

## **DISTURBING FACTORS IN SCHOOL LEARNING AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

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**Abstract:** *Disturbances in personality development and high school student failure have become a problem and at the same time a challenge for the psycho-pedagogical community. By conducting questionnaires, a study was carried out, attended by 224 teachers and 760 students from 68 high schools from 21 counties. There have been identified some problems faced by high school students and the factors that produce them. Factors that determine school failure are found in three categories: internal factors that are related to the pupil, external factors related to educational policies and the family environment. In the present paper, starting from the educational realities identified in high schools, we are trying to identify aspects that are worthwhile being taken into account in the initial and professional development programs (teachers' degrees, training courses, masters, postgraduate courses) of teachers, in order to improve the existing situation.*

**Keywords:** *school failure; remediation; counselling; tutoring; mentoring;*

### **Theoretical foundation**

Teenagers achieve results below expectations, expectations of teachers and parents, an effect that (in the form of a second-degree impact) has repercussions on their overall attitude to school activity, balance, and personality development.

For some teenagers, at this stage, a downward spiral begins, overall, at the level of attitude towards school, an attitude often leading to academic failure and school dropout.

This was addressed by Simmons and Blyth (1987), who found a sharp drop in school performance in teenagers as they moved to high school. Moreover, the extent of this decline has been predictive of school failure and school abandonment. The study mentions that decline, motivation, and school outcomes is due to the fact that adolescents are in a situation where they have to cope with major transitions: pubertal change and school change, and with it the physical context of the relational system.

According to JS Eccles, JS Lord, S. Midgley, C. (apud, Hunt, 1975), behavior, motivation and mental health are influenced by the matching of the characteristics that individuals bring with them in social and the characteristics of these social environments. More specifically, matching between the needs and motivational orientations of individuals on the one hand and the requirements and characteristics of social media on the other is supposed to influence motivation, success and mental health. Individuals are not likely to do very well or to be very motivated if they are in social environments that do not match their psyche, expectations and cognitive needs.

In the early 1980s, a new pedagogical trend emerged, called School Effective Research (SER). The central idea of this trend is that the school is able to influence the access and success of individuals in education. Research on this paradigm analysed the characteristics of the SER school, which are able to provide a quality education to their students: the school facilities, the particularities of the teaching staff, the relations between the teachers, the relations between them and the pupils, the relations between the teachers and the

school leadership, teachers / teachers, the degree of security / safety offered by the school, the strategies used by teachers in school activities, says G. Neagu (apud Duru-Bellat, 2003)<sup>i</sup>.

Studies conducted up to now, from this perspective, have shown that all these characteristics of the school correlate positively with the quality of the education provided by the school and are able to significantly influence the students' educational performance of G Neagu (apud Dumay, 2004).

In the conclusions of the research carried out within the project School Effect on Students Performance, G. Neagu argues that the initiation and development of additional remedial education programs proved to be factors with a major impact on the increase of pupils' educational performance on those from social, cultural disadvantaged backgrounds, and beliefs supported by X. Dumay (Dumay, 2004).

According to the research called *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches*, made by International Reading Association in collaboration with National Council of Teachers of English, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Science Teachers Association National Council for the Social Studies, in The USA, one out of four students in secondary school (8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades) is a functional illiterate; he cannot identify the main idea in a paragraph or cannot understand the information from a text (Joftus, 2002); one out of four teenagers cannot read properly enough (Kamil, 2003).

Mentioned in the same study, ACT, a major college admissions examiner, shows that about 50% of high school graduates in 2005 do not have the necessary reading skills to succeed at college (Arenson, 2005).

According to the most recent data presented by Eurostat, taken over by the *Tribuna Invatamantului* newspaper, for an article - School abandonment, a phenomenon that creates havoc in Romanian education, in Romania, in 2016, 37% of 15-year-olds are functionally illiterate<sup>ii</sup>.

Functional illiteracy is a fairly predictive factor of lagging behind in learning, failure and school dropout. According to Hunt and Duru-Bellat's theories presented above, the causes that generated this situation should be identified at the level of school institutions in which teenagers learn.

## A short research

In creating this paper, we started from the data obtained from an empirical study, to identify the factors that generate the problems faced by high school students, was based on this paper. The study consisted in administering questionnaires to teachers and students.

A total of 224 teachers and 760 students from 68 high schools from 21 counties responded.

