

RESEARCH ON THE TEACHERS' NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR COMBATING SCHOOL DROPOUT

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Abstract: *This paper presents a small part from the research conducted within an Erasmus+ project, in six European countries, on reducing early leaving in vocational education and training. Today, at the European level, school dropout or early leaving from education and training is a serious issue and preventing and reducing this phenomenon is a priority. An important role in combatting this phenomenon belongs to the teachers, which need to increase their awareness of the underlying causes and to strengthen their capacity to take action to prevent school dropout and support students who are at risk. Through our research, we aim to discover the real current needs of the teachers for further developing an innovative and competitive training programme, which provide them new and modern supportive strategies and tools. The needs analysis is carried out through two types of researches: background research, and small-scale research, based on answers to questionnaires.*

Keywords: *teachers; needs; school dropout; research; questionnaires;*

1. Introduction

At European level, the phenomenon of school dropout, or early leaving from education and training, is a serious issue, and preventing and reducing early school leaving is a priority. How, unfortunately, Romania, alongside Spain, Italy, and Portugal, is in the top 10 EU countries list regarding the school dropouts rate [8], early school leaving is a worrying phenomenon in our country. In the same time, it is estimated that Vocational Education and Training (VET) has a key role in reducing early school leaving, and has the potential to attract, retain and reintegrate young people in education and training.

In this context, by understanding the important role of VET in combating school dropout, seven partners from six European countries have agreed to develop a project, Reducing Early Leaving in VET (RELiVET). The main aim of the RELiVET project is to develop a course for further training of VET staff, teachers and professionals, that will provide modern supportive strategies and tools to prevent and reduce early leaving from educational and vocational training system. The curriculum of this course will be based on a needs analysis developed in all consortium countries. To be more eloquent, it was decided that this needs analysis should be carried out through two types of researches: a background research, in fact, a desktop and internet research, and a small-scale research, based on answers to the questionnaires completed by the teachers, educators or scientific staff in VET, followed by a feedback analysis.

This paper presents the results of these two types of researches on the Romanian teachers' needs analysis for preventing and combating school dropout.

2. Background research

Initial teacher education offers insufficient training, especially on working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with learning difficulties or with VET students.

In this context, attracting high-quality teachers to this kind of schools and their permanent training is a continuous challenge [1].

Developing, improving and updating the teacher training system, alongside by the modernizing school curriculum and elaborating new and modern educational resources, by using the new technologies, and also strengthening technical and vocational education and training system, are key directions and priorities declared and assumed in the strategic framework for education and professional training in Romania [3, 4], and in all ongoing reforms and policy developments for education [2].

In the actual complex context, the teachers have to act as instructors or facilitators [5] and have to use innovative pedagogies, using an analytical approach located between practice and theory, and traditional resources alongside other modern ones [6], in order to attract students and keep them in school. Especially, to be a great teacher in TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) require a paragon of virtue, knowledge and skills and it requires expertise in both vocational field and in vocational pedagogy. “A great TVET teacher is: passionate and dedicated; a great facilitator; a leader of learning; an excellent communicator; a motivator; a positive thinker; a creative problem-solver; ICT-literate; respectful of learners, prepared to show care for students’ well-being and able to identify their needs; a lifelong learner and reflective practitioner; able to evaluate delivery and impact; personally well-rounded – fair, empathic, patient, stable, reliable; kind; a listener; strict and coherent; pedagogically very competent in a wide range of teaching and learning methods.” [7]. To offer all these, teachers and professionals need to acquire the necessary skills that can be obtained through non-formal training courses.

In Romania, in each county, respectively in the municipality of Bucharest, there is a Teaching Staff House, a related unit of the Ministry of National Education [9]. They are resource centers aimed at training and professional and personal development of employees of the school education system in Romania. At the level of these centers, regularly are applied some tools for analysis of needs concerning continuous training of the teaching staff. The latest such analyses have led to the identification of the following needs:

- the need for training courses
- ICT / digital competences
- the need for personal development
- productive communication
- exchange of experience in differentiated training
- passion for the teaching profession
- intricate need for training in the teaching profession
- acquiring new knowledge
- the need for socialization
- accumulation of professional credits
- financial resources for the organization of educational activities
- theoretical support - offering courses for continuous training and personal development.

Regarding the types of training required, the participants opted for the following:

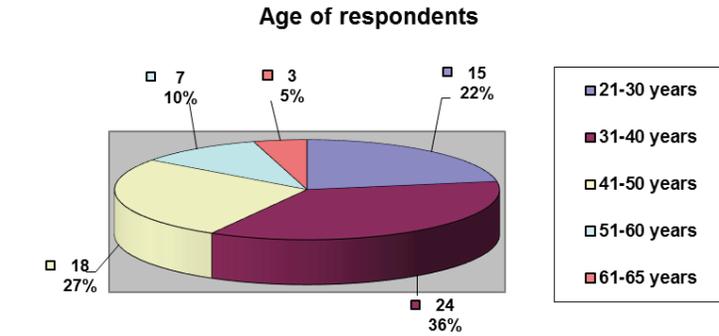
- Preventing school dropout and reducing absenteeism.
- Conflict management training programs in the pupil class.
- Training programs to stimulate school motivation.
- Training programs for counseling children and parents.
- Training programs on educational communication techniques.

