocque, Janosz, Tremblay, 2001) could also contribute to higher rates of dropout. Students with disruptive behaviours are rejected by colleagues, are not able to make friends in the class and accumulate a negative social experience in their groups (Coie, 1990, Vitaro *et al.* 2001). Aggressiveness, lack of friends, rejection and failure to establish friendships, correlated with poor academic results, may

increase the risk of dropping out of school (Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990, Kupersmidt & Coie, 1990).

4. Effects of school failure and dropout

The accelerated changes in our society, the informational explosion as well as the increasingly high standards imposed by the global labour markets have raised questions regarding people's adequate adaptation to their environment by acquiring superior competences in their field of activity. Graduating one educational cycle offers a high possibility of enrolling in a superior educational cycle and therefore, achieving superior competences and abilities.

In the social-economic current context, a bachelor's degree represents the minimum for finding a job; that is why dropping out of school before finishing high school produces serious negative effects both on the individual and their social level. The students who drop out of school at an early stage of education have fewer possibilities to choose a profession and so being employed in unqualified jobs, which are normally poorly paid, is sometimes their only realistic chance. The lack of educational access is not only reflected in low socio-economic status but also leads to difficulties in personality development, well-being and social integration. The long-term effect of the school dropout may be efficiently understood and prevented if we take in consideration the early consequences of the risk factors preceding the dropout phenomenon.

Psychological effects – empirical studies show that school dropout, skipping classes and truancy are not issues that appear out of nowhere; they are results of a school avoidance pattern which develops progressively in the academic history of a student (Hunt *et al.*, 2002); the sooner this pattern is developed, the more important are the psychological effects of the school dropout. Psychologists have shown that temporary or persistent school failure, which often precedes a dropout, has a negative impact on self-esteem. A generalized feeling of a lack of value may become a serious handicap for social integration, especially in societies where competition, success and intelligence are highly encouraged (Compas, 1991). Some authors have analysed school failure in direct or indirect relations with five core-competences developed in a progressive manner over the course of one's childhood and adolescence: positive feeling for self, self-control, decision making competences, a system of moral values and convictions and pro-social competences (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & McNeely 2008).

Socio-economic effects – psychological problems associated with dropout rates sometimes lead to health problems, delinquency and social supervision (Martin, Tobin, & Sugai, 2002). The direct (unemployment financial aid, social assistance) and indirect costs (criminality, delinquency, social intervention programs) of school dropouts are usually higher than the costs for preventing dropout programs (Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009). In the USA, for example, the percentage of persons assisted is four times bigger than for those who did not finish high school

(27% of them are socially assisted) compared to those who graduated (6% of them are socially assisted) (National Centre for Education Statistics, 1996, *apud*. Fashola & Slavin, 1998). In Romania, the effects of the school dropout are focused on socio-economic integration, moral and civic issues, difficulties in people's social assertion and on his/her quality of a citizen belonging to a community. The negative long and medium term consequences of the lack of initial training are reflected in the subsequent economic costs (unemployment, social care). However, there are no systematic studies analyzing the relationships between the school dropout and these effects, from an economical-social sphere.

5. Prevention and intervention

A review of empirical studies emphasizes a very large palette of strategies for prevention and intervention regarding the school dropout phenomenon: from the more general ones, which take into account the students and their adaptation to the school environment to the individualized ones, which directly aim at the high risk students.

Scientific research has shown that the development of systematic preoccupations for understanding and preventing school dropout and informing those responsible have led to its decrease in certain countries. In the USA, the Department of Education from Oregon carried out a project that has proven to be efficient for the prevention and reduction of the school dropout³. Interviewing those who abandoned school at an early stage has allowed for the identification of certain causes and reports regarding dropout rates from secondary schools; this has offered an image on the evolution of dropout rates. The information regarding the strategies for the prevention of the dropout was provided to school administrators and necessary resources for the prevention of school dropout were searched within the community. Most of the studies on the dropout recommend identifying potential dropouts and prompt interventions at the first behavioural sign (DeRidder, 1988).

Most of the prevention programs were developed on the American continent starting in the 50's when high-school graduation became a target for all students. Implementing prevention programs turned out to be an efficient measure: the school dropout rate in US high schools dropped from 15% in 1972 to 9% in 2006. Even so, Bradshaw *et al.* (2008) are convinced that school failure and dropout rates continue to be one of the most important challenges in the American contemporary educational system.