School factors mentioned by teachers that affect learning outcomes:

- 74.1% of the teachers consider the main factor, a large amount of knowledge taught at each discipline, which leads to the overwork of the students;
- the use by teachers of the didactic strategies, dominantly oriented towards the theoretical part, that of learning, to the detriment of practical, applicative character - 63,4%;
- school teaching facilities - 50.4%.

Family factors that teachers consider to be involved in school results:

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<sup>i</sup><http://www.revistacalitatevietii.ro/2011/CV-3-2011/02.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup><http://www.tribunainvatamantului.ro/abandonul-scolar-un-fenomen-care-face-ravagii-in-invatamantul-romanesc/>

- 83.9% of teachers appreciate that the family's lack of interest in school activity is the main factor affecting the pupils in the school where they work;
- parents who have left abroad, in a percentage of 79.5%
- lack of moral support from the family - 66.5% of the teachers.

Among the internal factors that affect the quality of learning, the most often mentioned are:

- large gaps in previous years' acquisitions, with the highest share, score 226 and 83%;
- attitude of indifference and low motivation for learning, score 213 and 77.2%;
- basic intellectual (basic reading, written, accounted) intellectual skills, 149 score and 71.9%.

Interpreting student responses generated the following data:

Among the aspects that make learning harder, the students mentioned:

- high volume of knowledge taught at each discipline, which leads to over-stressing, is stated in the proportion of 57.5%, with the highest weight, score 555;
- teachers' orientation towards the theoretical part of learning, at the expense of the practical-applicative character, score 509, in proportion of 54.5%;
- inappropriate dosing of the required effort, subsistence or overloading, score 387, percentage 50.9.

Among the family factors that affect the quality of learning, students often mention:

- 47.4%, mentioned - the lack of moral support from the family, but with the lowest share, score 290;
- 47.2%, mentioned - tense family climate, but with the score of 588;
- 45.8 % but with the highest severity, expressed by those of the score of 637 - the parents who left;

Among the internal factors identified by the teachers: large gaps in previous years' acquisitions, precarious elementary skills, low motivation are the result of cumulative factors related to educational policies, school factors, family factors and subjective internal factors, add the factors mentioned by the students: a great deal of knowledge taught at each discipline, teacher's orientation towards the theoretical part of learning, to the detriment of practical applicability and inadequate dosing of the required effort. These are the main issues that have generated the problems faced by high school students: *functional illiteracy, dysfunctions of the process of thinking, indifference and low motivation for learning*. These affect the quality of teaching activity, they determine students' failure and dropout.

It is difficult to establish a cause-effect relationship between these issues, but what is certain is that the educational system, the teaching staff training departments, have the task of finding ways of intervening to improve the situation.

Improving educational aspects is a challenge for the educational community in Romania and for which the specialists in education sciences have the responsibility of research and intervention through the initial and continuous training of teachers.

### **Possible solutions**

"Teachers," says John Hattie, in his book *Visible Learning*, „are the factors with the most influence on learning" (2014),

In the National Education Law no1/2011, in Chapter IV, the curriculum of pre-university education, Article 66, states that "for each discipline and field of study, the curriculum covers 75% of the teaching and evaluation hours, leaving 25% of the time allocated to the discipline / field of study concerned. Depending on the characteristics of the pupils and the school strategy to which they belong, the teacher decides whether the 25% of the time allocated to the discipline / field of study is used for remedial learning, knowledge consolidation, or stimulation of high performing students according to some plans of individual learning programs developed for each student"<sup>iii</sup>.

As a response to this need expressed in the National Education Law, teachers should use that time budget to perform differentiated activities with the purpose of development or improvement, remediation.

Remediation programs are aimed at eliminating the gap between what they know and what the students are expected to know. Teachers can provide students with learning and practical experiences according to their skills and needs. Remedial activities can be done through classroom differentiation or small group activity as additional activities. Teachers can also create tailor-made educational programs with intensive remedial support to help students build their core knowledge in different subjects, master learning methods, build confidence, and enhance learning efficacy<sup>iv</sup>.

If this intervention does not work, another type of intervention with additional evaluation services and additional psycho-pedagogical assistance may follow.

What is the reality in Romanian schools?

Teachers were not trained to ensure this type of curriculum.

Departments of training teachers, both in initial development and long-life learning, have the responsibility of preparing teachers above the high school students' needs.

It is necessary for teachers **to make a change** in their professional attitude and in the way of organizing their schooling, assuming their role as tutor-teacher!

