School Dropout and Early School Leaving in Romania: Tendencies and Risk Factors

Simona ALEXA¹,
Elena-Loreni BACIU²

¹PhD. student, West University of Timișoara; The Doctoral School of Philosophy, Sociology and Political Sciences; The Research-Action Centre on Discrimination and Social Inclusion, simona.alex@e-uvt.ro

²Associate Professor, Phd., West University of Timișoara; Faculty of Sociology and Psychology; Department of Social Work; The Research-Action Centre on Discrimination and Social Inclusion, elena.baciu@e-uvt.ro

Abstract: Improving participation rates in education and reducing the number of persons who leave the educational system prematurely has increasingly become a concern for national governments and international organizations all over the world. The current paper is the result of the documentation process for a doctoral research project on school dropout (SD) and early school leaving (ESL) in Romania and the appropriate measures that could effectively tackle these negative phenomena. Based on information compiled from periodic reports issued by the relevant authorities, we present the evolution of the two phenomena in Romania, within the last decade. The most extended section of the article is dedicated to a review of the risk factors that have been associated with SD and ESL, based on the theoretical works, research findings and relevant policies consulted during the documentation stage. In the final section of the article, we systematize the relevant aspects resulted from the documentation process and outline the improvements that would benefit future studies aimed at identifying effective solutions to reduce SD and ESL. The current paper may be of use to other researchers, when setting up the design of a study concerned with SD and ESL.

Keywords: *premature school/educational disengagement; school dropout; early school leaving; risk factors for school dropout and early school leaving; research strategy in approaching the determinants of school dropout and early school leaving.*

How to cite: Alexa, S., & Baciu, E.-L. (2021). School Dropout and Early School Leaving in Romania: Tendencies and Risk Factors. *Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 13(2), 18-38. <https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/13.2/408>

1. Introduction

Education and schooling are key factors in the internationalization and global economic integration process, and therefore, they have attracted the attention and interest of the main relevant stakeholders for decades.

Educational policies are high on the agenda of national governments all over the world, as well as international organizations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), The World Bank, The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

UNESCO (established in 1945) supports relevant institutions in the educational sector in developing educational policies and strategies and managing their implementation. “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, adopted in 2015 by all the UN Member States, is the main policy document that sets out the common ambitions of the signatory countries. It consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are basically common desiderates for the near future that countries have agreed on. Reaching these goals is meant to bring people opportunities for prosperity and peace. The fourth SDG refers to promoting inclusive and equitable quality education and represents one of the cornerstones of the 2030 Agenda.

The World Bank (established in 1994) aims to provide support in the reconstruction of the countries affected by the Second World War. Currently, the World Bank's initiatives reach every important sector in fighting against poverty and promoting economic growth. One of the most popular approaches used by The World Bank in reaching these desiderates is the support provided to education projects, especially in respect to easing access to education for children with disadvantaged backgrounds.

UNICEF, established in 1946, currently operates in over 190 countries and implements programs aimed at saving children's lives, defending their rights, and helping them fulfil their potential. One of its main goals is to support all children (especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds) to access quality education.

OECD, established in 1946 as a European organization, has extended in 1961 internationally. Its declared mission is to enhance prosperity and wellbeing for people around the world and one of the strategies used in reaching its aim related to adapting educational policies to

markets' needs, in order to ensure a higher compatibility between the two and, thus, a better labor market integration for all persons.

In order to improve education and its outcomes, the European Union has adopted the "Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training" (ET 2020), which has four strategic objectives, related to enhancing lifelong learning opportunities, quality and efficiency of education, equity and social cohesion, and innovation.

In 2015, the Romanian Ministry of National Education, with the collaboration of the World Bank, designed the "Strategy for reducing early school leaving", meant to define the approaches used in achieving the objectives of the ET 2020 framework and reducing the rate of pupils who disengage from education prematurely. Romanian NGOs are also involved in preventing and reducing educational dis-engagement: NGOs like Roma Educational Fund, World Vision and "Save the Children" Romania are implementing educational programs (after-school or non-formal education activities) for disadvantaged children to prevent SD and ESL.

However, in spite of the multiple proved benefits of education on the welfare of individuals and on the overall development of the society, many persons still give up schooling before completing a level that would allow them to access gainful employment and secure a decent living standard.

The low educational attainment is the effect of young people's disengagement with school, early in their educational path, which leaves them exposed to a greater risk of unemployment, social exclusion and poverty because they did not have time to acquire the skills and qualifications required for employment.

At societal level, low educational attainment levels among a country's population affect the quality of the human resources, which in turn, due to problems of productivity and competitiveness, hinders the economic development of that country, and delays its results in tackling poverty and social exclusion (European Commission, 2017).

At individual level, low educational attainment is an obstacle to employment and, implicitly, to the autonomous social functioning of the individual.

As such, relevant actions need to be taken toward improving participations rates in education and reducing the number of persons who leave the educational system too early, before completing a level of educational attainment that would grant them access to gainful employment

and, thus, a decent life standard. In order for these objectives to be reached, a proper understanding of the interactions between multiple factors that cause premature school disengagement has to be achieved.

