EXPLORING THE TOPIC OF SCHOOL DROPOUT.
NARRATIVE REVIEW OF ACADEMIC LITERATURE

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Abstract: *School dropout is a significant problem area in many European countries, including Romania, with serious economic, social and educational implications (Gorghiu, et al., 2020; Pop-Flanj, Herța, 2019). The paper is a narrative review that proposes to analyze educational policies in the EU and Romania that prevent school dropout. We used the ERIC and Google Scholar search engines using the key terms school dropout, policies, school dropout prevention. 21 articles were selected and included in the narrative review. The study aims to identify the determinants of school dropout and evaluate the measures implemented to prevent it. The results indicate that policies that include integrated measures, involving families, schools and communities, are the most effective in preventing school dropout (Sahin, Arseven, 2016).*

Key words: *school dropout; educational policies; early intervention; inclusive education.*

Introduction and problem statement

Early school leaving is one of the most important challenges for education systems worldwide, with major social, economic and cultural implications. Identifying and understanding the factors that contribute to early school leaving is essential for the development of effective educational policies. This narrative review explores the literature on the determinants of early school leaving, focusing on four main categories: socio-economic factors, family factors, individual and psychological factors, and community and public policy factors. Early school leaving is defined as leaving school before completing upper secondary education and is a phenomenon with multiple causes, including socio-economic, cultural and educational factors. Early school leaving is also defined as leaving education without obtaining a minimum qualification

(Adams, Becker, 1990). In the European Union, early school leaving rates vary significantly between Member States, and recent data show a decreasing trend in this phenomenon in recent decades (Lyche, 2010). According to Eurostat (2020), the early school leaving rate in the EU reached 10.3% in 2020, with notable differences between countries. In countries such as Portugal, Italy and Spain, early school leaving rates are much higher than in Nordic countries such as Sweden and Finland (Eurostat, 2021). In Romania, early school leaving is a particular problem, with a rate of 16.4% in 2020, significantly higher than the European Union average (Eurostat, 2021). This problem is influenced by factors such as poverty, lack of access to quality education in rural areas and forced migration of families, among others (World Bank, 2018). Early school leaving has long-term consequences for young people who drop out of education, increasing the risks of social exclusion and more difficult integration into the labour market (OECD, 2020).

Description of research design
The paper is a qualitative research that uses the method of narrative review of academic literature.
Purpose and Objectives
Narrative review of academic literature in order to describe the issue of school dropout
• Identify the most frequent directions of growth in the field of school dropout
• Identify the determinants of school dropout in Europe and Romania.
• Evaluate measures to prevent school dropout in the European Union and Romania.

Sampling and Method
The study was carried out by accessing the Research Gate, Google Academic databases to identify international specialized literature that researches the issue of school dropout. The review took place between December 2024- January 2025 and was limited to articles published in Romanian and English. The search terms used are listed in Table 1.
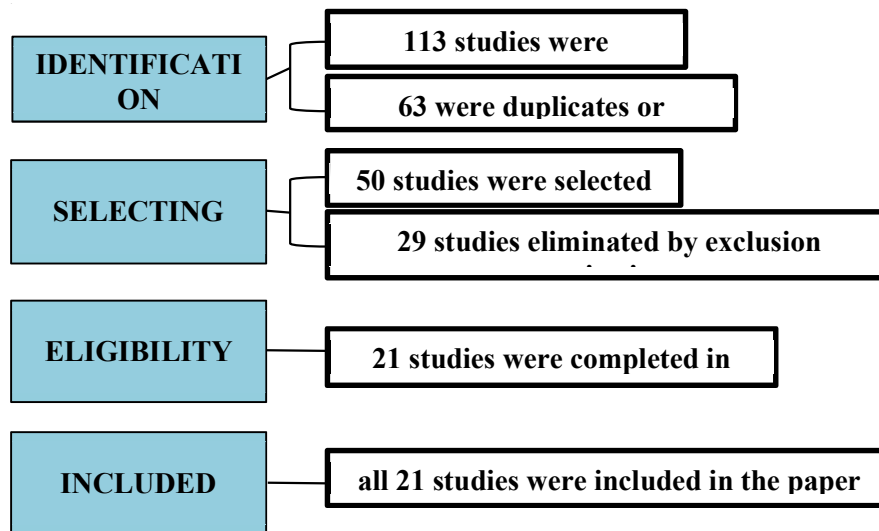
IDENTIFICATION	113 studies were
	63 were duplicates or
SELECTING	50 studies were selected
	29 studies eliminated by exclusion
ELIGIBILITY	21 studies were completed in
INCLUDED	all 21 studies were included in the paper

Figure 1. Flowchart for identifying selected articles

Findings

The most important directions of growth in school dropout concern these topics: Risk factors for school dropout, social and educational policies aimed at preventing dropout, and school dropout in rural areas. The table below summarizes the three directions of research with the related references.

