Early School Leaving:
Reasons and Consequences

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Abstract. *Early school leaving represents a loss of potential that has effects on both social and economic scale (reduced social cohesion, lower financial incomes, increase of social allocations). Early school leaving has various reasons that can be either social or economic. Due to the average statistics of the 27 countries of the European Union, in 2008 78,5% of the populations of these countries went to school regularly, whereas the same statistics applied for Romania showed an extent of 78,3%. The statistics of early school leaving showed some 14, 9% in the countries of the EU, whereas in Romania this index was higher (15, 9%). Sequel to some analyses we can state that there is a strong relationship between the variables named participation in education and early school leaving; more than that, there is a strong relationship between the extent of school studies completion and the rate of unemployment.*

Keywords: degree of participation in education; early school leaving; Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Introduction

Early school leaving represents both an individual and a social problem. There are several reasons for which young people drop out of school very early: difficulties related learning, social problems or lack of motivation, counselling and orientation. Low level education has disastrous consequences not only for the youth; it implies the inefficient use of costs. Besides, considering the aging population of European countries and the current demographic changes, these countries cannot afford themselves the loss of young talents.

While the term "early school leaving" includes all forms of leaving education and training before completing upper secondary education or equivalents in vocational education and training, the term "school drop-out" is used with a much more restricted meaning: it refers to discontinuing an ongoing course in general or vocational education and training.

Early school leaving in the European Union

According to the definition used in the EU, early school leaving can take several forms. It includes young people who have dropped out of school before the end of compulsory education, those who have completed compulsory schooling, but have not gained an upper secondary qualification, and those who have followed pre-vocational or vocational courses which did not lead to a qualification equivalent to upper secondary level.

On the long run, early school leaving has negative effects on social development and economic growth.

Economic development and growth is based on qualified labour force: the reduction of the rate of early school leaving on European scale would supply European economy with half a million of young people with qualification who have real potential of employment.

The average participation in the processes of education in the 27 member states of the EU was 78.5% (2008) compared to 76.9%, which was calculated in 2003. Thus, the statistics in 2008 show a 2% higher percentage. The lowest one in 2008 was obtained in Turkey (54.3%, which actually was higher than the statistics in 2003, when they had a percentage of 47.3%). In this respect, Malta ranks the second (54.2%), Portugal the third (54.3%), whereas Spain comes the forth (60%). On the other hand, the highest percentage as far as participation in education is concerned was obtained in Croatia (95.4%), Slovakia (92.3%), the Czech Republic (91.6%) and Slovenia (90.2%).

We have to mention that during the analysis in the case of Turkey there is a difference between the two sexes: male students have a participation of 56.4%, whereas female students participate in educational processes to an

extent of 40.9% (on the level of the EU these values are the following: 75.7% for male students and 81.4% for female students). Male students have a higher tendency to early school leaving than female ones.

On EU level, early school leaving had a percentage of 16.6% in 2003, that is 10.2% lower than in 2008, when there was a rate of 14.9% (from among which 16.9% male students and 12,9% female students). The target of the EU regarding the situation of education until the year 2020 is that the percentage of early school leaving should be reduced to 10%. There are countries within the Union where the rate of early school leaving is under the desired 10% such as: Croatia (3.7%), Poland (5%), Slovenia (5.1%), the Czech Republic (5.6%) and Slovakia (6%).

One can notice that while these countries have a low rate of early school leaving, in the meantime they have a high rate of participation in educational processes. As for the countries where the rate of early school leaving is quite high, they are the following: Turkey (46.6%), Malta (39%), Portugal (35.4%) and Spain (31.9%). There are some other countries where the rate of early school leaving lowered considerably between 2003 and 2008, such as Bulgaria, where this rate lowered from 21.9% to 14,8%, Romania (from 22,5% to 15.9%), Malta (from 49.9% to 39%), Portugal (from 41.2% to 35.4%), and Turkey (from 53% to 46.6%).

Considering the statistics related to participation in educational processes and early school leaving, we can notice an inverted correlation and a powerful relationship between the two variables. This observation is based on the values of Pearson correlation (r= -0,880).