The current paper is the result of the documentation process for a doctoral research on premature school disengagement of Romanian school-aged children and the various factors that contribute to this negative phenomenon. In the second section of the article, we present two conceptualizations of the phenomenon – school dropout (SD) and early school leaving (ESL) – and discuss the potential implications that arise from using one or another. The third section presents the trends of SD and ESL in Romania, in the last decade. The fourth section is a review of factors that lead to premature school disengagement among students, resulted from the consultation of theoretical works, research findings and relevant policies in the field. The fifth and final section sets up the framework of the doctoral research that will be undertaken, by systematizing the important aspects resulted from the documentation process and outlining the approaches to be used in studies aimed at identifying effective ways in tackling SD and ESL.

2. School dropout and early school leaving: two faces of the same phenomenon

Two concepts are predominantly used when referring to the phenomenon of leaving the education and training system prematurely: “school dropout” (SD) and “early school leaving” (ESL).

UNICEF, makes the distinction between the concepts of „school dropout” and „early school leaving”, with the former referring to „the children who gave up frequenting school at a certain educational level” and the later referring to „the children from a certain age group (18-24 years), who left the education system before graduating compulsory education and have not subsequently attended a training or qualification program” (UNICEF, 2012: 9).

On the one hand, at EU level, the common definition used for early school leaving (ESL), also adopted by Romania, makes reference to „those young people who leave education and training with only lower secondary education or less, and who are no longer in education and training” (European Commission, 2013). The statistical indicator “early leavers from education and training” is calculated as the “percentage of people aged 18-24 who have completed lower secondary education or less and who are not involved in education or training out of the total population aged 18 to 24”

(Eurostat, 2019). In EU reports, the terms „early school leavers” and „early school leavers for education and training” are used without differentiation, to encompass all the various types of disengagement from education and training before the completion of upper secondary education. Those concepts include “those who have never enrolled, who have dropped-out of education and training, who do not continue education and training after finishing lower secondary education and those who failed final exams at the end of upper secondary education”. (European Commission, 2013; European Commission, 2017).

On the other hand, the definitions of “school dropout” (SD) in the Romanian literature vary. Some authors define it as “the knowingly withdrawal of the student from the school social system due to loss of interest or motivation for learning or due to lack of economic resources to continue schooling” (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1995:167), thus highlighting the role of the student as the main actor in the process. Another definition (also stressing the agency of the student in the process), brings the concept closer to that of ESL, framing is as „the conduct of definitive evasion consisting in the cessation of school attendance, leaving the education system, regardless of the level reached, before obtaining a qualification or complete professional training or before the end of the cycle of studies started” (Neamtu, 2003: 199).

The authors of a study on the causes and effects of ESL among students enrolled in secondary education, consider that SD and ESL are closely related phenomena, „since a person cannot leave school early, without first abandoning it” (Ivan & Rostas, 2013: 34). The authors point out that the main difference between the two concepts relates to the methodological approach used in the administrative processing of each type of case, since the persons who have dropped out of school are not necessarily considered as early school leavers, because they can re-enroll in education until the age of 18.

According to the Romanian national legislation, the attendance of school until the age of 18 is stipulated as an obligation of the child. The persons who have exceeded the age of the grade in which they could enroll and didn’t graduate primary school until the age of 14 or didn’t graduate the lower secondary school until the age of 19, can continue the studies in the Second Chance Program, at their request.

Until 2016, the Romanian legislation in education stipulated that the students who didn’t attend school for more than 2 years were considered to

be in the situation of school dropout (Ministry of National Education, 2001, 2005). Currently, the concept of school dropout is no longer mentioned by the legislation that has replaced the former regulations. In the last Order issued by The Romanian Ministry of National Education regarding the organization and functioning of pre-university education institutions (Order no. 5079/2016), there is no mentioning of school dropout.

3. Recent trends of school dropout and early school leaving in Romania

The 2019 Report on the status of education in Romania, released by the Romanian central authorities for the school year 2017-2018, shows a 91.4% enrollment rate in pre-primary education, 90% enrollment rate in primary education, and 86.3% in lower secondary education (Ministry of National Education, 2019). The analysis of the school enrolment rates for the last 9 academic years shows a constant decrease in primary and secondary levels, the latter being the most affected, with a 12.6% drop in 2017-2018, compared to 2009-2010 (Table 1). The only educational level for which the enrolment rates have increased is the pre-primary level, with a 13% increase in 2017-2018, compared to 2009-2010.