Causes of school dropout	Educational policies	School dropout in rural communities
Chirtes, (2010)	Rahbari et al., (2014)	Muntele, Istrate, Bunduc (2020)
Sahin, Arseven, Kiliç, (2016)	Lyche, (2010).	Marin, (2022)
Gorghiuet al., (2020)	Arriazu, Solari, (2015)	Pescaru, (2018)
Sabates et al., (2010)	Weatherbee, (2006)	Bosoanca, (2021).
Pop-Flanja, Herța, (2019)	Popa, (2020)	Dupéré et al., (2019).
Ioanaet al., (2015)	Tranca, (2018)	Piscitello, Orooji, Robison (2022).

Table no. 1. Research directions on the issue of school dropout

2. Poverty, family factors, individual factors, cultural and community factors - risk factors for school dropout

Poverty is one of the most important factors influencing school dropout (Gorghiu et al., 2020). Studies show that low-income families cannot cover the indirect costs of education, such as transportation, school

supplies or uniforms, which negatively affects students' participation in education (World Bank, 2018). In Romania, approximately 32% of children between the ages of 6 and 17 live at risk of poverty or social exclusion, which significantly limits their chances of completing compulsory education (Eurostat, 2021). In addition to poverty, economic inequalities contribute to the creation of significant gaps between rural and urban areas. According to a World Bank report (2018), the insufficiently developed educational infrastructure in rural areas accentuates this phenomenon, offering fewer educational opportunities to students in these areas. Social exclusion disproportionately affects children from marginalized groups, such as Roma or those with migrant parents (Pescaru, 2018). These students often face discrimination, limited access to quality education, and reduced opportunities for integration into the education system (Pop-Flanja & Herța, 2019). In Romania, the school dropout rate among Roma children is significantly higher than the national average, reaching over 77% in some regions (UNICEF, 2021).

Parental migration abroad, a frequent phenomenon in Romania and other Eastern European countries, has a negative impact on children left behind. The lack of emotional support and parental monitoring decreases the school performance of these children and increases the risk of dropping out (World Bank, 2020). A UNICEF study (2021) indicates that students who have at least one parent abroad have a 30% higher risk of dropping out of school.

Family structure is an important determinant of children's educational success. Single-parent families or those with frequent conflicts provide little support for continuing their studies. According to OECD (2019), emotional support and active involvement of parents in children's education are essential factors in preventing school dropout. In Romania, families where parents are abroad exacerbating this problem, with children often left in the care of relatives or even alone (World Bank, 2020). The level of education of parents directly influences children's attitudes towards school. Families where parents have a low level of education are less involved in their children's school life, and the risk of dropping out is significantly higher (Popa, 2020). Also, the lack of a perspective on the benefits of education for the future limits children's motivation to continue their studies (Sabates et al., 2010)

Limited economic resources affect not only children's access to education, but also family involvement in school life. Costs associated with education, such as supplies or transportation, become a burden for low-income families (Eurostat, 2021). In addition, children from such families are often forced to work to support the household, which limits their time and energy for studies (World Bank, 2018). Among individual factors, lack of personal motivation is a frequent factor in school

dropout, especially among adolescents (Rahbari et al., 2014). Students who do not perceive education as relevant to their future aspirations are more likely to drop out of school. Mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression or behavioral disorders, play a significant role in school dropout (Piscitello et al., 2022). Students who face such difficulties are often marginalized in the educational environment and do not receive the necessary support (World Bank, 2018**).**

Cultural norms play an important role in educational decisions, especially in communities where early marriage and domestic responsibilities are common. For example, in Roma communities, girls are often withdrawn from school to marry or to perform domestic tasks (European Commission, 2021).

Communities with limited resources offer few opportunities for children to engage in extracurricular activities or personal development, which contributes to an increased risk of school dropout (Dupéré et al., 2019). This lack of support contributes to an increased risk of school dropout, especially in rural settings (OECD, 2020). Inadequate educational policies are a major obstacle to preventing school dropout (Weatherbee, 2006). The lack of mentoring programs, personalized interventions negatively affect school retention (European Commission, 2019). Although programs such as "Second Chance" and "Money for High School" have had a positive impact, their coverage remains limited (Ministry of National Education, 2020).

School dropout is a complex phenomenon, influenced by socio-economic, family, individual and public policy factors (Chirtes, 2010). Studies show that integrated measures, involving both families and communities and public institutions, are the most effective in preventing school dropout (Tranca, 2018). Understanding these factors is essential to develop effective interventions. Studies show that integrated measures, involving both families and communities and public institutions, are the most effective in preventing school dropout.

