



Reducing the inclination towards school absenteeism through
extracurricular activities. Theoretical and applied studies at the level of
Bihor county

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Authors note

Abstract

During last years, running away from school, and thus school absenteeism have become phenomena that are even more present in Romanian and European education. The problem is even more serious as passing a number of 80 absences present in the roll creates the premises for school abandon. Statistic data published recently demonstrates that at the level of the European Union the two aspects mentioned above – absenteeism and school abandon-have a rate that often overcome 10-15%. The causes that lead to such numbers are diverse and include economic causes, social and cultural, psychological, pedagogical causes, etc. in Romania, and particularly in Bihor County, the numbers are similar to those in Europe and are influenced by variables like: the student's age, school level, personal type, background. Still, daily educational practice show us that in order to keep students in school, not the formal didactic activities are the most important, but mostly the extracurricular ones that respond to their needs and expectations. In our article we will analyze the inclination for school absenteeism as a risk factor in school abandon by taking into consideration the students' background and the extracurricular activities offered by the school. There will be presented statistical data offered by the School Inspectorate from Bihor County, as well as the results of a research developed in a POSDRU project by which we desire to prevent and correct school abandon by reducing the rate of school abandon. The results of this research demonstrated that by involving students in activities that will increase their interests towards non-formal education, the rate of school absenteeism decreased significantly.

Key-words: extracurricular activities, non-formal education, scholar absenteeism, scholar dropout (abandon).

Zusammenfassung

Die Flucht von der Schule und das miteingebiffene Schulversäumnis sind, in den letzten Jahren, immer mehr, gegenwärtige Erscheinungen im Europäischen und Rumänischen Erziehungswesen. Das Problem ist umso bedenklicher daher dass, das Überschreiten einer Anzahl von 80, in das Klassenbuch eingetragenen Absenzen, die Voraussetzung für die Schulabtreterung darstellt. Die neulich veröffentlichten statistischen Angaben zeigen dass die zwei oben erwähnten Erscheinungen-das Schulversäumnis und die Schulabtreterung (Schulverzicht) eine Vorherrschaft darstellt die oft 10-15% überholt. Die Ursachen die zu solchen Werten führen sind verschiedenartig und beeinschließen, unter anderen, auch wirtschaftliche, sozio-kulturelle, psychologische, pädagogische u.a. In Rumänien und im besonderen im Kreis Bihor, sind diese Werte vergleichbar mit den europäischen und gleichzeitig, von veränderlichen Größen beeinflusst, wie zum Beispiel – das Alter des Schülers, das Einschulungsniveau, das Geschlecht der Person, das soziale Abstammungsmilieu, usw. Trotz allem, zeigt uns die Erfahrung im alltäglichen praktischen Unterricht, dass nicht die formalen Schultätigkeiten unbedingt wichtig sind, um die Schüler im Schulmilieu zu behalten, sondern eher die außerschulischen, extracurricularen Tätigkeiten, die ihrer Erwartungen entsprechen. Im vorliegenden Beitrag werden wir die Vorherrschaft des Schulversäumnisses als Risikofaktor im Auftreten des Schulverzichts bei den Schülern untersuchen, im Lichte deren sozialen Abstammungsmilieus und der, von der Schule vorgeschlagenen, extracurricularen Tätigkeiten. Es werden sowohl die statistischen, vom Schulinspektorat des Kreises Bihor gelieferten Angaben, als auch die Resultate einer, im Rahmen eines POSDRU Projektes entwickelten Forschung vorgestellt, durch die wir uns vorgenommen haben die Vorbeugung und Verbesserung der Schulabtreterung durch die Herabsetzung der Vorherrschaft des Schulversäumnisses innerhalb der Schulen zu verwirklichen. Die Ergebnisse dieser Forschung haben bewiesen, dass durch das Hineinziehen der Schüler in Tätigkeiten, die ihr Interesse an nonformale Erziehung steigt, die Rate des Schulversäumnisses wesentlich gesunken werden kann.