Table 1. Evolution of school enrolment rates of Romanian children, according to their corresponding age for 2009-2018 period, by educational level (pre-primary, primary and secondary)

Educational level	Enrolment rate per school year (%)								
	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018
Pre-primary (kindergarten)	78.4	78.8	90.2	87.4	90.1	90.9	90.9	91.6	91.4
Primary (Grades 1 to 4)	97.6	97.5	95.6	88.4	89.0	88.7	87.7	86.7	90.0
Lower secondary (Grades 5 to 8)	98.9	97.6	92.8	93.4	92.7	91.4	91.5	91.2	86.3

Source: Data compiled from the Report on the status of education in Romania (Ministry of National Education, 2019)

The reports regarding SD rates in the reference period (Ministry of National Education, 2019; Romanian National Statistics Institute - NSI, 2019) show a relative constant evolution (Table 2) with an average rate of 1.5 for primary level (the lowest being 1.1 in 2012-2013 and the highest 1.8 in 2014-2015) and of 1.8 for secondary level (the lowest being 1.7 in 2009-2010 and 2012-2013 and the highest 2.0 in 2010-2011 and 2015-2016).

Table 2. Evolution of school dropout rates for 2009-2018 period, by educational level (primary and secondary)

Educational level	Dropout rate per school year (%)								
	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018
Primary (Grades 1 to 4)	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.1	1.2	1.8	1.7	1.5	1.6
Lower secondary (Grades 5 to 8)	1.7	2.0	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.9	2.0	1.8	1.8

Source: Data compiled from the Report on the status of education in Romania (Ministry of National Education, 2019) and the Romanian National Statistics Institute (NSI, 2019)

The registration of SD cases, in Romania, is done through the “entry-exit” method and the dropout rate is calculated as “the difference between the number of students enrolled at the beginning of the school year and those registered at the end of the same school year, expressed as a percentage of the number of students enrolled at the beginning of the school year” (NSI, 2019). The Romanian National Statistics Institute notes that this method can induce distortions at the county level, due to the transfer of students during a year school between schools located in different counties (NSI, 2019:15).

According to the same source, SD is an important indicator for the evaluation of the performance of the pre-university education (NSI, 2019:15).

The reports regarding ESL rates in the last decade (Eurostat, 2020) show a generally decreasing trend in Europe and Romania (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparative evolution of early school leaving rates for 2010-2018 period
 – Romania and EU (27 countries)

	Early school leaving rate (%)									
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Romania	19.3	18.1	17.8	17.3	18.1	19.1	18.5	18.1	16.4	15.3
EU (27 countries)	13.8	13.2	12.6	11.8	11.1	11.0	10.6	10.5	10.5	10.2

Source: Data compiled from Eurostat database, accessed online

However, Romania is consistently over the EU average each year, in 2019 being the country with the third highest ESL rate in the EU (Eurostat, 2019).

4. Research evidence regarding the factors that lead to school dropout and early school leaving

Premature school disengagement is the effect of an intertwinement of factors, which vary from individual characteristics to family-related aspects, to factors related to the institutions where the children learn and also to the cultural norms or socioeconomic conditions that describe the communities where the children reside (Lee & Burkham, 2003; Rumberger, 2004).

Some of the theoretical models that explain premature educational disengagement show that low academic achievements and deviant behavior (truancy, alcohol or drug abuse, disciplinary reports, juvenile delinquency) contribute the most to the increase of premature school leaving rates in teenagers (Hoff, Olson & Peterson, 2015; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). However, these are not the only causes of youngsters' early withdrawal from education.

A quantitative analysis based on data collected from 19,000 students in 7 European countries, aimed at identifying the demographic and socio-economic patterns of early school leavers and NEETs and the trajectories and risk factors associated with early school leaving found out that educational and occupational aspirations, support from peers and family members, and perceived levels of teacher support were important factors in preventing premature school dis-engagement (Kaye et al., 2015).

Scholars address premature school disengagement as a complex and multidimensional phenomena. In addition to the individual factors, there are also other factors that have been associated with it, such as the socio-economic status of the family (Hammond et al., 2007; Dockery, 2012), race and ethnicity, gender and disability (Hammond et al., 2007; Hoff et al., 2015).

Although the intertwinement of these various factors is not a particularly new issue, their influence on the children's educational path continues to be analyzed mostly separately, which stalls the progress in tackling them effectively.

At the individual level, the factors that have been associated with SD and ESL are school engagement, school attendance, absenteeism, school failure, deviant behavior, and low academic achievements. Some of these factors have been grouped under the A-B-C Dropout Factors model, which assesses the attendance (A), behavior (B) and course (C) performance (Hoff et al., 2015) of the students.

School engagement is conceptualized as “involving psychological investment in learning, comprehending, or mastering knowledge, skills, and crafts, as opposed to simply a commitment to complete assigned tasks or to acquire symbols of high performance such as grades or social approval” (Newman et al., 1992: 12). School engagement has been found to work in two ways to encourage or discourage school attendance: extrinsically, when associated with rewards related to school work and other school-related tasks and intrinsically, when associated with the syllabus and the design of educational activities (Janosz et al., 2008; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Wehlage et al., 1989). Therefore, school engagement is positively associated with academic achievement and negatively associated with SD (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Absenteeism is another important factor associated with SD and ESL. Studies show that a less than 80% attendance rate seriously increases the risk of SD in pupils (Balfanz, Wang, & Byrnes, 2010; Heppen & Theriault, 2008; Hoff et al., 2015; Neild et al., 2007).

