

## The role of education in reducing poverty social exclusion

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**Abstract.** *Education provides a stable foundation for developing the societies of tomorrow, having a dual function since it fosters economic growth and represents a crucial instrument also for ensuring the stability of a society in terms of human welfare. The research was carried out through an econometric analysis based on a questionnaire as a quantitative measure. Through this study we intended to identify the standpoints of teachers activating in the Romanian pre-university education system and who activate in Bucharest and Prahova, on the research subject as well as correlations that exist between the study variables. Some key issues addressed by the study were determining the extent to which teachers believe that education can reduce poverty and social exclusion, measures that can minimize poverty and strategies for reshaping the educational services to improve their suitability for students. The results have shown that education can indeed promote the reduction of social issues but it steadily needs to be reformed to fulfil its scope. The findings can be of interest for institutions that establish legislative procedures in the educational field and can help to regenerate Romanian education. For the present-time societies, enabling social and economic wellbeing is both a target and a challenge, due to the persistent need of remaining competitive and the ongoing legal and economic reorganizations that appear during every country's existence.*

**Keywords:** educational services, education, poverty, social exclusion, Romania.

### Introduction

The young people of today, or in other words, the beneficiaries of educational services, are the ones who will play an active role in developing the societies of tomorrow. Thus, active policies need to be formulated in order to shelter the thriving of its end users on the long term and to reduce social occurrences like poverty and social exclusion.

In order to promote the minimization and even eradication of social imbalances, the educational system has to find itself in a persistent need of being reshaped in accordance with the needs and aspirations of the present-day citizens. Ardashkin (2015) emphasizes that education is an integrated social element and a solid pillar in shaping individuals' subsequent existence. Similarly, Păunescu (2017) views education as a resource that people must benefit from without any constraints in order to access a good living. Nevertheless, education has to be profoundly adapted to the globalization phenomenon which makes everything to be rapidly changed. Moreover, Burja and Burja (2013) claim that education can bring value to a society through fostering economic growth, by improving the capabilities of the people who participate in the academic process and making them to obtain a high-quality output in their tasks. Tsui and Dragicevic (2018) develop a new design on personal learning environment in higher education.

The paper's objective is to analyze the role played by education in diminishing negative social phenomena such as poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, we aim to identify the extent of the need for redesigning the educational services in Romania and measures that can be implemented in order for education to better fulfil its social mission, meaning to instruct young people and to prepare them for their future. The research will be conducted through the usage of a questionnaire, namely a quantitative measure, while the sample consists of teachers from the pre-

university education, who undertake instructional processes in the following sub-levels: primary, secondary, high school and post-high school. Furthermore, the geographic target chosen selecting the research participants is represented by Southern Romania, more exactly Bucharest County and Prahova County.

## **Literature review**

### ***Education and its social problem-solving dimension***

According to Mosora and Mosora (2013), education represents an indispensable driver for expansion from the economic point of view, on one hand and for people's lives, on the other hand. Furthermore, the authors claim that individuals' opportunity of benefiting from education is obstructed by negative social phenomena such as poverty. Poverty involves economic hardships at the personal level which trigger social exclusion of underprivileged groups. There is a bidirectional link between poverty and education, since the absence of education results in poverty and the vice versa is applicable, too.

In a similar manner, Awan et al. (2011) recognizes poverty as a barrier towards economic advancement and perceives education as a critical instrument in the eradication of poverty, outlining the negative correlation between educational accomplishment and the occurrence of poverty. In addition, attending higher education institutions decreases an individual's probability of being affected by poverty. Verner (2004) underlines the strong need for taking measures in the educational field, as poverty makes students unable to obtain good grades or even to attend school. Besides this, there is a vicious circle produced by education of a poor quality which triggers low financial gains that contribute further on to the deepening of the poverty status. A minimal educational attainment can also impede growth by making people to obtain a poor productivity of labor, thus education is essential for mitigating poverty.

