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Claudia SALCEANU*, Raluca-Silvia MATEI

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The Educational Failure in an International School

Claudia SALCEANU[1]*, Raluca-Silvia MATEI[2]

Abstract

The school failure, as a complex system of manifestations, such as absenteeism, the poor school performance, the lack of interest in different school subjects, difficulties in adapting to the requirements of the educational system is the central core of this research. The study was conducted on a sample of 92 students from two schools in Constanta: an international school and a secondary school of mainstream education. There was developed a questionnaire for the students, containing questions aiming to provide answers to the main objectives of the study. A comparison was made between the two educational systems. The authors aim to capture the following aspects: (1) The identification of the family's role in the educational process; (2) The identification of the disciplines with worst results at school and the explanation of school failure in these domains; (3) The identification of the obstacles to school progress, perceived by the students; (4) Describing the relationship between teacher and student; (5) The identification of the perception concerning the volume and complexity of homework; (6) Describing students' attitude towards the process of evaluation and identifying the level of students' satisfaction / dissatisfaction concerning the evaluation method; (7) Highlighting both positive and negative means of motivating which are preferred by students within the instructive-educational process. In the end of the study, there is a debate on the conclusions and practical implications of the study.

Keywords: Educational failure, educational process, international school, school progress, school malajustment.

[1] Ovidius University of Constanta, Constanta, Romania, claudiasalceanu@yahoo.com.
[2] Ovidius University of Constanta, Constanta, Romania, ralum74@yahoo.com.

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Corresponding Author: Claudia SALCEANU
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1. Introduction

Every school trail may be seen from the perspective of the parent, the student or the teacher, invariably making references to students' performance. The prestige of the family or school, their social perception are linked to students' grades, as in the modern society, school represents a standard of the quality of all those involved in this process [12]. The author argues that the studies on school failure have highlighted a complex phenomenon, with multiple facets, difficult to be summarized in a definition. Complex problems of school failure are widely debated in the contemporary psycho-pedagogical literature [8], [11], [2], [10], [15].

2. Problem Statement

School failure is a negative phenomenon, often defined through comparison with its opposite term, scholastic success. Hence, there is a diversity of interpretations of these two concepts, depending on the cultural and educational traditions of different countries. Stefan (2006) defines the school failure as students' inability of standing up to school requirements of assuming the competences provided by the school curriculum, of adapting to school life, of answering the assessment tests [14]. Kulcsar (1978) considers that school failure occurs when the student's abilities and interests, as well as the scholastic requirements framed and presented through instructive-educative methods are in a process of disagreement [7]. Cristea (2004) defines it as the ensemble of scholastic loss which would have negative effects on social and professional integration, as well as on the companionship relations with the others [3]. There might be several causes of failure: the socio-cultural environment, teaching deficiencies/difficulties, evaluation errors, stressful events in the family's life (disease, divorce, conflicts), friends, the environment of school hostile friends which negatively influences the attitudes towards school duties, the intellectual or skills deficiencies of the student, etc.

3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

The study aimed to highlight the following aspects: (O1) The identification of family's role in the educational process; (O2) The identification of the obstacles to school progress, in students' opinion; (O3) Describing the student-teacher relationship; (O4) Describing students'

attitude towards the process of evaluation and identifying the level of students' satisfaction/dissatisfaction concerning the evaluation method.

4. Research Methods

The research was conducted between in 2 schools from Constanta: Cambridge International School and "Nicolae Tonitza" Secondary School with Mainstream Education. The sample was composed by 46 romanian students, 18 boys and 28 girls, between 14 and 15 years old and 46 students from Cambridge School, different nationalities (Romanians, Americans, Egyptians, Nigerian, Koreans, Croatian, Greek, Israeli, Syrians, Turks, Serbian), 24 girls and 22 boys, between 11 and 17 years old. A survey created by the authors was applied. To ensure the ethics of the research, we obtained from all the participants their written consent, as well as the permission from school chairman to conduct the study.

5. Findings

O1 - the family's attitude concerning school results and activity of the student. 82.60% of Romanian children and 76.08% of Cambridge School students claim that parents have an understanding attitude, whereas only a few students, consider their parents to be demanding. The familial factors that have an effect on the scholastic evolution are divided in two categories [6]: the emotional climate and the parental style, on one hand, and the educational behaviors, on the other (family's expectations concerning the student's behavior at school, as well as student's results). In this context, the harmony, understanding and the emotional support offered to the child, as well as monitoring the child in his/her school or extra-scholastic activities or regular discussions over the current themes, represent determining factors of school succes. We would have expected the traditional Romanian family to be more authoritative and more involved in the partnership with the school and in the educational process of the student. However, as Enache (2013) says, the Romanian family has suffered a metamorphosis for the last 50 years. It went from an extensive, multigenerational structure, with patterns predominantly authoritative, in which the parent-child relationship was led by traditional guidelines, rigid relationships and strict moral, spiritual and educational values, to a nuclear type limited form, which keeps the significant relations with the origin family, but with a bigger intergenerational and interpersonal dynamism [4]. However, we asked the students whether they have their parents' support in making homework.