Behavioral problems are a key factor in the early identification of SD cases (Garnier et al., 1997), and their intensity during elementary school is strongly associated with SD (Jimerson et al., 2000). In addition to behavioral problems, several cognitive and affective disorders are related with SD. Learning difficulties have been associated with school failure by various authors (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Dunn et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2002).

Cognitive and affective disorders have also been associated with reduced motivation in school activities (Vallerand et al., 1997).

Additionally, children's individual values and expectations regarding education have been found to influence SD and ESL: studies show that children who present low attachment to the school values and reduced appreciation for school success (Alexander et al., 1997), and those who have a low level of confidence in the role of the school in their social integration (Dunn et al., 2004) are prone to giving up school early.

School failure is conceptualized as 'the impossibility of the student to achieve the pedagogical goals proposed at different levels of the educational process' (Viscol, 2016:136). On a short term, it can be characterized by difficulties in solving school tasks, and, on a long term, it consists in the accumulation of gaps that can in turn lead to class repetition and school dropout (Istrate, 2013; Viscol, 2016; Vlad & Vlad, 2018).

From an eco-interactional developmental perspective, school failure encompasses school dropout, as well as poor attendance, psychological absence, low achievement and grade repetition (Richman et al., 2004:133).

Epp & Epp (2001) found that there are a host of outside-of-school experiences (like early pregnancy and/or marriage, family and entourage influences, early undertaking of the role of provider in the origin family, individual responsibilities of the children in the family – like taking care of younger siblings etc.) that lead to dropping out of school.

The family context has an important influence on the child's relationship with the school and the subsequent effects of this relationship: SD was associated with lower parental expectations about their children's school results, and low level of interest about the child's school activities (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000), lack of supervision and ineffective parental practices, or poor parental practices, such as the lack of emotional support (Lagana, 2004). The family structure and the relationships within the family are also considered important determinants of SD and ESL: children at risk are often part of divided or single-parent families (Lagana, 2004), or come from families in which the relationships between family members are characterized by frequent conflicts (Gillock & Reyes, 1999).

Socio-economic disadvantage and a low level of parental education are also considered important factors that lead students to give up education and training prematurely (EC, 2011). Poverty, school policies, structure and climate are also among the factors that consistently correlated to SD and ESL (Dockery, 2012; Hoff et al., 2015). People living in rural or disadvantaged areas are at risk too, as they may have limited access to

education or to a desired choice of study. McKinney (2014) and Murnane (2007) highlight the relation between poverty and negative academic performances.

In an effort to understand the teachers' perspectives about the factors that lead to SD, The United International Found for Children's Emergencies (UNICEF) conducted a study in 103 middle schools, which are facing the phenomenon of absenteeism and school dropout, in 37 counties of Romania. The main instrument for data collection was an individual identification sheet of students at risk of SD, filled in by the teachers for primary and lower secondary schools.

Following the analysis of the data provided by teachers in over 3000 identification sheets, the authors grouped the risk factors into three main categories: individual factors, family and socio-economic factors and school factors (UNICEF, 2012).

The individual factors that influence the dropout risk reported by the teachers are: high absenteeism (30.5%), learning difficulties (28.3%), lack of motivation for school activities (25,6%), special educational needs with or without certificate (7.1%), health problems (4,8%), deviant behavior (1,1%), and others (2.6%). (UNICEF, 2012:54)

The authors note that factors such as deviant behavior or poor health are less mentioned even if it can be assumed that these factors may be determinants of high absenteeism (UNICEF, 2012:57).

The more frequent three factors mentioned by teachers are the same for students from both educational levels, but with a different ranking: while for the students from primary education the factors are learning difficulties (32%), high absenteeism (26%) and lack of motivation for the school activities (25%), for those in lower secondary education, the order differs a little, with high absenteeism (35%) in the first place, followed by the low level of motivation for the school activities (25%) and learning difficulties (24%) (UNICEF, 2012:58).

The analysis of data about students' gender and area of residence show that high absenteeism its met both among girls and boys, and is met more often in urban areas.

The family and socio-economic factors that influence the dropout risk reported by the teachers are: low income (24.9%), low level of parental education (24%), low involvement of family members in children's education or school (11,5%), lack of decent conditions for study at home (9,4%), models of SD within the family – i.e., in the case of older siblings

(6,1%), performing lucrative activities in the household or outside it (6,1%), disorganized family through divorce or death (4,5%), unemployment for one or both parents (4,2%), child in the temporary or permanent care of grandparents or other relatives, (3,5%), single-parents family (3,1%), reorganized family (1,9%), others (0,9%) (UNICEF, 2012:60).