Schlüsselwörter: Extracurriculare Tätigkeiten; nonformale Erziehung; Schulversäumnis; Schulabtreterung/Schulverzicht.

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1. The problem

One of the most serious problems that European and Romanian education is confronting in recent years is the alarming increase of the rate of school absenteeism (Kempes et. al., 2005) and when their number exceeds 80 absences / student / academic year, the scholar dropout risk arises installation. A scholar absenteeism means temporary leaving of school by pupils from different reasons, like personal or family's ones. If the phenomenon is repeated, it can turn in the first instance to "scholar dropout disguise", and finally into a "total one" (Blândul et. al, 2010).

Statistical data obtained in the educational community from Bihor county are extremely interesting. The scholar dropout rate is calculated by a percentage between the number of students enrolled in full-time education and the graduates. In Bihor county, school dropout rate in 2006/2007 registered by the National Institute of Statistics and School Inspectorate shall submit the following (Table 1 and 2) (Blândul, 2012):

Table 1

Scholar Dropout Frequency from Compulsory Learning System from Bihor County according with Pupils' Gender

<i>Total Number of Pupils</i>	<i>Scholar Dropout - Boys</i>	<i>Scholar Dropout - Girls</i>
53225	190	127
	0,35%	0,23%

Tabelul 2

Scholar Dropout Frequency from Compulsory Learning System from Bihor County according with Pupils' Residence Place

<i>Total Number of Pupils</i>	<i>Scholar Dropout - Urban</i>		<i>Scholar Dropout - Rural</i>	
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
53225	82	45	108	82
	0,15%	0,08%	0,2%	0,15%

From the data presented in the tables above, we can see that theory is confirmed by practice. Thus, an encouraging aspect is that in Bihor county scholar dropout rate is less than half a percent and is just over 1% in high school. We can note that scholar dropout rate is higher among boys than for girls,

which seems to confirm the theory about the premature assumption of responsibility for males by employing in the labor market before graduating with a degree of any forms of schooling. We cannot exclude the variant in which such persons can commit criminal acts, or to accompany the family to work abroad temporarily. The same answer we obtained in the case of backgrounds, both for boys and girls in the school dropout rate is higher in rural areas. Possible causes worth to mention family disinterest in education, lack of motivation of pupils for education, students who come from dysfunctional families or Roma' ones, entourage composed of illiterate children, struggling to fit the schedule imposed by the school, the need to obtain immediate material gains etc. .

Trying to solve this complicated problem, University of Oradea and Scholar Inspectorate from Bihor County, Romania, implemented from 1 July 2010 for 2 years a project entitled "*School, My Chance!*", co-financed by the European Social Fund by the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013. The main objective of this project is to prevent and correct early school pupils leaving in such areas where exist a major risk in this sense, by facilitating them access to quality formal education. The target group of the project is pupils who studying in inferior secondary scholar cycle in schools with classes I-VIII of Avram Iancu, Boge, Carasau, Les, and Șuncuiuș, Bihor County, Romania, their parents and teachers (Ortan et. al., 2012).

One of the main activities of the project was *Implementation of A and B Cognitive Therapy for pupils presenting high risk of early school leaving*. Thus, from the first day of the second semester of scholar year 2010 / 2011 started specific A and B Cognitive activities, after a schedule and for some specific academic disciplines selected for each school. The program ran from Monday to Thursday, after mandatory classes and academic disciplines covered were: S08 Avram Iancu - English and Mathematics; S08 Boge - Romanian and English; S08 Carasau - Romanian and Mathematics, S08 Les - Romanian and Mathematics; GRI Șuncuiuș - English and History. Overall, the activities involved students' homework for the next day, or to enhance knowledge and skills acquired in the mentioned scholar disciplines. At the beginning, middle and end of the first year of the program, students involved in the target group were evaluated using oral examination, to determine the acquisition of knowledge for each subject. Also, it was monitored the number of absences that was recorded in the scholar grade book for each student from target group, aiming to increase or decrease them, in parallel with the involvement of students in the program. Another important activity was represented by development of students' social skills, because we consider that one of the most important way to convince them to remain in school is to offer them the opportunity to exchange experience with other colleagues who have similar problems and with others as well, that can create the possibility for an effective integration of students with large number of school absences in learning environment. Concrete, this activity included sports games, drawing competition, volunteering activities, ecological ones and so on (V. Blândul et. al., 2010).