³ Project CREDENTIALS: Current Research on EDucational ENdeavors To Increase At-Risk Learner's Success. Office of Professional Technical Education, Oregon Department of Education (1999-2000). Project coordinators: Tary Jeanne Tobin & George Sugai

The primary prevention focused on the factors preceding the dropout (low school performance, failed classes, academic year repetition, absences, aversion to school) is not always efficient; many of the abandonment situations requiring secondary prevention programs (in the case of students with high risk) or even tertiary (in the case of persons who have already abandoned school).

Generally, the interventions in the school dropout situations described in scientific literature include: a) offering alternative teaching services for professional training; b) improving interpersonal relations between family and school members; c) developing a feeling of respect and consideration towards school staff; c) offering a positive individual support to students who manifest behavioural problems (Martin, Tobin, & Sugai, 2002).

A review of the main prevention and intervention programs undertaken by Fashola & Slavin (1998) showed that most of these programs are focused on: a) adjusting the school experience for the students at high risk in order for them to get involved in activities which in turn brings them appreciation and consideration from both teachers and colleagues; b) increasing students' awareness on the long-term benefits of high-school graduation, through vocational education, placement in part-time jobs, summer jobs within colleges and tutoring activities with volunteer students from the surrounding universities etc.

Larrivee & Bourque (1991) proposed a conceptual framework which divides the prevention and intervention strategies in three categories: individual strategies (students' adjustment to academic requirements), school and societal strategies (creating extra-school environment favouring dropout prevention). Analyzing the efficiency of the main prevention and intervention programs underlined the fact that most of them had a general effect on decreasing the dropout rate and a significant change in a students' attitude towards education but also has lead to different effects on academic results, behaviour in classrooms and involvement in academic activities.

Martin, Tobin, & Sugai (2002) proposed another classification of the main types of intervention which can result into a decreased rate of school dropout. Here are some of the strategies which have proven to be efficient.

General no-specific interventions

Counselling programs with students are recommended for pupils with behavioural problems and learning difficulties who have the tendency to abandon school, especially, during the period of transition from middle to high school. Teachers or counsellors who monitor students' activities are assigned individually and in groups for discussions. The groups of discussions offer students who have difficulties in adapting to school the possibility to build positive relationships with an adult from school or with other colleagues, to develop feelings of belonging to a group, to develop adaptation abilities, to think critically, solve problems and make decisions.

Extracurricular activities also represent opportunities for the students to become noticed, to know themselves and know each other. For example, Mahoney & Cairns (1997) investigated 392 teenagers from the 7th grade up to the 12th grade among which 16% abandoned school before the 12th grade. The authors found that extracurricular activities are efficient for the dropout prevention programs since it offers the possibility to build a social conventional network of support within which students with problems can develop personal and group purposes and interests. The most efficient extracurricular activities in reducing dropout rates were the vocational and sporting ones. The same observations were made by Walters & Bowen (1997) regarding the efficiency of extracurricular activities achieved by the groups of peers.

The School-to-work programs are destined to develop relationships of collaboration between schools, business persons as well as the community. They offer students the possibility to connect academic activity with professional environment and community requirements. Such programs help students who have a potential of dropping out by underlining the importance of education for their professional future.

Specific interventions for the students with dropout risk

The systematic monitoring of students with risk factors is the first step in reducing dropout rates. Students' presence in classes, their behaviour and grades are relevant factors for appreciating the dropout risk and establishing necessary modalities and resources for the subsequent interventions.

Personal development of the class is a program that was initially destined for students involved in drug abuse and was focused on increasing their school performances and wellbeing in teenagers at risk. The program is centred on two aspects: social support and developing basic abilities (self-esteem, making decisions, self-control and interpersonal communication) and is implemented by teachers who participate in special courses and trainings.