Romanian students' parents are more involved in helping their children with their homework (60.87%), whereas only 39.13% of Cambridge School students' parents do. A possible explanation is the current afterschool system present in this institution, where students go home with their homework done.

O2 - obstacles to school progress. In the Romanian school, the following were reported: laziness, other activities, using computer for other purposes rather than the ones related to school; Cambridge School: laziness and distractions; TV and disorganization; inattentiveness. A study that was conducted in 2013 revealed as main ways of spending spare time during preadolescence are computer games, sports and social networking [13]. The same study highlighted that among the main disadvantages of the time spent in front of the computer, self-reported by the participants, the lack of interest for school and homework is situated on the 2nd place, only after the visual impairment caused by using the computer in excess. The negative influence of computer games on scholastic success has also been highlighted by other studies, such as the one conducted by Strasburger, Wilson and Jordan, cited by Chele [1], who noticed, among other disadvantages, the abolition of social activities, from the domestic, scholastic ones, to the ones of recreation with friends.

In this context, the need for psychological counseling is quite obvious. Psycho-pedagogical action may engage some specific directions for reducing the effects of certain obstacles to school progress [9]: medium and long term educational projects, educational counseling activities for pupils, parents and teachers which imply interactive methods, teachers training in the spirit of profound human attitudes and values, training and development of pupils' relational and communication skills, acceptance of the pupil as a valuable person, with specific availabilities.

O3 - teacher-student relationship and favorite didactic style. In the Romanian school, the relationships with the teachers have been characterized using words like: good, open, king – servant, and for Cambridge School: good, friendly, very good. Although both institutions promote a partnership between teachers and students, based on understanding and mutual respect, sometimes, students do not see it in the same way as teachers do. The difference comes from the fact that students populations in Romanian schools are usually, very numerous, whereas in Cambridge School there are less students per classroom, which allows teachers to have more profound interactions, in a more harmonious and pleasant environment.

O4 - students' attitude towards the evaluation process. In the Romanian school, students consider that evaluation is: relatively subjective 17.39%, average 65.21%, relatively objective 13.04%, whereas in Cambridge School:

very subjective 6.51%, relatively subjective 15.21%, average 26.08%, relatively objective 28.26%, very objective 23.91%. a possible explanation for these differences could be the fact that the exams and evaluations in Cambridge School are individual, every student has the test in front of him / her, along with the grading scale (starting preparatory class). Moreover, the evaluation is more objective and standardized, and the tests are elaborated in England. Furthermore, while 91.30% of the Romanian school students were unhappy with the grades they had obtained, only 69.56% of Cambridge school students confirm the same. As far as the attitude of the students that are not satisfied with the obtained grades is concerned, students of both institutions say that either they are determined to study harder, they accept the situation, or they pay more attention in class. A study conducted by Markku Hannula [5] identified four different processes as aspects of pupil's attitude towards the evaluation process: emotions aroused in the situation, emotions associated with stimuli, expected consequences and relating the situation to personal values. At Cambridge School, children receive an evaluation rapport that indicates the child's evolution/involution and recommendations for improvement.

6. Conclusions

We would have expected a bigger number of differences of perception concerning the scholastic failure among students, judging by the differences between the two school systems. However, we identified quite many similarities between the two educational institutions. We explain this based on the fact that both Romanian school teachers and Cambridge School ones are originally Romanians, formed by and thus, familiarized with our educational system. Furthermore, at the moment, more Romanian parents are attracted by the Cambridge system and bring their children to attend this institution's courses.

A major difference between the two educational systems is based on the financial and economic aspects. Being a private school, Cambridge School is superiorly endowed in comparison to other Romanian mass schools, which leads to differences in the way activities are conducted, in the way they are planned and executed.

The biggest challenge for students, related to adjusting to the educational environment of Cambridge system is caused by the trouble to adjust to the teaching language, the English language. Once exceeded, students' scholastic and professional evolution is ascending. This school represents an open door for these students towards the European and

international educational systems, where they can be successful, as they are already used to such requirements, teaching and learning methods

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