2. Lot of subjects

Lot of subjects was represented by 100 students (N = 100) with risk of early scholar leaving in 5 schools: S08 Avram Iancu and S08 Boge - with 20 students, S08 Carasau and S08 Les –15 students and GRI Șuncuiuș - 30 students. Students, whose chronological age was between 11 and 14 years old, were 72 girls and 28 boys.

3. The methodology

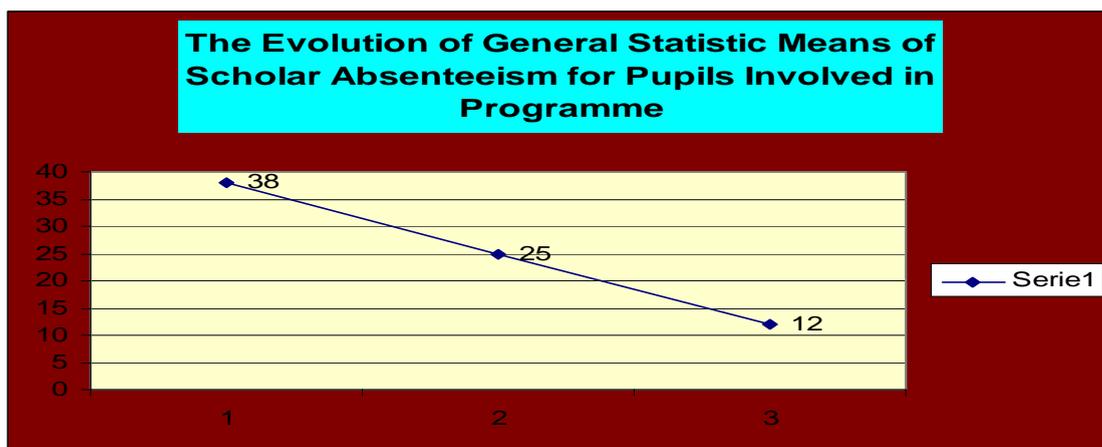
The main research methodology was represented by psycho-pedagogical experiment. So, in pre-test, we evaluated the number of pupils' school absences registered in school grade books. This stage took place at the beginning of academic year 2010 / 2011. The specific psycho-pedagogical intervention took

place during following 2 years of the project (2010-2012) and supposed the implementation of supplementary classes at any scholar disciplines like: Romanian, Mathematics, English and History. The main content of these lessons was represented by homework, solving exercises and problems, supplementary reading some books, games, competitions, documentary trips, volunteering in local community and so on. In post-test, we evaluated once again the number of pupils' school absences from grade books. The present stage took place twice, first at the end of academic years 2010 / 2011 and second one year later, at the end of the whole project. The quantitative interpretation was consisted by computing total number of school absences, maximum and minimum its values, namely correlation between these obtained values at the beginning, middle and the end of project, using Bravais-Pearson quotient.

