

# Teachers` Perceptions and Attitudes Regarding ESL

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**Abstract:** Early school leaving has important social and economic implications. Young people who leave school prematurely are predisposed to the risk associated with unemployment or small gains when they find a job. The estimates related to the competences required in Europe show that, in the future, only one in ten jobs will be accessed by a person who has left school early. Taking into account the importance of understanding this phenomenon, in order to reduce it, we've done a research to identify teachers` perceptions and attitudes regarding ESL. The research of the ESL phenomenon, from the perspective of its causes, in particular the causes associated with the school environment, has circumscribed two types of approaches: a quantitative approach, achieved through the elaboration and administration of a questionnaire addressed to teachers and a qualitative approach based on designing and conducting focus-groups with teachers. Dimensions explored in our research were: communication/interpersonal/pedagogical competences; main causes of conflictual relations with students and solving strategies used; challenges in daily work with students; representations/beliefs of the factors which can increase student commitment and student motivation; causes of the ESL; school strategies to prevent ESL; teaching methods used to prevent the school disengagement. The results obtained demonstrated that teachers have a wide range of perceptions and attitudes regarding ESL, especially regarding the causes associated with the school environment. Some of them consider that ESL is not caused by school related factors, others consider that this factors may occur, but they don't have power to reduce their action.

**Keywords:** *ESL; causes of ESL; teachers` perceptions; teaching competences; strategies for preventing ESL.*

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## 1. Introduction

Early school leaving is a problem that concern all member states of the European Union, generating social and individual effects with major negative impact, difficult to correct/control if some effective preventive intervention strategies are not constantly assumed and implemented.

According to the *Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving*, entitled *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support*, the early school leavers are persons with ages from 18 to 24, which simultaneously meet two conditions: the highest level of education or training completed is ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c short and no form of education or training has been followed in the last month before completed the survey. In order to calculate the rate of early school leaving it was taking into consideration, as reference group, the total population of the same age group: from 18 to 24 (European Commission, 2013).

The meaning of the concept *early school leaving*, adopted by the EU Council, is used in relation with those persons who leave educational or training system with only lower secondary education or less, and who does not follow any form of education or training (EU Council, 2011).

This complex phenomenon subsumes a series of facets, being usually the result of associated causes that have their origins in the social environment, in a broad sense (referring here to its economic, political, cultural, dimension), in the family environment (socio-economic status, cultural model, attitudes towards school, etc.), in the school environment (educational practices, relevance of the curriculum, pedagogical relations, etc.) and / or emerge from specific aspects of the personality structure of those who make the decision to leave the education system (values, attitudes, deficient or antithetical skills with those promoted by the school environment).

Through the Europe 2020 strategy, EU member states have established as target to reduce early school leaving phenomenon from 14,4% in 2009 to less than 10% by 2020. In this regard, each country, depending on the early school leaving rate registered at national level, has proposed a specific target and some specific strategies adapted to the particular mode of manifestation of ESL. Beyond measures taken at national level, strategies folded on the specificity of ESL in such different national contexts, it is necessary, as recommended by the EU Council, to promote the exchange of experiences and good practices, collaboration between countries to identify strategies and concerted actions, which converge to reduce this

phenomenon, to increase the participation rate of those who are part of ESL risk groups and, implicitly, result in significantly improved educational results.

In this regard, the ACCESS Project - "*Active Cross-sectoral Cooperation for Educational and Social Success*", developed within the Erasmus Plus Program, brings together partners with responsibilities and concerns in the field of education from four countries - Italy, Romania, Portugal and Lithuania, aiming approaching ESL in a preventive manner. What differentiates the specific approaches of this project from other similar projects is the focus on ESL causes associated with the school environment. The stated intention is to consolidate/improve the quality of the educational process, including by promoting innovation, optimizing teachers' competences and creating a positive learning environment.

Regarding the situation of ESL in each of the four countries involved, the differences are important, but even more so, the professional community coagulated within the project benefits, implicitly, from models of good educational practices, successfully implemented in the countries that has a lower ESL rate.