The "School within the school" approach is a model that was successfully applied within multicultural programs for students at risk, from different ethnicities or nationalities. According to these programs, groups of approximately 20 students from different ethnic cultures were created and they received special education from an interdisciplinary team (teachers, social assistants, counsellors). These programs offer flexibility and adaptation to the various needs and styles of students. The assessment of their skills revealed a greater involvement and more efficient learning than within the traditional classroom. A good example of a "school within a school" program is the *Effective Learning Program (ELP)* which proved to be efficient for students with high dropout risk from a high school in Kentucky. The program was designed by Nowicki et al. (2004) for a 2 year period and was based on the psychological concepts of *locus of control* (perceptions

regarding their possibilities of influencing the world) and *interrelating*. According to the authors, students with dropout risks have difficulties establishing relationships with others and tend to explain these difficulties by invoking external causes; thus, their school integration is severely damaged. The Effective Learning Program helps students learn how to establish adequate relationships with other people and to be more aware of the control they have on the activities and interactions in which they engage. Students are also trained to develop interpersonal communication abilities (verbal and non-verbal communication) and to observe the positive and negative effects of their behaviours on their relationships with others. The program's efficiency was evaluated through indicators like: a significant change of locus control, improvements in emotional expressions and acquisition of a friendly interpersonal style of interaction. The long-term effects have led to a higher rate of graduation from those students who were included in the program.

Cognitive-behavioural interventions (CBI) are often used in individual or group prevention programs for students facing diverse problems like: learning difficulties, anxiety towards school, depression and attention deficit disorder. This type of intervention uses a system of strengthening specific behaviours for learning, along with developing the students' meta-cognitive abilities. A meta-analytical research undertaken by Cobb *et al.* (2006) on 16 empirical studies in which cognitive-behavioural interventions were used has underlined the significant effects of these types of interventions on the development of social competences, attitudes towards school and dropout rates. The cognitive – behavioural interventions are focused on exercising meta-cognitive abilities like: problem solving, conflict management, relaxation and introspection as well as self-awareness. These types of programs require introducing a special curriculum that needs to be followed at least 1 to 5 times per week.

Community-Based Learning is an approach that emphasizes the relationship between basic academic abilities and the real world. Students have the possibility to choose the learning contents from different fields that refer to the aspects of the community (focus on career, civic education etc.); students from local universities may be asked to participate as tutors who can assist the students included in the program.

Individualized interventions

The support based on functional behaviours assessment (FBA) represents an individual type of intervention program which deals with replacing negative behaviour with positive ones (Martin *et al.*, 2002). The general scheme of behavioural change requires completing several steps: a) identifying reinforcements which might contribute to increase the frequency of positive behaviours; b) systematic avoidance of reinforcing the undesirable behaviours c) reinforcing the desired behaviour.

Wraparound interventions are used when the students' problems cannot be solved without involving several responsible factors like his/her family, the community, etc. The intervention consists of a package of strategies which take into account: the student (counselling sessions, programs of behavioural change, after-school programs etc.), family (counselling sessions, assistance for managing possible family problems) and local community factors (social aids, partnerships with the business environment etc.)

Examples

We will continue by presenting two examples of intervention programs for school dropout situations that were successful in schools from several American states.

A. *The VYP Program (Coca-Cola Values Youth Program)* is a program developed in 1991 for students attending 7th grade to 12th grade which complied with an efficient and reliable criteria. The purpose of this program was to increase students' self-esteem and academic success among students with dropout risk from secondary school to high school by appointing them as tutors for the students from a primary school. Initially, the program was implemented by Cola-Cola in collaboration with five schools from San Antonio during the period 1984-1988 with 525 high school students - tutors and 1575 primary students (Fashola & Slavin, 1998). The tutors were included in special classes for the development of basic academic and tutoring abilities. The program assessment was made by comparing a group of 63 students-tutors VYP with a control group equivalent of 70 students outside the program. The results have shown that after two years only 1% of the students from the experimental group abandoned school compared to 12 % from the control group. Since 2009 the program has also been extended to the schools from other American states.

B. *The AVID Project (Advancement Via Individual Determination – Swanson, Mehan, & Hubbard, 1995)* is a program initiated in 1981 in San Diego, California with the purpose of placing high school students with high academic potential, but poor academic results into preparatory college courses. The coordinators have selected high school students with a score above the average in the CTBS (*Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills*), but with poor academic grades. They attended courses where they were taught research strategies, text writing, thinking strategies, and were offered academic assistance and tutorship for the basic subjects. Comparing a group of 248 students who participated for three years in the AVID courses (190-992) with a group of 146 students who participated for only one year in this program, after which they abandoned, emphasized its efficiency. However, among those who participated in the program for 3 years, 43% attended 2 years of college, compared to 40% of those who only attended one year and 37% from the district population. In addition, from the experimental

group, only 14% obtained a job immediately after high school by comparison with 38% of the district population and 40% of the group which attended only one year of the program (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Linz, 1996).