Statistical evidence provided by the GEM Report (2013) issued by UNESCO shows that the poverty rates have followed decreasing values since 1990 but at the current moment the share of people affected by extreme poverty at a global scale is of 21%. The European Association for the Education of Adults (2010) details the alarming situation of worldwide poverty claiming that 1.40 billion individuals have daily earnings of less than \$1.25, which is translated into 20% of the global population. Concerning the educational situation, the number of people who were illiterate was of 776.164 and this is not a good sign since an increased illiteracy rate for a country is a favouring circumstance for persistent poverty. Besides a poor education, other factors that promote the acceleration of poverty are political uncertainty and corruption, prejudices related to gender, a deficient life expectancy and a reduced society participation from the citizens' part.

According to Save the Children (2016) poverty and social exclusion are phenomena that also threaten children to a very high extent in Europe, as more than 26 million children are the subjects of these phenomena on this continent. If added up, these children would be of the same number as the country that is ranked on the seventh place in terms of population size in the EU. At the European Union level, one out of four children (28%) face the poverty and social exclusion risk, whereas Romania exceeds the EU average by far, having a share of 51% in terms of children influenced by these imbalances.

Moreover, the report highlights the fact that educational poverty tends to spread from one generation to the next and that it makes its effects visible from the first years of living, this justifying the requirement for early education and caring. Despite this thorough necessity, Romania has a poor development in this sense, as the investments in childcare and early

childhood education have a coverage below 10%, the same being true for Slovakia, Poland and Czech Republic.

Parziale and Scotti (2015) sustain the inverse link between poverty and education and claim that contributions made in the educational field can aid economic welfare and social stability at the same time provided their goal is the minimization of social exclusion of individuals. Moreover, Fernandez (2014) asserts that programs undertaken at the level of the European Union prove the education's positive impact on fighting against social exclusion.

In addition, Weber et al. (2007) argue that two measures for decreasing poverty can be the refinement of the educational services' nature, quality and worth as well as determining students not to leave the educational domain. Merce et al. (2015) highlight school withdrawal as a serious problem that affects Romania, this issue being influenced by aspects such as learning hardships, absence of needed motivating factors, assistance and counselling for undertaking education, or social obstacles. More precisely, these aspects can be assigned to three categories: student and family determinants (the income owned by the family as well as the instruction that parents provide to the child), society determinants (employment opportunities; absence of dialogue between teachers and parents) and school determinants (deficient school results). Ushadevi (2001) asserts that children who quit school become a vulnerable group, one that is very difficult to reintegrate and that they form a true and accurate measure of poverty.

Regarding the influence of the family factor upon school dropout, Mihai et al. (2015) state that the schooling of children who belong to families with a defective economic situation is compromised by the fact that they have to work in order to improve the family's income. However, this produces a vicious circle, as the renouncement to education determined by poverty does not raise the individual or family wellbeing, on the contrary, it intensifies its wrecking and impedes a person to financially sustain his living.

Education also has to fulfil the function of supporting students to easily access the labour market and to be socially included from this point of view. In this sense, Müller (2005) affirms that if educational institutions are concerned with ensuring training oriented towards developing particular skills, the students will be better prepared for the labour market inclusion and a minimum effort will be required from the employers' part.

### ***Reason of research***

The research was carried out as an extension to the aspects identified in the literature review regarding education as an instrument of reducing social disparities.

More precisely, it brings added value to the field of research as it collects the opinions of teachers who carry out pedagogic activities within the Romanian pre-university level of education, more precisely within the primary, secondary, high school and post-high school education, upon the research topic investigated and provides an integrated image of it. The reasoning behind the paper's approach is the absence of concluding literature studies concerning the education's impact on poverty and social exclusion which have as a basis the beliefs of the previously mentioned category, at the level of Romania.