In this context, if we refer to the lowest ESL rate, we find it in Lithuania: 4,6% in 2018, compared to 8,7% in 2009. The most spectacular reduction in the ESL rate belongs to Portugal: from 30,9% in 2009, to 11,8% in 2018. Italy succeeded to reduce the early school leaving rate from 19,1% in 2009 to 14,5% in 2018, and Romania, although it also registered more consistent decreases of this rates, in 2018, has a difference of only 0,2% compared to 2009, respectively 16,4%, compared to 16,6%. It should be noted that the EU average in 2018 is 10,6% (European Union, 2019).

The investigation carried out within the ACCESS project ensures, once again, the awareness of the causes that explain a phenomenon whose implications in the social and personal life of those who leave school early are likely to worry us. Thus, the aforementioned report shows that research results demonstrate that early school leaving is associated with low earnings, higher unemployment rates and high public and social costs (European Commission, 2013).

Given the complexity and magnitude of this phenomenon, we consider useful to outline a comprehensive framework that facilitates the awareness of the need for a multidimensional, interdisciplinary approach, first of all, from the perspective of the various causes that generate it.

## 2. Problem statement

ESL is a priority for the EU long before the design of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Any discourse on educational policies, quality education, effective educational practices integrate, implicitly, the issue of ESL or, at least, of one of the precursors of this phenomenon, namely school dropout.

Educational policies regarding the reduction of school dropout, once implemented at the level of formal education, certainly produce positive effects in terms of reducing the ESL rate.

As shown in the study *Leaving education early: putting vocational education and training centre stage. Volume I: investigating causes and extent*, monitoring systems has the role to identify the persons at risk of dropping out, because they analyse collected data related to absenteeism, which is recognized as a risk factor for early school leaving. Beside absenteeism, there are other indicators for ESL: low school performance/bad grades, class repetition, problematic behaviour, aspects related to health and well-being, or family background (Cedefop, 2016).

So, if we refer to a symptomatology of school dropout as described above, we can easily see that certain behaviors that announce dropout can be considered alarm signals from the perspective of ESL, too. Of course, such a symptomatology is caused by a series of social, family, personal factors, associated with the school environment, etc., which merge and particularize in a specific way in the case of each student in a situation with ESL risk. The purpose of the school and of the teachers is to identify in time not only certain undesirable behavioral manifestations of students, but also their causes, in order to design and apply appropriate intervention strategies, thus preventing school drop-out and, respectively, early school leaving. In this regard, in order to understand the causes that lead to drop-out in the situation of one person and to identify the adequate ways to help him/her to return to education or training, it is necessary an analysis at individual level (Cedefop, 2016).

Teachers must understand, first of all, that their role is not only to teach and to disseminate information to the category of students with learning availability, with a solid cultural background, with well-defined cognitive interests, with a strong intrinsic motivation, with intellectual work skills, oriented towards success and academic performance, with adequate support from the family, etc.. They are also teachers of those students with learning difficulties, with emotional and behavioral problems, with a reduced "archive" of knowledge, with a low level of abilities and skills, with a

distorted self-image, with problems of relationship and integration, with a deficient socio-economic background etc.. In addition, if we refer to a materially deprived family environment, ESL is an additional punishment for students who are already socio-economically disadvantaged (Borgna & Struffolino, 2017). Those in the last category obviously need more attention from teachers, need their support and dedication. The measure of their psycho-pedagogical, psychosocial, emotional, managerial competences, of their mastery in what we call the art and science of education, can be found rather by investing in these students, with potential ESL risk, and helping them not only to stay in school, but to know what academic success means, to integrate in this environment, developing the feeling of affiliation, of belonging to a space and a group that, until then, they perceived as "foreign", hostile, manifesting, perhaps, even a form of "allergy" to contact with them.

Teachers and school management team must ensure that education and training institutions and their learning environment provide a secure and motivating learning climate for all students, including equal access to quality education for all children and young people (European Commission, 2013).

However, a quality education can be provided by teachers with solid psycho-pedagogical, psychosocial, specialty, managerial, digital competences, etc. A special type of competences that teachers must use in the process of preventing / reducing ESL, is emotional competences type, especially in the context in which students at ESL risk need, in most situations, primarily emotional support.