In conclusion, on the basis of the meta-analytical studies from the scientific literature, we can say that the efficient programs are those intervention programs that are focused on: *creating a connection between students and teachers, offering work opportunities in the school, offering academic assistance and ensuring a status-role for the students at risk*. Most of the researchers claim that interventions in high dropout risk situations should not be focused only on decreasing the rates of skipping classes and academic development but also on developing a feeling of belonging to the school environment, increasing their convictions about their capabilities in achieving academic tasks and their beliefs regarding their acceptance in the community (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Dropout in Romania

In Romania, the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth (MECT) stresses each year's reports regarding certain aspects of our national educational system: academic success and failure, school dropout rates, graduation rates among students, percentages of qualified didactic staff, funds allocated to the educational system, etc. These reports indicate significant differences between the indicators of level and efficiency of education in Romania in comparison with the same indicators from other European countries. One of the most important indicators, where the discrepancies are major, relates to school dropout rate, a rate which indicates the level of maturity of the educational system and its power to absorb and maintain its students in the system until graduation. The school dropout rate is an indicator for a lack of pedagogical efficiency, lack of proper institutional management in correlation with external factors such as economic development as well as standard of living.

According to the MECT's report regarding the state of our educational system for 2007, shows that the indicator for the school dropout rate was 19.2% in Romania while similar indicators for other East-European countries (EU adherents after 1990) were significantly lower (Slovenia, 4.3%; Poland, 5.0%; Czech Republic, 5.5%).

Between 2001 and 2007, the school dropout rate in Romania (considering the proportion between enrolling and graduation rates) at the primary and secondary school level has significantly increased. Thus, the value of these indicators became higher by 50% over all in the early education system (from 1.2% in 2001/2002 to 2.0% in 2007/2008) primary school level (from 1% to 1.7%) and secondary school level (from 1.4% to 2.3%).

In 2007/2008, the rates for the school dropout over the entire school population showed a 1.9% indicator compared to 2.0% in the previous academic year; in the urban areas the indicator decreased from 2.2% to 1.7%; in the case of

girls, the indicator went from 1.8% to 1.7% while for boys the indicators stayed the same 2.2%. The value of the school dropout indicator for the rural areas increased from 1.8% to 2.2%.

A global comparison shows that Romania is situated significantly below the average registered by other European countries (14.8 %) for early school dropout. After the European Union integration, Romania must respect the same occidental norms of education, which means that the rate of school dropout should decrease below 10 %.

What are the causes for school dropout in Romania? An investigation undertaken by World Vision Romania shows that in 2006, in Romania only, one out of four students from the rural areas was enrolled to high school courses; in 2006, only 24% of the students in rural areas enrolled in high school courses in comparison with 36 % in 2005. According to the report of the organisation, the main cause of dropout in the rural areas is poverty. Parents with low incomes have difficulties in paying for their children's studies and, therefore, encourage them to dropout of school and work together with them in agriculture.

The World Vision report mentions that Romania has the lowest number of people residing in rural areas among the Eastern European countries: approximately 45 % of the population. In these areas, the main sources of subsisting consist from the agricultural production, often using primitive tools among which manual labour, holds the first place. Children and adolescents do manual and physical work in order to financially help their families during the time when they should be at school. In these kinds of situations, parents see their children as people capable of working and, therefore, encourage them to drop out of school.

World Vision Romania has identified several areas with an increased risk of educational exclusion due to the high levels of poverty. Among these areas we can mention the rural areas from the Southern region (Calarasi, Ialomita, Teleorman and Giurgiu counties), South-East region (Buzau, Vrancea, Braila and Galati counties) and the North-East region (Botosani, Iasi and Vaslui counties). Their report shows that, in these regions, almost 30% of the population of 15 years old has barely graduated from primary school. We would like to add that the University Alexandru Ioan Cuza of Iasi, which proposed this project, is situated in the proximity of the last two underprivileged regions mentioned in the previous report.