The analysis of socio-economic factors by place of residence shows that factors like low income level (72.4%), low level of parental education (68.4%), inadequate study conditions at home (29%), performing lucrative activities in the household or outside it (17.8%) are found predominantly in rural areas, while the low level of interest of family members towards the education of children (33.2%) and situations of school dropout in the family (17.8) are predominantly found in students from urban areas (UNICEF, 2012:60).

The most mentioned school-related factors that influence the dropout risk are: poor school results (26.1%), high absenteeism (17.3%), and not having attended kindergarten (16.4%) (UNICEF, 2012: 65). Other school factors identified by teachers are: low participation in extra-curricular activities (11.5%), repetition of grade(s) in previous years (13.9%), failing to pass one or several disciplines in previous years (7.5%), lack of communication or isolation from colleagues (3.8%), deviant/violent behavior towards colleagues or teachers (2.1%), manifestation of other forms of school maladaptation (1.2%) (UNICEF, 2012: 66).

A noteworthy observation about the teachers' perception about the school-related dropout risk factors actually boil down to factors that relate to the individuals concerned (the children) or, at most, their families, and do not refer to dimensions actually related to the school (as the school climate, policies, or structure).

The Strategy for Reducing Early School Leaving in Romania (2015-2020), adopted by the Romanian Government (2015), approaches education as a service (in terms of demand and offer) and groups the risk factors for ESL in two categories: (1) Factors that influence the pupils and their families in their demand for education and (2) Factors that influence the offer of education.

The first category includes the following factors: low family income; inappropriate level of territorial accessibility of educational services, especially in rural isolated areas; children's involvement in seasonal work or in providing care for their younger siblings; parents' external migration in search of jobs; low educational attainment of parents; the way in which the family perceives the benefits of education; children with disabilities of

special educational needs; children's state of health; early marriage or pregnancy; poverty; reduced employment opportunities; minority ethnicity (with special mentioning of Roma ethnicity).

The second category includes the following factors: reduced availability of Second Chance programs; insufficient number of places for practice trainings and apprenticeships; problems with the school infrastructure in professional and technical schools; low quality of some professional and technical schools; low levels of compatibility between the educational offer and the local economic profile; the quality of some educational processes and practices; insufficient support for children from minority groups; the quality of the teaching process (insufficiently adapted to modern methods of teaching and inadequate for the needs of the children at risk); lack of resources in schools; unmotivated teachers; the lack of communication in the school environment (between the various levels of the educational system, and also between parents/ community and the relevant local institutions); deficient funding allocations; inadequate school conditions; lack of school counselors and psychologists; inadequate support for children with special educational needs and disabled children; lack of reliable real-time data (which hinder the monitoring of ESL process).

According to the Romanian National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for 2015-2020 (Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly, 2015), the children with the highest risk of non-participation or dropout from mandatory education are: those with serious disabilities, children whose mothers have graduated at most primary education, Roma children and children from large families.

5. Conclusions: Relevant aspects in setting up a study aimed at identifying the determinants of school dropout and early school leaving

Summarizing the various approaches explored in the previous section, on the factors that influence ESL and SD, we grouped the risk factors in three categories, depending on the level at which they manifest (Table 4): micro-level factors (which manifest at individual and family-level), mezzo-level factors (manifested at school and community-level) and macro-level factors (which refer to central policies and programs).

Table 4: Risk factors for school dropout and early school leaving, at micro, mezzo and macro level

Factors that influence school dropout and early school leaving	Indicator
Micro-level risk factors	
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Male</i>
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Minority (in Romania, especially Roma)</i>
<i>Academic achievement</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>Educational needs</i>	<i>Special</i>
<i>Disability</i>	<i>Present</i>
<i>Absenteeism</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Motivation for schools activities and school engagement</i>	<i>Low / Reduced</i>
<i>Performance in school</i>	<i>Repetition of grade(s) or failure to pass one or more disciplines</i>
<i>Behavior</i>	<i>Deviant</i>
<i>Values and expectations regarding education</i>	<i>Negative / Low</i>
<i>Socio-economic status of the family</i>	<i>Lower/ Disadvantaged background</i>
<i>Educational models within the family</i>	<i>SD/ESL antecedents among other members of the family, Low parental educational attainment levels, Negative attitude of family members regarding the role of education, Low parental expectations regarding school performance Decreased interest in children's school activities</i>
<i>Structure of the family and number of family members</i>	<i>Single-parent family, Family with large number of members</i>
<i>General climate within the family</i>	<i>Cold or conflictual, with disengaged parents</i>
<i>Parental employment status</i>	<i>One or both parents are unemployed, One or both parents are working abroad</i>
<i>Child's involvement in household duties</i>	<i>Performing lucrative activities in the household or outside it</i>
<i>Uncommon personal situations of the children</i>	<i>Early (teenage) marriage, Early (teenage) pregnancy</i>
Mezzo-level risk factors	
<i>Characteristics of the community where the child resides</i>	<i>Rural area or suburbs; Isolated areas; Poor community; Community with difficult access to education and training services</i>
<i>Characteristics of the school in terms of</i>	<i>Deficient, outdated or lacking</i>