The results of a qualitative exploratory research, carried out in eight European countries, highlight the idea that students who are experience the poverty and who are at risk of ESL need to be emotional supported. According to the interview results, the needs of the students at ESL risk are: supports for withdrawn children and young people, for children at risk of suicide or who have experienced bullying in school (Downes, 2011).

Even if, in our study, we emphasized the role of the school, in this case of teachers, in preventing and reducing the ESL rate, given the diversity of causes and the way they intertwine and nuance them from one student to another, we do not consider that solutions, the optimal strategies, the appropriate measures for each situation fall under the exclusive task and responsibility of the educational institution.

As Downes shows (2011), ESL is not just a problem at the school level, so the causes of this phenomenon need to be addressed across a range

of social, youth, family, health, local community, employment, as well as education policies.

In order to ensure an intervention with high chances of success in prevention/ reducing / combating ESL, it is necessary to involve multidisciplinary teams, integrating specialists, professionals in various fields (teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, counselors, social workers, doctors, priests, etc.), supported by representatives of the local community, directly interested in this complex process.

### **3. Research questions/ Aims of the research**

The research was conducted within the Erasmus+ Project *Active Cross-sectoral Cooperation for Educational and Social Success (A.C.C.E.S.S.)* -, as we mention above, in four partners countries: Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania.

The central objectives of the research were:

- investigating the perceptions and attitudes of teachers from all four partners countries in relation to the ESL phenomenon (with an emphasis on causes, competences of teachers who can manage the phenomenon and prevention strategies);
- identifying the most effective strategies for preventing ESL, from the point of view of the teacher included in the study.

The most important research questions, which guided us in the investigative approach, were:

*What are the opinions and attitudes of teachers about ESL?*

*What are the main causes of ESL generated by variables specific to the educational system, by variables specific to the school organization, by variables associated with the teacher's personality, by variables specific to the students' class, by variables associated with the personality of the student at ESL risk?*

*How can we prevent this phenomenon with multiple negative implications?*

*What are the most effective ESL prevention strategies?*

*What competencies circumscribe the didactic personality profile of the efficient teacher from the perspective of ESL management?*

### **4. Research methods**

The research of the ESL phenomenon has circumscribed two types of approaches: a quantitative approach, achieved through the elaboration and administration of a questionnaire addressed to teachers and a qualitative approach based on designing and conducting focus-groups with teachers.

The questionnaire addressed to teachers was a complex one, and the main dimensions explored were: communication/interpersonal /pedagogical skills, main causes of conflictual relations with students and resolute strategies used; challenges in daily work with students, representations/beliefs of the factors which can increase student commitment and student motivation, causes of the ESL, school strategies to prevent ESL, teaching methods used to prevent the school disengagement.

Because we focus on a situation aimed at dropping out of school, regardless of the triggers, we believe that teachers, as key educational actors, as professionals in the field of education, it is necessary to intervene, targeting, in particular, those "facets" of ESL which can be controlled by them. That's why the sample of this study consisted of 256 teachers from the four country (Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania).

The applied sampling technique was the stratified randomization, so as to ensure that among the investigated population are included different categories of teachers, as follows: teachers in secondary education, teachers in high school, teachers working in schools from rural areas, teachers who carry out their teaching activity in urban areas, teachers with different experience in the teaching activity, related to the number of years of work in education, teachers who belong to the male and, respectively, to the female gender.

Thus, the sample constituted for the present research can be described by the following characteristics: 74% of the respondents work as teachers in the urban area, and the rest, of 26%, in the rural area; 81% are represented by female teachers, 19% - male teachers.

The report on the accumulated didactic experience, materialized in years of experience in the teaching activity, is presented in the table below.

**Table 1.** The distribution of the sample, related to the years of experience in the teaching activity (Source: author's own conception)

Years of experience in the teaching activity	Percentage
0 – 5 years	13%
6 – 10 years	13%
11 – 15 years	18%
16 – 20 years	21%
21 – 25 years	13%
26 – 30 years	13%
Over 30 years	9%

In the following we will present the most relevant data obtained in our research.