Table 1

Correlations

		Participation in education 2008	Early school leaving 2008
Participation in education 2008	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.880**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	18.000	18
Early school leaving 2008	Pearson Correlation	-.880**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	18	18.000
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: programme SPSS.

Considering the analysis described above, we assume that it is very important to re-enter the education system for those who, for some reason, have dropped out of school.

Thus, in 2008 9.6% of the age group 25-64 were involved in lifelong learning on European level. Among the member states, there are some whose rate

of participation is above the European average, such as: Sweden (32.4%), Denmark (30.2%), Finland (23.1%) and the Netherlands (17%; on the other hand, some states are much below the average such as: Bulgaria (1.4%) and Romania (1.5%).

Early school leaving in Romania

In our country the reasons of early school leaving have been identified; they create the conditions of the failure of social integration in the respect that they reduce the chances of self – accomplishment significantly. In 2003 Romania had a rate of early school leaving of 22.5% that was reduced to 15.9% in 2008.

There are a lot of reasons for which students drop out of school before completing their studies. One of them might be the students' inability to get used to learning in an institutionalised way, or, on the other hand, it might be the fact that the different compulsory activities at schools do not take into consideration the students' biological and psychological characteristics. We also have to mention some economic and social factors as well. Thus, early school leaving is the result of the combination of different internal and external reasons (immaturity, psychological instability, behaviour disorders, inappropriate economic and financial situation of families, lack of proper clothes, poor living conditions, family problems, lack of help with studying, etc.).

On national level there are worrying signs of early school leaving in pre-university education, especially on primary level, where the rate of participation in education has decreased from 96% to 95%.
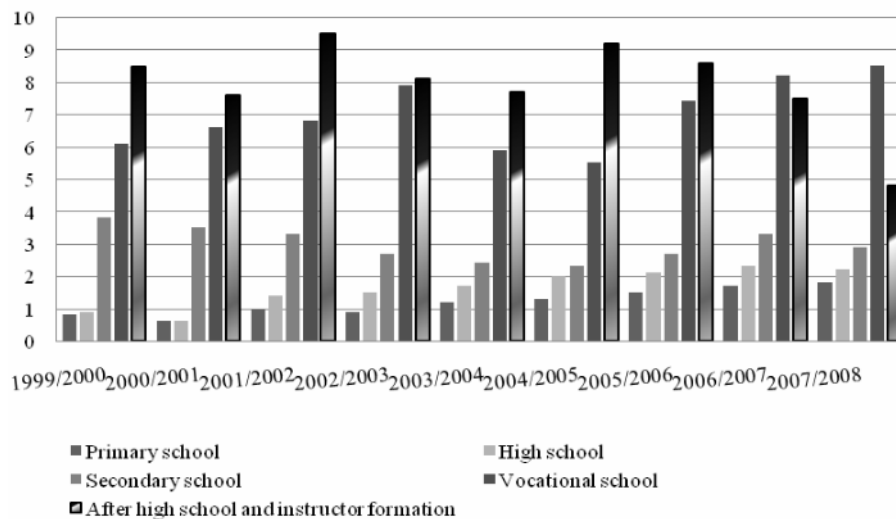
Source: www.insse.ro

Figure 1. *Early school leaving in Romania during the period 1999-2008 represented on educational levels*

It is observed that there is a high rate of early school leaving in vocational schools, and so is there during the period of after school studies and while one's attending to become an instructor in a certain domain of education. This tendency is also present during secondary school studies, showing an increasing percentage when compared to those who drop out of school just before the completion of their high school studies. As for high school statistics, there are some differences but the extent of early school leaving varies between 3 and 4%. I would like to add some more data to the already mentioned ones: in school year 2008-2009 the extent of the participation in some forms of education decreased alongside with the growth of age, thus there is a rate of 94.4% among students aged 11-14 (which has been constant for a couple of years), that of 79.2% is characteristic for the age group of 15-18 year-old students, and eventually, there is the age group of 19-23 year-old students whose rate is 63.3%.

Reasons of early school leaving

Some factors that may lead to early school leaving might be:

One of them is the lack of proper financial means of the family, especially in the case of disorganised families, families with a large number of members, families that lack in resources, and have problems providing the proper clothing for their children, families where children have to help with field work or household chores. Family disruptions draw financial troubles after themselves. Cases of divorce, alcoholism, domestic violence are signs that frequently precede the decision of early school leaving.