<i>infrastructure and resources</i>	
<i>Characteristics of the school in terms of climate and structure</i>	<i>Unsupportive teachers, or teachers with negative attitude towards students and their family context;</i> <i>Segregated classes;</i> <i>Crowded classes;</i> <i>Deficient or inadequate communication within the school environment and between relevant actors</i>
<i>Characteristics of the school in terms of quality of the teaching and learning process</i>	<i>Teachers' skills are not correlated with modern methods;</i> <i>Teachers without tenure;</i> <i>Poorly rated school</i>
Macro-level risk factors	
<i>Central budgetary allocations for specific preventive measures</i>	<i>Lacking or insufficient</i>
<i>Funding for "After school" and "Second Chance" programs</i>	<i>Lacking or insufficient</i>
<i>Compatibility between the educational content and the real needs of the labor market</i>	<i>Weak</i>
<i>Presence of support specialists (counselors and school psychologists) in the schools</i>	<i>No specialists present</i> <i>Specialists overwhelmed by the number of children that need their support</i>

Source: Data compiled from Hammond et al., 2007; Hoff et al., 2015; Romanian Government, 2015; Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly, 2015; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Newcomb et al., 2002; Richman et al., 2004; UNICEF, 2012; Dunn et al., 2004; Garnier et. al, 1997; Jimerson et al., 2002; Vallerand et al.1997; Balfanz et al., 2010; Heppen & Therriault, 2008; Hoff et al., 2015; Neild et al., 2007; Newman et al., 1992; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Istrate, 2013; Viscol, 2016; Alexander et al., 1997; Dockery, 2012; European Commission, 2011; McKinney, 2014; Murnane, 2007; Gillock & Reyes, 1999; Lagana, 2004; Epp & Epp, 2001; Kaye et al., 2015.

The main approaches used in studying SD and ESL have been, so far, mostly top-down, policy-informed and focused on listing indicators and risk factors at individual level. However, we still know very little about the effectiveness of the macro-level actors and policies in preventing SD and ESL, especially among persons from disadvantaged groups. Also, most research on this topic has focused on students that drop out of school in upper secondary school or later. Less research has focused on children who leave school on an earlier stage, or children who start the process of leaving earlier on.

Moreover, children that sever their ties to school prematurely, although readily available for categorization as a simple social indicator be it

SD or ESL), are actually persons with very different backgrounds and vulnerabilities. They are not only described by some broad social characteristics, but also by a very specific set of circumstances that describe themselves, their families, their schools or their communities. Depending on the interplay between all these levels, a child could become more vulnerable to ESL or more resilient to it. In order to understand these circumstances, a bottom-up approach is needed in the investigation.

In order for the future policies and programs addressed to tackling SD and ESL to take note of the complex relationships between the determinants and the factors that operate at various levels, research in this area has to re-frame the approach of these factors. The mezzo- and macro-level determinants of SD and ESL have to be analyzed, in conjunction with the factors at the micro-level: we have very little research evidence on how the service institutions with a mandate to prevent SD and ESL actually work and how they organize their services, or on the effectiveness of the rapid educational policy changes that took place in the last three decades in Romania.

Therefore, a research that seeks to find out how we could effectively tackle SD and ESL should:

(1) take into account factors from all three levels, and not focus on just one of the levels; additionally, considering the cumulated effects of various factors on the same case (person) may produce an effect that is larger than the sum of each individual factor;

(2) have a bottom-up approach and include also the voice of the population concerned, not just the perspective of the policy makers and the school representatives;

(3) bring also into analysis programs and measures that produced good results (searching for 'what works'), especially for persons from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A research that would satisfy the three conditions above would allow us:

- to understand more about the separate influence of each factor on these negative outcomes, as well as their combined influence - how factors from different levels interact with each other, potentially enhancing the risk for certain children, found at the intersection of many risk factors at different levels (for example, Roma or disabled child, coming from a poor, large family, living in an isolated rural community, which has an under-funded school, with teachers that have a negative attitude towards inclusive education);

- to acknowledge how SD and ESL are enacted and processed by those affected by them;
- to improve the design and implementation of future interventions aimed at tackling SD and ESL and improving the participation in education for all children.

References

- Alexander, K.L., Entwisle, D.R., Horsey, C. (1997). From first grade forward: Early foundations of high school dropout. *Sociology of Education*, 70(2), 87-107.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2673158>
- Balfanz, R., Wang, A., Byrnes, V. (2010). *Early warning indicator analysis: Tennessee*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools, Everyone Graduates Center.
<https://new.every1graduates.org/tools-and-models/early-warning-and-response-systems/>
- Battin-Pearson, S., Newcomb, M.D., Abbott, R.D., Hill, K.G., Catalano, R.F., Hawkins, J.D. (2000). Predictors of early high school dropout: A test of five theories. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(3), 568-582.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.92.3.568>
- Dockery, D.J. (2012) School Dropout Indicators, Trends, and Interventions for School Counselors. *Journal of school counseling*, 10(12), n12.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ978868.pdf>
- Dunn, C., Chambers, D., Rabren, K. (2004). Variables affecting students' decisions to dropout of school. *Remedial and Special Education*, 25, 314-323.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325040250050501>
- Epp, J. R., & Epp, W. (2001). Easy exit: School policies and student attrition. *Journal of education for students placed at risk*, 6(3), 231-247.
https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327671ESPR0603_5
- European Commission (2011) EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 COM(2011)173.
<https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vioa8md3cqzg>
- European Commission. (2013). *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, November 2013*. https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2011-2013/esl/esl-group-report_en.pdf
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, (2017). *Structural Indicators on Early Leaving from Education and Training in Europe – 2016*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ffea0a0e-f995-11e6-8a35-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