## 5. Results and discussions

### 5.1. Causes of ESL

One item of the questionnaire was focused on ranking the potential causes of ESL generated by variables specific to the educational system, on a 1 to 10 scale (where 1 represents minimum level and 10 – maximum level), according to the extent to which the respondents considered that the causes mentioned may, by their frequency and intensity, generate ESL.

The causes were grouped into five categories: causes generated by variables specific to the educational system, causes generated by variables related to school organization, causes generated by variables related the didactic personality of the teacher, causes generated by variables related to class and causes generated by variables specific to student.

**Table 2.** The main causes of ESL generated by educational system-specific variables (Source: author's own conception)

Italy	Lithuania	Portugal	Romania
1. inefficient educational policies, 2. deficient implementation of educational policies, 3. lack of consistent investment in CPD.	1. oversized curriculum, 2. deficient implementation of educational policies, 3. inefficient educational policies.	1. disagreement between the curriculum and the students' training needs, 2. inefficient educational policies, 3. oversized curriculum.	1. oversized curriculum, 2. insufficient number of school counselors / psychologists, 3. disagreement between the curriculum and the students' training needs.

Related to *causes generated by variables specific to the educational system*, we note that the respondents in Italy, Lithuania and Romania rank first the aspects referring to *education policies*, considered to be ineffective. Moreover, the teachers in Italy and Lithuania express their conviction that they are confronted with a deficient implementation of educational policies. The only



country which does not rank the educational policies on the first three positions is Romania; however, these policies may be found on the next positions, respectively 4 and 5. In relation to the respondents' options, we see that the education policies represent a sore/sensitive point of the education system in all countries partners to the project, and they represent a major cause generating ESL.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis on the distribution of the registered responses highlights another common element for the teachers in Lithuania, Portugal and Romania: they rank on first positions the aspects concerning the curriculum such as: *oversized curriculum* and *disagreement between the curriculum and the students' training needs*. The teachers in Italy also signal as a possible cause of ESL, the disagreement between the curriculum and the students' needs, placing it on the fifth position. Consequently, as a possible measure to prevent ESL, it is necessary to rethink the school curriculum, in all four countries, or - a factor which teachers may control more easily - to develop their capacity to select and process specific informational contents, so that students not to be overloaded with learning tasks, as well as other associated phenomena – school fatigue, stress, demotivation, depreciation of the school climate etc.

It is also worth noting that the teachers in Italy and Romania appreciate that *lack of consistent investments in the continuous professional development* and the *insufficient number of school counselors/psychologists* are the main causes of ESL (ranked in the first three options), highlighting other sensitive point of the educational systems in these countries: neglecting the teachers' continuous training process, as they are the main persons responsible for the quality of the educational act and ignoring some phenomena which escalated – bullying, school violence etc. – and which teachers are not prepared to manage in an effective manner and in relation to which school counselor and psychologists are required.

**Table 3.** The main causes of ESL generated by the school organization's variables (Source: author's own conception)

Italy	Lithuania	Portugal	Romania
1. oversized classes of students, 2. deficient management of interpersonal	1. oversized classes of students, 2. poor management of the school,	1. oversized classes of students, 2. promoting exclusively cognitive	1. oversized classes of students, 2. ignoring moral, socio-emotional

relationships, 3.lack of collegiality and collaboration among teachers.	3.deficient management of interpersonal relationships.	education 3. lack of interest for non-formal education and ignoring moral, socio- emotional education	education, 3. not assumed roles by school counselor / psychologist / social worker or non-existence of those persons
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In terms of *causes generated by variables related to school organization*, it should be noted that the respondents believe that the main cause (position one for all countries involved in the project) is represented by *oversized classes*, as an effect of either defective educational policies, or bad decisions of school managers or inspectors. The *deficient management of interpersonal relations*, *poor management of the school*, as well as *lack of collegiality and collaboration among teachers*, are causes ranked on the next two positions by teachers in Italy and Lithuania, highlighting the absence of an organizational culture and an appropriate climate at the school, the main responsible for this situation being the school manager whose managerial competences are in general inconsistent.