Based on statistics, in the year 2008 the average monthly income of families was 1,365.36 RON. 40% of this amount was allocated to food and non-alcoholic drinks, 15-16% for household expenses, 6.2-6.7% for clothing, 6-6.5% for alcoholic drinks and cigarettes, and only 0.8% was invested in education (which means approximately 11 RON/household/a month).

Table 2

Early school leaving in the central region of the country

	Early school leaving (%)		Number of divorce cases		Number of moving home		Average net salary			Rate of unemploy-ment (%)
	2006-2007	2007-2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2011 apr.	2008
Central region	*2.2*	*2.2*	*4,422*	*3,802*	*40,709*	*39,347*	*937*	*1,150*		*5.2*
Alba County	1.5	1.4	530	618	6,249	6,332	933	1,128	1,236	7.1
Braşov County	3.6	2.7	1,630	890	9,922	9,954	984	1,226	1,369	4.3
Covasna County	1.4	2.2	354	326	3,156	2,799	792	987	1,120	7.2
Harghita County	1.0	1.6	364	372	4,541	4,063	814	998	987	6.5
Mureş County	1.7	1.8	784	880	10,103	9,358	950	1,133	1,290	4.7
Sibiu County	2.9	3.5	760	716	6,738	6,841	987	1,230	1,530	3.1

Source: www.insse.ro, processed data.

Another factor that can determine early school leaving is entering the labour market. It does not matter whether it is about working as a day labourer or having a regular activity (as a barman for instance), participation during school semesters in such profit-making activities represents a jeopardy that in most cases leads to early school leaving. A solution for those who need to work in order to be self-sufficient would be the promotion of models that have been in use in developed western societies, such as involving high school students in part time activities during holidays, which provide them with financial rewards (for example baby – sitting for a night).

Analysing the data mentioned above we can reach to the conclusion that in the central part, where the rate of unemployment is higher than in any other part of the country, the rate of early school leaving is actually lower as young graduates cannot find any jobs continue to stay within institutionalized forms of education. This phenomenon can be observed in County Covasna and County Alba, where the rate of unemployment is 7.2% (Covasna) and 7.1% (Alba), and where the rate of early school leaving is lower (1.4% and 1.5%). On the other hand, there are some counties where the rate of unemployment is quite low but the rate of early school leaving is quite high: Counties Brasov (3.1% rate of unemployment, 2.9% rate of early school leaving), and Sibiu (4.3% and 3.6%).

Circulating migration does not seem to represent a risk factor on its own, but there are some important problems related to the reintegration of children who leave the system and then they come back at an older age. The same problems can be observed when it is about children getting into institutionalized forms at older ages.

Another factor that influences early school leaving is a social one, that is the educational model shown by parents and siblings. More often than not, children who drop out of school before completing their studies come from families where parents do not have more than eight years of study completed. However, there are exceptions as well. The educational model shown by siblings seems to be more important. If there is an elder child who dropped out of school, there are high chances that the younger brother will 'repeat' the same scheme.

Lately, there has been an increase of the rate of participation in education (it was 66.3% in school year 1998-1999, and 79.6% in 2008-2009), therefore we can notice that, besides their families, the youth have other models to follow as well.

Table 3

Participation in education and rate of unemployment in the period 1998-2008

School year	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Participation in education	66,3	67,3	68,9	70,6	72,9	74,2	74,9	76	77,3	79,7	79,6
Rate of unemployment (%)	10,4	11,8	10,5	8,8	8,4	7,4	6,3	5,9	5,2	4	4,4

Source: www.insse.ro, Yearly statistics.

Considering the statistics so far, it is necessary to confirm the strong relationship between the number of people involved in the process of education and the rate of unemployment.

The measurement of the intensity of dependence between the two quantity variables (rate of participation in education and rate of unemployment in 1998-2009) can be accomplished with the help of Pearson's correlation coefficient. This one expresses the co-variation between the two variables measured metrically, and it has a value comprised between -1 and $+1$.