4. The results

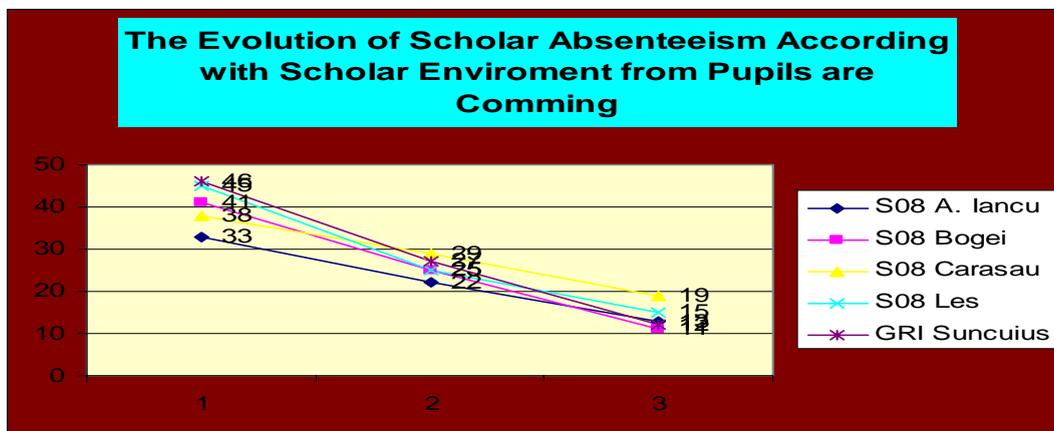
The results that we obtained are very interesting and can be present in following pictures and table.

Picture no. 1



The results are extremely interesting and prove a decreasing of pupils school absenteeism registered in scholar grade books, from viewpoint of its statistical means and its highest / lowest values (Picture no. 1). So, at the beginning of academic year 2010 / 2011, the pupils who composed our focus-group had a mean of 38,59 school absences, their highest number was 89 and lowest one – 20. At the middle of implementation period for psycho-pedagogical intervention (at the end of academic year 2010 / 2011), the statistic mean of pupils' school absenteeism was 25,65, their extremely values being 61 and 20. Finally, at the end of project, the statistical mean of pupils' scholar absenteeism decrease at 11,98, with it maximum value 41 and minimum one 10. It can be observed a significantly reducing of school absences for pupils from project focus-group, especially in the second part of the intervention. These results prove that pupils' involvement in A and B Cognitive Therapy can obtain positive academic performances, able to determine them to remain in formal educational system.

Picture no. 2



The results from each school are similar to those generally described described in the preceding paragraph (Picture no. 2). Thus, we observe the same tendency of decreasing the number of school absences registered by students in those three phases of our research. In addition, the obtained values are relatively the same for all 5 schools, the differences observed being statistically insignificant. So, at the beginning of our research, the fewest absences related to the number of students registered at S08 Avram Iancu (33.61), while that most are at GRI Șuncuiuș (45.44). In the middle of psycho-pedagogical experiment, in terms of school absenteeism, the best situation have the students from S08 Avram Iancu (22.92) and the worst - students from S08 Carasau (29,55). At the end of the experiment, students who have most corrected school absences were those from GRI Șuncuiuș (11.08) and the least - students from S08 Carasau (17,55). Moreover, in these two schools, were registered the higher, namely the smallest difference between the average school absences at the beginning and end of the experimental research. No matter of the obtained values, encouraging is that pupils’ scholar situation represented by number of absences registered in scholar grade books has improved considerably, the risk of early leaving of formal education by them being significantly reduce.

Table 3

The Statistic Correlation between Scholar Absenteeism Registered by Pupil sat the Begining, Middle and End of Research

	General Correlation	S08 Avram Iancu	S08 Bogei	S08 Cărăsău	S08 Leș	GRI Șuncuiuș
r_{1-2}	0,67	0,85	0,89	0,32	0,91	0,61
P	<0,01	<0,01	<0,01	<0,1	<0,01	<0,01
R_{1-3}	0,72	0,68	0,94	0,82	0,90	0,52
p	<0,01	<0,01	<0,01	<0,01	<0,01	<0,5
r_{2-3}	0,64	0,45	0,69	0,62	0,64	0,55
p	<0,01	<0,5	<0,1	<0,01	<0,5	<0,5