Poverty is not the only cause for the school dropout rate; there are other factors facilitating the phenomenon, although, they are harder to depict because of the difficult socio-economic conditions of the families to whom these children belong to. If, in the rural areas, the school dropout can be mainly explained through a lack of material and financial possibilities of the families, in the urban regions, it can be explained by a lack of interest and involvement manifested by families and

professors, a low level of faith in the educational system and its power to ensure social success for its beneficiaries. One of the major problems is the lack of involvement parents manifest in their children's education. Most of them place all responsibility for their children's education in the hands of teachers, ignoring the fact that they are equal partners in the educational process. Thus, parents show little support in extra-curricular activities involving their children, communication with teachers is mostly absent; their concern is usually focused on ensuring material support for their children, ignoring the intellectual, emotional or social support.

Another major problem influencing the dropout phenomenon is the temporary or sometimes indefinite migration of one or both of the parents in foreign countries in order for them to work. Parents going to work in other countries entrust their children to relatives or other people (usually, grandparents) and in some cases they are left alone. The lack of parental authority has led these children to drop out of school together with anti-social behaviours. Psychologists have noticed that these children manifest signs of depression, low levels of academic motivation, and low levels of compliance to norms and discipline, poor academic results. Step by step, academic failures become inherent the social relations with teachers and peers start to alter and, in the end, students decide to drop out of school.

At local level, there are few community initiatives in adopting strategies or programs capable of preventing and fighting the dropout phenomenon. School inspectorates, as representatives of MECT in the territory, have little resources and initiatives; therefore, we may say that, at this moment there is no major partnership between the representatives of the Ministry and the local communities.

At a national level, there is a legislative framework which mentions the implementation of several actions for decreasing the school dropout phenomenon. Thus, in 1990 Romania approved by law (no. 18/1990), the Convention regarding Children's' rights which acknowledges their right to education on the basis of the equal opportunity principle (art. 28). This legislative initiative has lead to a series of measures which encourage school attendance and decrease the school dropout phenomenon.

The National Plan of Development indicates the necessity of identifying some specific solutions to prevent and fight school failure and, in its most radical form, the school dropout. Decreasing the rate of dropouts in schools has been one of the main objectives established in the National Plan against Poverty and Promotion of Social Inclusion in Romania, which was approved by Government' Decision no. 829/2002.

On the basis of these legislative initiatives, MECT and other national institutions have developed a series of specific intervention actions in order to achieve the objectives mentioned above. Statistical data show that the results are insignificant so far; there are no rigorous analyses of these intervention programs,

therefore, no information on the causes that has led to low levels of efficiency. It may be possible that prevention and the fight against the school dropout phenomenon require specifically organised actions involving local communities, specialized persons and institutions (from non-governmental and governmental sectors) as well as scientific expertise ensured by professors and specialists working in the universities and scientific centres.

6. Conclusions

The article above synthesizes the theoretical framework of prevention school dropout strategies by describing behavioural models and risk factors involved in the school dropout phenomenon. The classification of behaviours, which may lead to dropping out of school, reduces the broad range of indicators associated with school maladjustment offering to the specialist the possibility of elaborating concrete and detailed prevention and intervention programs. For example, when students have antisocial behaviours, we know that unspecific strategies (personal growth, extra-curricular activities) are not efficient as methods of intervention. These cases require specific intervention strategies (cognitive-behavioural interventions, effective learning programs etc) or individualized strategies (family and individual counselling).

When behaviours preceding the school dropout are associated with difficulties in school and social adaptation, unspecific interventions may be sufficient to help maintain these children in the educational system. In addition, when the school dropout is preceded by behaviours like depression, lack of school motivation some combination of unspecific and specific intervention strategies should be considered.

Classifying the factors which favour school failure, thus, contributing to the increase of dropouts into the four categories – personal, family, school and interpersonal factors offer valuable information regarding the level of intervention we should take into consideration.

Most of the empirical studies insist on the socio-economic effects of the school dropout, therefore, we believed that it was important to underline the psychological effects associated with school failure which often lead to maladjustments and eventually to dropping out of school. Some of the socio-economic effects (social assistance, delinquency, and criminality) are the result of psychological consequences of school dropout.

In the end, we made a short description of school dropout in Romania as statistical indicators place it among the first three countries from Europe with regard to the school dropout rate. The scientific studies undertaken in Romania confirm the general causes which generate the school dropout, but there are few studies and projects that have tested and evaluated the efficiency of certain intervention programs.

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