- Eurostat (2019) Glossary: Early leaver from education and training. Eurostat statistics explained. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Early leaver from education and training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Early_leaver_from_education_and_training)
- Eurostat (2020) Early leavers from education and training by sex and labour status, Dataset accessed on-line at https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_lfse_14&lang=en
- Garnier, H.E., Stein, J.A., Jacobs, J.K. (1997). The process of dropping out of high school: A 19-year perspective. *American Educational Research Journal*, 34, 395-419. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312034002395>
- Gillock, K., Reyes, O. (1999). Stress, Support, and Academic Performance of Urban, Low-Income, Mexican-American Adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 28, 259–282. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021657516275>
- Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J., & Dew, S. (2007). *Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs: A technical report*. National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, Clemson University and Communities in Schools. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497057.pdf>
- Heppen, J. B., Therriault, S. B. (2008). *Developing early warning systems to identify potential high school dropouts*. American Institutes for Research, National High School Center: Washington, DC. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED521558.pdf>
- Ho□, N., Olson, A. & Peterson, R. L. (2015, March). Dropout Screening and Early Warning. Topic Brief.
- Lincoln, NE: Student Engagement Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska Department of Education. <http://k12engagement.unl.edu/dropout-prediction-variables-screening-early-warning>
- Ho□, N., Olson, A. & Peterson, R. L. (2015, March). Dropout Screening and Early Warning. Topic Brief.
- Lincoln, NE: Student Engagement Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska Department of Education. <http://k12engagement.unl.edu/dropout-prediction-variables-screening-early-warning>.
- Hoff, N., Olson, A. & Peterson, R. L. (2015, March). *Dropout Screening and Early Warning*. Topic Brief. Lincoln, NE: Student Engagement Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska Department of Education. <https://k12engagement.unl.edu/DropoutScreening&EarlyWarning3-27-15.pdf>

- Istrate, I. (2013). The Management of the school success. *Columna*, 2, 345-352.
<https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=873984>
- Ivan, C., Rostas, I. (2013) *Părăsirea timpurie a scolii: cauze și efecte. Raport de cercetare [Early school leaving. Research report]*. Roma Education Fund. România.
https://romaeducationfund.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Rezultate-concluzii-recomandari-ale-cercetarii_FIN1.pdf
- Janosz, M., Le Blanc, M., Boulence, B., Tremblay, R. (2000) Predicting Different Types of School Dropouts: A Typological Approach With Two Longitudinal Samples, *Journal of educational psychology*, 92(1), 171-190.
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michel_Janosz/publication/232546461_Predicting_types_of_school_dropouts_A_typological_approach_with_two_longitudinal_samples_Journal_of_Educational_Psychology_92_171-190/links/54a98700cf2eccc56e6c4ae/Predicting-types-of-school-dropouts-A-typological-approach-with-two-longitudinal-samples-Journal-of-Educational-Psychology-92-171-190.pdf
- Jimerson, S., Anderson, G., Whipple, A. (2002) Winning the battle and losing the war: Examining the relation between grade retention and dropping out of high school. *Psychology in the Schools*, 39 (4), 441-457.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.10046>
- Jimerson, S., Egeland, B., Sroufe, L.A., Carlson, B. (2000). A prospective longitudinal study of high school dropouts: Examining multiple predictors across development. *Journal of School Psychology*, 38, 525-549.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/223760069_A_Prospective_Longitudinal_Study_of_High_School_Dropouts_Examining_Multiple_Predictors_Across_Development
- Kaye, N., D'Angelo, A., Ryan, L., Lorinc, M. (2015) *Students' Survey: Preliminary analysis*. Project paper 5, Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe project. Social Policy Research Centre, Middlesex University.
https://medialibrary.uantwerpen.be/oldcontent/container23160/files/Project%20Paper%205_FinalVersion_revised.pdf
- Lagana, M., (2004), Protective Factors for Inner-City Adolescents at Risk of School Dropout: Family Factors and Social Support, *Children & Schools*, 26(4), 211-220. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/26.4.211>
- Lee, V.E., Burkam, D.T. (2003). Dropping out of high school: The role of school organization and structure. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40, 353-393. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312040002353>
- McKinney, S. (2014). The relationship of child poverty to school education. *Improving Schools*, 17(3), 203-216.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480214553742>
- Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly. (2015). *Strategia națională privind incluziunea socială și reducerea sărăciei. România [National Strategy*