3. Categories of measures to prevent early school leaving

The European Union has implemented various policies and strategies to reduce early school leaving. These measures focus on early intervention, promoting inclusive and accessible education and supporting vulnerable students (Sahin, Arseven, & Kiliç, 2016). European policies are supported by reports and strategies that emphasize the importance of education as a driver of economic and social development (Lyche, 2010). Early interventions are essential for preventing early school leaving. According to the European Commission (2019), identifying students at risk of dropping out of school and providing personalized support can significantly contribute to reducing this phenomenon. Some countries have implemented early education programs targeting children

from disadvantaged backgrounds, providing a fair educational start ((Sahin et al., 2016; OECD, 2019; European Commission, 2020)). Compulsory and quality pre-primary education is considered a key factor in preventing early school leaving. Promoting inclusive education is another major objective of European education policies. The European Union supports the creation of an education system in which all students, regardless of their socio-economic status, ethnicity or disability, have access to quality education (Muntele, Istrate, & Bunduc, 2020). In many European countries, integration programs for migrant students and those with disabilities have been implemented, which include language courses, psychological support and social integration activities (European Commission, 2021). Also, in some countries, such as France and Germany, vocational and technical schools have been developed that offer alternatives for students who do not wish to follow a general educational path (OECD, 2020)

Active involvement of parents and the community is crucial in preventing early school leaving. According to OECD (2020), collaboration between schools, parents and community organizations can reduce the risks of early school leaving, especially in disadvantaged regions. Many European countries, including the United Kingdom and France, have implemented programs that encourage parental involvement in the educational process, providing them with support and information to support learning at home (Sabates, Westbrook, Akyeampong, & Hunt, 2010).

In Romania, school dropout is a deep-rooted problem, influenced by socio-economic inequalities and the lack of adequate educational infrastructure. The Romanian government and international organizations have implemented various measures to prevent this phenomenon, but there are still significant challenges in implementing these policies (Miron & Mistrean, 2024). Romania has implemented various programs aimed at reducing school dropout, including through financial support provided to families from disadvantaged backgrounds. The "Money for High School" program is an example of a measure aimed at stimulating the continuation of studies for students from poor families (Ministry of National Education, 2020). Romanian authorities have also implemented support measures for students from rural areas, who are more likely to drop out of school due to the lack of educational infrastructure and the long distance from educational institutions (World Bank, 2018). Table 2 Summary of risk factors and prevention policies.

References	Findings
Risk factors in school dropout	
Sabates et al., (2010); Gorghiu et al., (2020)	Culture (belonging to certain ethnic groups)
	Economic factors; Family factors
	Poor access to education
	Family problems
Sahin, Arseven, Kiliç, (2016)	Poor parent-child relationships
	Ignoring school absenteeism
Chirtes, (2010)	Perspectives on education
	Economic difficulties
	Family problems
Pop-Flanja, Herța, (2019); Ioana et al., (2015).	Economic problems, poverty
	Cultural values
	Emotional and psychological factors
Educational policies	
Rahbari et al., (2014).	Grants and financial support programs
	Special programs for student reintegration
	Student registration systems
Arriazu, Solari, (2015)	Improving youth mobility and access to education and training
	Scholarships and material support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
Popa, (2020)	Family Support Allowance.
	The "Corn and Milk" Program.
	Providing free school supplies to students from disadvantaged backgrounds
Lyche, (2010)	Remedial education
	Tutoring and homework assistance to support struggling students
	Comprehensive programs that combine academic, vocational, and social work education.
Weatherbee, (2006)	Screening and Diagnosis: Identifying Students at Risk of School Dropout
	Monitoring and Evaluation: Assessing the Effectiveness of Intervention Programs.

Tranca, L. M. (2018)	Creating partnerships with NGOs and local institutions to support the education of disadvantaged children. Community awareness campaigns on the importance of education and combating discrimination. Involving volunteers in education
School dropout in rural communities	
Muntele, Istrate, Bunduc, (2020) Marin, (2022)	Endemic poverty of families;-Low level of education of parents; Low income of parents Poor digital infrastructure
Pescaru, (2018); Bosoanca, (2021)	Parental attitudes towards education, especially in the case of Roma communities; Seasonal migration, belonging to nomadic families; Cultural norms (e.g. early marriage of girls)
Dupéré et al., (2019)	Peer-Related Stressors Parentification of the Child, Responsibility for Raising Siblings
Piscitello et al., (2022)	Increased socio-demographic risks; Increased economic difficulties

Table no. 2. Findings from the specialized literature

Conclusions

Research suggests that school dropout is a complex phenomenon, caused by a combination of economic, family and socio-cultural factors. Educational policies adopted include financial support and remedial education, can have a significant impact in reducing dropout, but these measures must be implemented taking into account the particularities of each region and community. In particular, rural communities and students from disadvantaged backgrounds are the most vulnerable to school dropout, and interventions must be adapted to take into account their specific difficulties, such as the lack of educational infrastructure and parental migration. It is also essential that interventions include a component of raising awareness among parents and the community about the importance of education.

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