The tutor-teacher is able to track the impact that teaching has on each student. The tutor-teacher becomes more concerned about how students learn and tracks the extent to which learning becomes visible. Students helped by tutor-teachers could engage in deliberate effort and could take responsibility for their own learning. When pupils fail to learn, they do not need "more" but something else than that which makes visible learning (Hattie, 2014). It is therefore desirable for teachers to be prepared to act so that students who need remedial action feel that they belong to a school community, to be convinced that they can succeed, understand the meaning / purpose for which they are learning, and last but not least, to believe in their ability to succeed with class teachers. To cope with these tasks, initial training and ongoing training is necessary for teachers to avail themselves of the training, the support of a mentor to provide counseling and advice.

### **Tutor-teacher training**

Tutoring is understood as a one-to-one or small group activity in which a person who has knowledge and expertise in a particular area of content or discipline provides guidance, guidance, help, support<sup>v</sup>.

The purpose of the tutoring as a pedagogical action is to help students increase their motivation for school activity and become independent in learning.

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<sup>iv</sup><http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/special/resources/serc/irtp/book-3.html#10>

<sup>v</sup><http://www.dictionary.com/browse/tutoring>

Tutoring differs from ordinary teaching, in that it involves both the tutor and the person being taught, in a personalized and flexible learning process, a process in which the tutor has the role of orienting and supporting the student.

The tutor accepts the idea that backsliding and school failure can be generated by a multitude of factors (internal or external), school or family factors, and acting in accordance with student needs, depending on the factors identified. The tutor-teacher has the task of identifying, for each pupil at risk, the factors that can lead to school failure, he intervenes, in a personalized way, through remedial activities to diminish their impact on the development and progress of students.

The tutor-teacher's possibilities to change something at the family level is limited, but cooperation with parents is essential as it can increase the degree of safety, security and psychological comfort of students. Learning will be more effective if it takes place on a psychic comfort background, because only a learning experience ending with a state of safety, security and satisfaction tends to repeat itself. Otherwise, if the state of uncertainty, dissatisfaction or lack of security persists, there is an opposite behavior, that of rejecting learning.

The tutor-teacher searches the source of motivation for each student and his / her aspiration level so that he / she finds the proximity of the aspirations in line with the potential. Thus, the teacher-student relationship provides the latter with methodological support in organizing the individual study and supporting the use of the resources needed for learning.

At the level of competencies, the training activities for the future tutor-teacher would have the following ends:

- diagnosing each student's problems / needs;
- identifying the type of learning the learner needs;
- facilitating learning for the learner: selecting and adapting learning materials, accessibility of content, and choosing action strategies for learning autonomy;
- support for knowing the learner's level of performance in order to adjust the level of aspiration, in order to increase motivation and self-esteem;
- recovering tutors among students.

The role of tutor can also be successfully taken up by a class mate, where we speak of tutors among the students, the educational benefits being for both pupils. (Jean-Pol Martin, 1998). The tutor practices what he has learnt (we know that the highest retention rate is produced by teaching others), and the assisted receives support and is satisfied with the need for affiliation. About student tutoring and the benefits offered, also speaks Hattie in his study and book *Visible Learning* (2014). An advantage for this type of educational partnership is that the vocabulary used by the colleague tutor, but also the interests are closer to the assisted level.

## Conclusions

In order for the system to meet the teenagers' needs, it is first and foremost necessary to be concerned with the training of teachers able to respond to these challenges.

It is necessary, mentoring, that could provide advice and counseling to future teachers and debutants.

It is necessary for the future teacher to have the support for the formation of practical skills, so that, in turn, he could be able to provide support to his students.

It is necessary for the teacher to be trained himself by the mentor and to:

- reflect on personal didactic behavior;

- capitalize on their own teaching style in order to avoid behavior that can create problems for students, making creative use of the feedback received from students;
- look for appropriate methods and tools to make a correct diagnosis of pupils and their needs;
- act proactively, in a differentiated and individualized way to help students overcome the "helplessness learned" state;
- help students to set goals in their own learning and apply self-assessment strategies to measure success rate;
- adapt and direct their own teaching style to promote learning based on each student's personal action and effort;
- contributes to establishing common goals and a common work plan between: teachers, executives, pupils and parents;
- participate in group meetings, teachers, to share best practices;
- act on the idea that they can help students by accepting the change of role, from a teacher who teaches to a teacher who provides learning for each pupil (adaptation of Hattie, 2014).

Reconsidering of mentoring, during the continuous training and institutionalization of mentoring, for the debutant teachers are possible solutions for the training of tutor-teachers.

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