- on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction*].
http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/2016/StrategyVol1RO_web.pdf
- Ministry of National Education. (2019). *Raport privind starea învățământului preuniversitar din România 2017-2018* [Report regarding the status of education in Romania 2017-2018].
https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/Raport%20privind%20starea%20%C3%AEnv%C4%83%C8%9B%C4%83m%C3%A2ntului%20preuniversitar%20din%20Rom%C3%A2nia_2017-2018_0.pdf
- Ministry of National Education. (2001). Ordin nr. 4.747 din 16 octombrie 2001 cu privire la aprobarea Regulamentului de organizare și funcționare a unităților de învățământ preuniversitar [Order no. 4.747 from October 16th 2001 regarding the approval of the Regulation for the organizing and functioning of pre-university school units]. <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/34133>
- Ministry of National Education. (2005). Ordin nr. 4.925 din 8 septembrie 2005 pentru aprobarea Regulamentului de organizare și funcționare a unităților de învățământ preuniversitar [Order no. 4.925 from September 8th 2005 regarding the approval of the Regulation for the organizing and functioning of pre-university school units].
<http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/65325>
- Murnane, R.J. (2007). Improving the education of children living in poverty. *Future of Children*, 7(2), 161-182. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ795871.pdf>
- Neamtu, C. (2003). *Devianta scolară*. Iasi: Polirom.
- Neild, R. C., Balfanz, R., Herzog, L. (2007). An early warning system: By promptly reacting to student distress signals, schools can redirect potential dropouts onto the path to graduation. *Educational Leadership*, 65(2), 28-33.
http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Early_Warning_System_Neild_Balfanz_Herzog.pdf
- Newcomb, M.D., Abbott, R.D., Catalano, R.F., Hawkins, J.D., Battin-Pearson, S., & Hill, K. (2002). Mediational and deviance theories of late high school failure: Process roles of structural strains, academic competence, and general versus specific problem behaviors. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 49, 172-186. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.49.2.172>
- Newman, F.M., Wehlage, G.G., & Lamborn, S.D. (1992). The Significance and Sources of Student Engagement, in F.M. Newman – Ed. *Student Engagement and Achievement in American Secondary Schools*. Teachers College Press.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED371047.pdf>
- Richman, J. M., Bowen, G. L., Woolley, M. E. (2004) School failure: An eco-
interactional-developmental perspective. *Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological perspective*, 2, 133-160. NASW Press.

- Romanian Government. (2015). *Strategie privind reducerea parasirii timpurii a scolii in Romania [Strategy for reducing early school leaving in Romania]*.
<https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fi%C8%99iere/Invatamant-Preuniversitar/2015/Strategie-PTS/Strategia-PTS-2015.pdf>
- Romanian National Statistics Institute. (2019). *Sistemul Educational din România: Date sistematice [Educational system in Romania: Systemic data]*
http://www.insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/sistemul_educational_in_romania_2017_2018.pdf
- Rumberger, R. W. (2004). *Why students drop out of school*. Dropouts in America: Confronting the graduation rate crisis (G. Orfield, Ed.), 131-155. Harvard Education Press.
- Rumberger, R., Lim, S.A. (2008). *Why Students Drop Out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research*. California Dropout Research Project Report #15.
<https://www.issuelab.org/resources/11658/11658.pdf>
- UNICEF. (2012). *Copiii care nu merg la școală: o analiză a participării la educație în învățământul primar și gimnazial [Children that don't attend school: an analysis of participation in education in primary and secondary education]*.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277645243_Copiii_care_nu_merg_la_scoala
- Vallerand, R. J., Fortier, M. S., Guay, F. (1997). Self-Determination and Persistence in a Real-Life Setting: Toward a Motivational Model of High School Dropout. *Journal of Personality and Social psychology*, 72, 1161-1176.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.5.1161>
- Viscol, M. (2016) Identificarea determinantilor psihosociali ai eșecului școlar și asigurarea adaptării elevilor la cerințele școlii. [Identifying the psycho-social determinants of school failure and ensuring students adaptation to school requirements]. *Studia Universitatis Moldaviae, Seria Stiințele Educatiei*, 5(95), 135-138. http://studiamsu.eu/wp-content/uploads/20.p.135-138_95.pdf
- Vlad, R., Vlad, M. (2018) School Success and Failure: Determinants Factors and Ways to Prevent School Failure. *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies*, 14, 340-343. <https://old.upm.ro/jrls/JRLS-14/Rls%2014%2047.pdf>
- Wehlage, G. G., Rutter, R. A., Smith, G. A., Lesko, N., & Fernandez, R. R. (1989). *Reducing the risk: Schools as communities of support*. Falmer Press.
- Zamfir, E., Zamfir, C. (1995). *Politici sociale. România în context European. [Social policies. Romania in an European context]* Aternative