From the findings of the background research regarding the requirement and offer of training courses, we can summarise the most important general focal points for designing and developing of the curricular elements and toolkits of a course on preventing and combating the Early Leaving from Vocational Education and Training (ELVET):

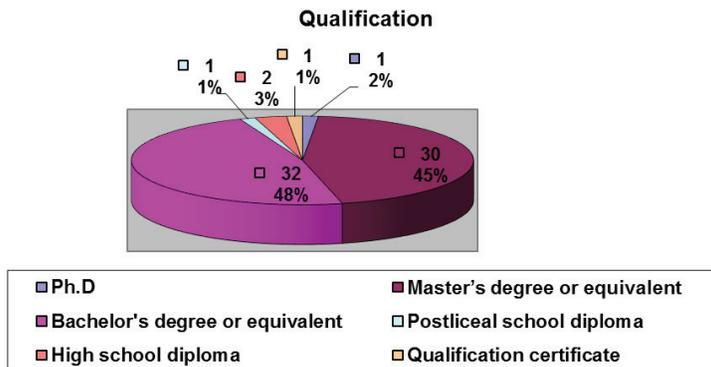
- The course has to contain a presentation of the effective situation of the school dropout phenomenon: definition, causes, consequences, strategies and measures, categories of people at risk, the role of the teachers, parents and community in the prevention of school dropout.
- The training course should develop to the participants that knowledge and skills that make them become: good facilitators and mediators; excellent communicators; positive thinkers; creative problem-solvers; ICT-literates.
- The participants have to learn to use innovative pedagogies, in an analytical approach located between practice and theory, such as: blended learning; gamification; computational thinking; experiential learning; embodied learning; discussion-based teaching.
- The training course has to include modules regarding educational communication techniques, school motivation, integration, orientation and counselling.
- Examples of good practice in reducing school dropout.

3. Small-scale research

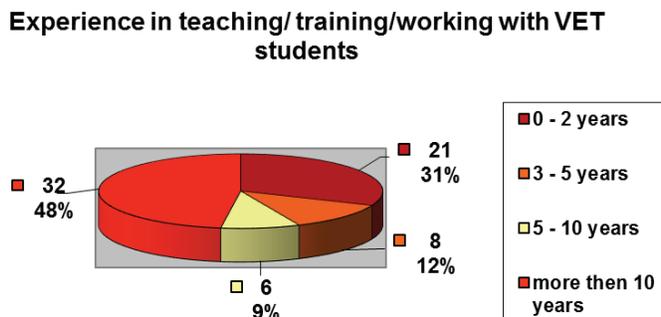
The small-scale research is based on feedback analysis of the 67 answers to questionnaires, completed by teachers, educators or scientific staff in VET in Bihor County of Romania. The background and experience of the respondents are presented in the next charts in fig. 1:



a)



b)



c)

Fig. 1. Background and experience of the respondents: a) age; b) qualification; c) experience.

Regarding the utility of a training on supportive strategies and intervention methods to prevent/ reduce ELVET, 46% of the respondents have appreciated like adequately this kind of training and 42% appreciated it very much.

The respondents require the next skills needed to be enhanced to effectively intervene in countering the dropout phenomenon in schools:

- Promoting creative, good practice activities that highlight student creativity.
- Training professional skills.
- Communication and relationship skills, with family, local council, other involved institutions.
- Mediation and conflicts negotiation abilities between parent and student.
- Motivation and involvement abilities.
- Abilities for a better school and vocational counselling and guidance.
- Skills needed for proactive involvement in the fight against absenteeism.

Regarding the recommendations on the key focal points of the training programme and the relative weight of the curriculum elements, the respondents suggest:

- Presenting concrete cases and solving them.
- Presentation of effective methods to combat school dropout.
- Exchanges of experiences and exchanges of views with the participation of several teachers.
- Focusing the activities on the knowledge of the student, his family and the community from which he/she originates.
- Strategies to be followed in preventing and combating absenteeism.
- Learning strategies for preventing school dropout.
- Modern ways of accepting the school as a way of approaching life and reporting on the development of a career.
- Adaptation to the specific situation of the school/town/village. Possibility to be put into practice in optimal conditions.
- Knowing the environment from which the problem student comes from.
- Effective collaboration methods with students and their families.
- Methods of educating children with problems to avoid school dropout.
- Effective monitoring methods.

The best toolkits recommend by respondents for the training program are:

- Innovative approach.

- Experienced staff with interactive teaching methods.
- Study platform.
- Online courses.
- Distance theoretical training. Practical training in specialized units.
- Questionnaires.
- Debates and workshops.
- Conferences.
- Meeting. Roundtables.
- The computer. Projector. PPT presentations.
- Relevant examples. Examples of good practice.
- Presenting concrete cases and their consequences; discussing them.

4. Conclusion

An important role in preventing and combating the school dropout phenomenon belongs to the teachers, which need to increase their awareness of the underlying causes of this phenomenon and to strengthen their capacity to take action to prevent school dropout and support students who are at risk. The main aim of this research is to discover the real current needs of the teachers for further developing an innovative and competitive training programme, which to provide new and modern supportive strategies and tools on preventing and combating the school dropout. After the needs analysis, carried out through two types of researches, background research, and small-scale research, based on answers to questionnaires, we can conclude that we find approximately the same needs in both types of research. In addition, the participants suggest a set of recommendations on the key focal points of the training programme and the best toolkits to implement it.

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