The calculations are made as follows (Lefter, 2004, p. 309):

$$r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(x_i - \bar{x})^2 * \sum_{i=1}^{n}(y_i - \bar{y})^2}}$$

Where:

r – correlation coefficient;

x,y – two variables;

$\bar{x}, \bar{y}$ – average of sampling x and y.

The absolute value of the correlation coefficient expresses the intensity of the linear association between variables x and y. The sign of the coefficient reflects the direction of correlation: the positive direction corresponds to variations of the same direction, whereas the negative one corresponds to variations of the opposite direction. As for the intensity of the relationship, it is represented as follows:

$0 \leq r < 0.2$ there is no significant relationship;

$0.2 \leq r < 0.5$ there is a relationship of weak intensity;

$0.5 \leq r < 0.75$ there is a relationship of average intensity;

$0.75 \leq r < 0.95$ there is a strong relationship;

$0.95 \leq r < 1$ there is a perfect relationship.

Table 4

Correlations

		Participation in education	Rate of unemployment
Participation in education	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.978**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	11.000	11
Rate of unemployment	Pearson Correlation	-.978**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	11	11.000
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: programme SPSS.

Sequel to the analysis, we obtain the value of r = -0.978 that indicates a perfect and inverted relationship. This means that the increase of the percentage of participation in education leads to the decrease of the rate of unemployment on national level, which proves the benefits of institutionalized forms of education.

Consequences of early school leaving

On 31st December 2008, the statistics showing the number of registered unemployed people revealed the fact that 50-55% of them were graduates of the primary, secondary and vocational education; 30-40% those of high school and after school education, whereas 10-20% showed the percentage of unemployed with university studies. Hereby I would like to mention the fact that at the end of the previous year (2007) these statistics showed some slightly modified values: there was a higher percentage of the unemployed aged over 55, graduates from primary, secondary and vocational schools (88%), in comparison with 52.3% (2008). Regarding people with university studies, the percentage given decreased except for the group age of 25-29 year-old-graduates.

Source: www.insse.ro, processed data.

Figure 2. *Registered unemployed people considering the level of their studies and age group (31st December 2008)*

Analysing the data comprised in the chart drawn above we can reach to the conclusion that along the growth of the qualification level the possibility of becoming unemployed increases in a direct proportion.

There are several possibilities for people who at some point and for some reason dropped out of school, to re-enter the institutionalized educational forms and complete their school studies successfully. One of them is low frequency education, whose rate showed a considerable growth over the past years (in school year 1990-1991 there were 10,884 people, whereas in school year 2008-2009 this number grew to 93,842). Another possibility is represented by courses run at night schools or courses provided by distance learning (in school year 1990-1991 there were 9,946 people involved in these forms, this number grew to 279,172 in school year 2008-2009).

Another possibility available for the unemployed is represented by different professional training programmes and courses. There were 12,758 people registered in this kind of programmes in 1991, from among which there were 10,460 were unemployed, whereas in 2008 this number grew to 59,703 (50,622 unemployed people). From among them only 8,924 people were employed after completing their courses in 2008, which means a decrease of 60% compared to the statistics from the previous year (21,891 people).

Conclusion

For some years the Romanian state has been offering different social programmes in order to keep students in institutionalized forms of education. Some of these programmes are as follows: the "Euro 200" programme, which helps student with acquisition of personal computers, different types of scholarships, school equipment, refund of transportation costs for students who come from the countryside, etc. According to Law no. 269/2004, in Covasna County in 2010 there were 261 students coming from families with very low budget who were given the "Euro 200" help. There was another kind of national programme named "Bani de liceu", within which in Covasna County 1,045 students coming from families with very low budget received financial help (total amount paid: 1,575,026 RON). According to the government's decision no. 1488/2004 that established the criteria of giving financial help through this programme, the gross monthly income earned by a family member during the preceding three month – period should not be more than 150 RON. 1,343 students obtained different types of scholarship (of merit, social, study, etc), the total amount of which was 449,707 RON.

These are only a couple of examples that can contribute to the decrease of the rate of early school leaving, especially when it is about students who come from families with very low budgets. Besides, the infrastructure of schools, teachers, the parents' attitude and the feedback given by society regarding education, they all are of utmost importance.

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