Data from statistical processing of values representing by number of absences recorded by students with high risk of scholar dropout confirms specific hypothesis that these students will significantly improve their scholar situation after the implementation of A and B Cognitive Therapy Program proposed by the project. Thus, in 4 of the those 5 schools included in project, the calculated values for Bravais-Pearson correlation quotient between the beginning and end of research (r_{1-3}) are highly significant at the 0.01 significance level, while the GRI Şuncuiuş this one is 0.5. On the other hand, highly significant correlation between debut and middle of the program (r_{1-2}) is at the 0.01 significance level for all 5 schools. Statistical correlations with the lowest values recorded between the middle and the end of psycho pedagogic intervention (r_{2-3}) are at significance thresholds that vary according to the school between 0.5 and 0.1. A possible explanation for this situation could be represented by the length of the time allocated to the program and the impact it had on the students involved. Thus, it appears that effects of the program were much stronger after the first year of implementation, students with high risk of school dropout better understanding the importance of formal education and behavior in this respect. In the second year of project implementation, participating students have continued to be interested in extracurricular activities proposed to stay concern in formal education system. However, the final result shows a total change of pupils' attitude towards school, expressed by significantly reducing the number of school absences registered in scholar grade books.

5. Discussion

A first issue that should be discussed concerns upon the socio-economic and cultural environment where are located those 5 schools included in our project. From the beginning, the target group of the project was represented by the students with difficult situation, namely a major scholar dropout risk. Therefore, these students were selected from schools in places socio-economically disadvantaged. After processing the data obtained in this study, we identified two extreme cases, it appears, which correspond to the economic and social reality from Bihor County. First is Carasau with a small population, a big ethnic diversity and a modest level of economic and cultural development. In this village there is one school where are studying children from kindergarten to secondary school cycle. In these circumstances, some local pupils are involved in different other activities than scholar one, such as household activities, field work, merchandising etc. Added to this is the low level of education for the adult population from the village and low aspirations in this sense. Thus it could be explained why at the end of the project pupils from Carasau registered the highest number of absences comparative with their peers from other schools. This means that economic and social daily needs are stronger than the effects of A and B Cognitive Therapy Program. By contrary, pupils from GI Şuncuiuş lives in a village with an acceptable socio-economic development level, fact demonstrated by the presence of superior secondary education that attracts numerous resources in the area. This interest in formal education is much higher and this is shown by the fact that pupils are more aware regarding the importance of it comparative with their colleagues that have reduced the number of school absences registered in scholar grade book.

Another important aspect concerns the content of A and B Cognitive Therapy Program proposed by the project. By its nature, the program proposed by the students performing homework for the main learning disciplines and other additional problems or for improving this theoretical knowledge acquired during the lessons (Kerbs et al., 2007). Moreover, students should be involvement in extracurricular activities with order to motivate them to learn better, or to remain in the educational system. Among these activities we can mention: sports, greening areas near schools, drawing contests or other artwork, documentation trips and visits, supporting families that are in difficult situations, celebrating personal or

community life' various events etc.. Although not solve the problems facing these students, non-formal education activities are designed to motivate them to stay in school, considering most attractive its educational offer and better understanding the importance of formal edicației for their personal and professional development. In this way, non-formal and informal education can be a vital support to the formal one, together constitute a whole with significant effects in preparing students for life (Fullerton et al., 2010).

6. Recommendation and conclusion

The complexity and multitude of causes that can generate scholar dropout risk makes difficult to precisely formulate both prediction and intervention to limit the phenomenon. However, a number of recommendations with the character of generality can be specified later being necessary more specific ones adapted for any particular case (Neamtu, 2003):

- attracting students in decisions that affect them directly;
- support the development of a real partnership teacher - pupil;
- optimization partnership school - family - community;
- providing quality educational services;
- students involvement in extracurricular activities with;
- development of thematic circles school where students can express their skills and personal interests;
- promoting inclusive education;
- support students in learning process.

In conclusion, we can say that in every school there is a group more or fewer students at risk of disengagement and dropout. The factors leading to this situation are very different and acts in strong correlation. The most important such variables are the following: aggression (physical or verbal), low level education outcomes, socio-economic status and origin, namely chronological age of students. The most effective scholar dropout prevention us represented by the intervention upon factors that can cause it, engaging the students in as many scholar and extracurricular activities, or supporting those who have learning difficulties. Otherwise, dropout effects could adversely on the individual score for life and, more generally, could have a negative impact on society as a whole.

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