Instead, in Portugal and Romania, the next positions in the respondents' choices are *promoting exclusively cognitive education*, *lack of interest for non-formal education*, *ignoring moral and socio-emotional education* and *roles not assumed by the counselor/school psychologist/social worker* or *non-existence of those persons*. The aspect shared by these two countries is *ignoring moral and socio-emotional education*, fact which represents another sore/sensitive point of the educational systems in the two countries mentioned, with visible consequences at the level of students' personality (deficient socio-emotional competences, poor abilities to adapt, to solve conflicts/problems, self-motivation competences), which will influence their evolution and socio-professional integration.

**Table 4.** The main causes of ESL generated by the teacher's personality variables (Source: author's own conception)

Italy	Lithuania	Portugal	Romania
1. lack of empathy,	1. poor relationship with	1. failure in adapting the	1. disinterest for the learning

2. ignoring students' emotional and social problems, 3. lack of emotional involvement	students, 2. lack of personalized psycho-pedagogical assistance, 3. low motivation or lack of interest for CPD	curriculum to the needs of students, 2. focus on cognitive / content-centered education, 3. routine didactic style	process, 2. lack of personalized psycho-pedagogical assistance, 3. ignoring students' emotional and social problems
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A third category was constituted by causes generated by *variables related to the teacher's personality*. In the options of the teachers from Italy, Lithuania and Romania, the first positions are represented by: *lack of empathy; ignoring students' emotional and social problems; lack of emotional involvement; deficient relation with students; lack of personalized psycho-pedagogical assistance and lack of interest for the learning process*. All these aspects refer to how teachers understand to build the relation with their own students and bring out either negligence toward/disregard of the student and of the relation with him/her, or an poor quality of the teachers' training in relation to emotional competences and a wrong reporting to the roles which they should assume in the educational process: facilitator, guide, provider of learning competences, coach, motivator etc.. The absence of some competences, some suitable attitudes from teachers, entail impersonal relations with their students, with effects on the way the latter relate to school, to education and learning. The teachers in Lithuania rank on third position a factor which should not be overlooked: *low motivation or lack of interest for CPD*.

Analyzing the responses provided by the teachers from Portugal, they appreciated that the three main causes of ESL are: *failure in adapting the curriculum to the needs of students*, aspect mentioned at other items as well, *focus on cognitive/content-centered education*, to the detriment of content centered on the student's needs and *the routine didactic style*. As opposed to teachers from the other partners countries, the teachers in Portugal focused mainly on aspects related to curriculum and teachers' own educational practices, drawing attention to some variables with negative impact on student's commitment, involvement in the learning process: the irrelevant contents for the students' needs, prevailing of the cognitive dimension of education over the others – emotional, moral, aesthetic, social etc. – and lessons marked by teachers'

conservatism, based on traditional didactic strategies, lessons easy to classify as “chalk and discourse” type.

**Table 5.** The main causes of ESL generated by the student class variables  
(Source: author’s own conception)

Italy	Lithuania	Portugal	Romania
1. the absence of a common set of values, principles, rules, 2. lack of adherence to a common set of values, principles, rules, 3. bullying / aggression / school violence, 4. poor, conflicting/tense educational climate	1. lack of adherence to a common set of values, principles, rules, 2. ignored / aggravated psychosocial phenomena, 3. low level of interactions between classroom members, 4. poor, conflicting/tense educational climate	1. the absence of a common set of values, principles, rules, 2. lack of adherence to a common set of values, principles, rules, 3. unfair distribution of responsibilities, 4. deficient management of discipline problems	1. lack of adherence to a common set of values, principles, rules, 2. bullying/ aggression/ school violence, 3. deficient management of discipline problems, 4. the absence of a common set of values, principles, rules.

To the category of causes generated by variables related to class, the teachers for all four countries rank on the first four positions *the absence of a common set of values, principles, rules* and/or *lack of adherence to a common set of values, principles, rules*.

The choices made demonstrate that the respondents are aware of how important the normative culture of class is; nevertheless, they fail to build alongside their students a set of values, norms, rules sufficiently relevant to determine the latter to adhere to them, to internalize them and to develop relating behaviors, attitudes.

Other possible causes of ESL generated by variables related to the class and ranked first were (by order of frequency and in relation to the results registered in all four countries): *bullying, aggression and school violence; poor/conflicting/tense educational climate; deficient management of discipline problems;*

*ignored / aggravated psychosocial phenomena; low level of interactions between classroom members and inequitable/unfair distribution of responsibilities.* All these choices demonstrate poor managerial competences of teachers who, facing up to a series of issues/phenomena at class level, cannot manage them appropriately, toward preventing and/or solving them promptly and efficiently or, more than that, they are the ones to cause such phenomena by using deficient educational/managerial practices.

**Table 6.** The main causes of ESL generated by the student-specific variables  
 (Source: author's own conception)

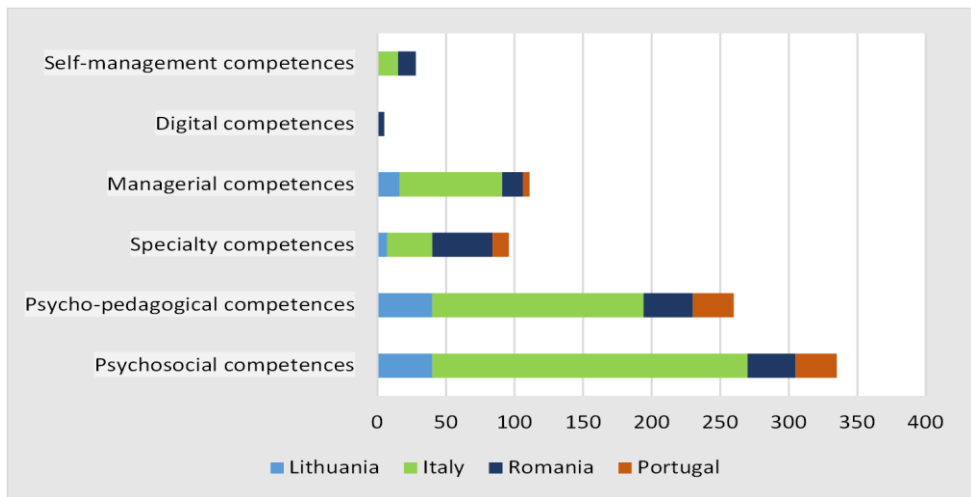
Italy	Lithuania	Portugal	Romania
1. school disengagement, 2. deficient perception of school experiences as irrelevant, insignificant, unnecessary, 3. low self-esteem, 4. hostility to school	1. low level of education, 2. narrow general culture horizon, 3. status of victim of bullying / school violence, 4. deviant / delinquent behaviors.	1. poor attachment of the student to school, 2. school disengagement, 3. deviant / delinquent behaviors, 4. school failure.	1. hostility to school, 2. deficient perception of school experiences as irrelevant, insignificant, unnecessary, 3. negative self-representation in relation to school requirements, 4. poor attachment of the student to school.

Given the results registered for the last category of causes – *causes generated by variables related to students* -, we may see that, according to their frequency, they divide as follows: *school disengagement* (Italy and Portugal), *deficient perception of school experiences as irrelevant, insignificant, unnecessary* (Italy and Romania), *hostility to school* (Italy and Romania), *deviant/delinquent behaviors* (Lithuania and Portugal), *poor attachment of student to school* (Portugal and Romania), *low self-esteem* (Italy), *low level of education, narrow general culture horizon and the status of victim of bullying/school violence* (Lithuania), *school failure* (Portugal), *negative self-representation in relation to school requirements* (Romania). Following analysis of results, we may see that the ESL causes are in general

conditioned on how the student relates to school, to themselves, to their school experiences, to the school success or non-success, and also to their position/rank in class, their behaviors.

### 5.2. Teachers' competences

An important item of the questionnaire asked respondents from the four countries to design *a profile of the competent teacher in the context of ESL prevention / reduction*.



**Figure 1.** Teachers' profile of competences in the context of ESL prevention/reduction (Source: author's own conception)

The comparative analysis of the projections related to the competences that a teacher needs in order to manage effectively the early school leaving situations, by order of importance scores, ranks the psychosocial competences first, followed by psycho-pedagogical competences, managerial and specialty competences, self-management and digital competences. The psycho-social competences become therefore the central element of the teacher's competence profile, which, in the respondents' opinion, is described in line with the following indicators: (active, assertive and empathic) efficient communication, emotional competences (empathy, motivation, availability, charisma, patience), interpersonal and intercultural competences. We notice that, for all partners of the project, integration of the psycho-social competences in the profile of the efficient teacher is identified as a priority need in order to manage school dropout/ESL in an effective manner.

According to the respondents, we may see that in terms of level of perceived importance scores, the digital competence is ranked on a low position. This fact determines us to appreciate that the respondents design the interventions to prevent and combat school dropout/ESL in a real space, in which the parties committed - teacher- student and family – need to communicate directly, face to face, so as to clarify and identify the intervention strategies.

### 5.3. Strategies for preventing ESL

At another item of the questionnaire the teachers were requested to evaluate, according to the level of importance, on a 1 to 5 scale (1 – minimum level of importance, 5 – maximum level of importance), a series of strategies to prevent ESL (early school leaving). In the table below, we present the responses of the teachers.

**Table 7.** Strategies for preventing ESL  
 (Source: author's own conception)

Italy	Lithuania	Portugal	Romania
1. development of the school-family partnerships 2. activities with parents (more interest in the student learning process) 3. placing each student in school success situations 4. socio-educational assistance for cases at risk	1. placing each student in school success situations 2. activity from parents (more interest in the student learning process) 3. school counseling and guidance 4. taking action/solving conflicts among students	1. operation of multidisciplinary teams at school level 2. development of the school-family partnerships 3. socio-educational assistance for cases at risk 4. availability in providing support in solving students' problems	1. socio-educational assistance for cases at risk 2. taking action/solving conflicts among students 3. school counseling and guidance 4. activity from parents (more interest in the student learning process)

The respondents in Italy have granted the highest scores to the following strategies: *development of a school-family partnership*, *activities with parents (a better collaboration between school and parents)*, *placing each student in school success situations* and *socio-educational assistance for cases at risk*. The teachers in Lithuania also appreciate that the strategies to prevent ESL should start with *placing each student in school success situations*, closely followed by *activities with parents* and *school counseling and guidance activities*.

The teachers in Portugal appreciate that *operation of multidisciplinary teams at school level* is considered to be the most effective strategy, closely followed by strategies aiming to *develop school-family partnerships* and *socio-educational assistance for cases at risk*.

The respondents in Romania attach the highest importance to strategies involving *socio-educational assistance for cases at risk*, closely followed by *adoption of measures/solving conflicts between students*, *school counseling and guidance activities* and *activities with parents* (high interest for the students' learning process). In terms of common points, all four countries value the family-school relation as a potential factor in preventing ESL situations.

In relation to this distribution of responses, we may conclude that the questioned teachers consider that the best strategies to prevent ESL involve a suitable collaboration between the two fundamental educational environments for the development of the child's personality – school and family.

## 6. Conclusions

Starting from the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained in our research, we can highlight some ideas with conclusive value.

- The ESL phenomenon that many schools are currently facing is a complex and difficult to control, which is why it is a matter of national and European interest;
- There are a multitude of causes that determine this phenomenon, of which those associated with the educational environment, targeted in this study, can be grouped into five categories: causes generated by variables specific to the education system, causes generated by variables related to school organization, causes generated by variables related the didactic personality of the teacher, causes generated by variables related to class and causes generated by variables specific to student;
- A fundamental condition to approach correctly the ESL phenomenon is the knowledge of all these causes, because only in



this way we can identify, later, adequate strategies for ESL prevention, reduction and control;

- The teachers consider that the best strategies for preventing ESL are those that value the partnership between school and family;
- The competences held by teachers are also very important in the management of ESL. According to the respondents, the most important competences are the psychosocial competences. Only assertive, empathetic, communicative, available and motivated teachers can successfully meet the challenges associated with ESL.

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