### **Methodology**

The methodology section of the paper aims to illustrate and to understand the standpoints held by the Romanian teachers activating in the pre-university educational system, as providers of these services, with respect to the function met by education in minimizing social imbalances such as

poverty and social exclusion. Given the fact that teachers represent the channel through which information is conveyed to students, they are a critical starting point in the students' learning process. As a consequence, their attitude towards the analyzed issue is highly constructive and needs to be assessed so that improvements can be reached in this domain both for existing and future generations. The research base on the assumption that the subjects of the analysis consider education as having an essential role in the improvement of social aspects like poverty and social exclusion, and they believe that Romanian education has to be reorganized to better meet the demands of its stakeholders.

With respect to this premise, the research hypotheses that constitute the basis of the study were formulated as follows:

H1: There is a correlation between the absence of motivational factors, assistance and counseling and students' deficient school results.

H2: Creating student counseling cabinets for finding better jobs can help to reduce poverty.

The research hypotheses were investigated by having as a basis a questionnaire, whose purpose was to determine the viewpoints of the educational services' providers in Romania, namely teachers from the pre-university education, regarding the role of education in reducing social issues and measures that need to be further implemented in the field.

The questionnaire has firstly aimed to find out whether the respondents were aware of magnitude of poverty and social exclusion at the level of Europe, in terms of number of children affected. Further on, the aspects that we have aimed to investigate through the questionnaire were as follows:

- the quantification of the respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: 'The educational services offered to an individual can help to reduce poverty', based on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 corresponded to a strong disagreement and 5 to a strong agreement.
- finding out the educational measure that the respondents thought to be the most important in reducing poverty, from a set of two possible options: improving the nature and quality of the educational services; encouraging partnerships with the business environment, universities and schools, at the local and international level.
- assessing the participants' opinion on whether the link between school results and parents' occupation had an impact on school dropout
- determining the level of importance assigned by the respondents to a list of measures for improving the educational services on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1-not at all important; 5-extremely important): (a) applying new and innovative teaching methods/allocating enough time to know the students at the individual level; (b) modernization of the school syllabus to make it more relevant for children's lives and the abilities they need/promoting a more pleasant learning style; (c) offering supplementary support for learning (offering writing materials, providing free tutoring for children from disadvantaged groups); (d) improving the school infrastructure and offering meals (brighter and colorful classrooms, arranging study classes, offering free meals for children from poor families, free access to Internet, printers, offering camps); (e) creating counseling cabinets both for the children and parents from these families, with support for finding better jobs.
- identifying the frequency of access to computers during school, and the frequency of receiving and being offered help in fulfilling school tasks.

- the respondents' rating of 6 school dropout factors, from 1-not at all important to 5-extremely important: (a) family income; (b) education level received within the family; (c) absence of dialogue between teachers and parents; (d) deficient school results; (e) learning difficulties; (f) absence of motivational factors, educational assistance and counseling.

Additionally, the research involved demographic considerations concerning the respondents: their age, gender, the educational level and the county in which they teach.

The questionnaire was constructed by using Google Docs and it was held available online in December 2019. It was sent to a number of 120 pre-university teachers from Bucharest and Prahova and the final sample was formed of 115 conclusive responses, the response rate being of 96%.

The hypothesis analysis was carried out through an econometric analysis, namely regression analysis. The software used for processing the primary data was Microsoft Excel.

## Results and discussions

The validity of the first research hypothesis according to which there is a correlation between the absence of motivational factors, assistance and counseling and students' deficient school results is assessed by using a simple regression analysis. In this analysis, the absence of motivational factors, assistance and counseling represents the independent variable or regressor (X) whereas students' deficient school results have the role of dependent, incontrollable variable (Y). Thus the hypotheses is formulated as follows:

Null hypothesis (H0): There is no correlation occurring between the absence of motivational factors, assistance and counseling and students' deficient school results.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): There is a correlation occurring between the absence of motivational factors, assistance and counseling and students' deficient school results.

The extent to which the two variables are correlated is tested by using R Square (coefficient of determination) and Adjusted R Square (adjusted coefficient of correlation). According to Table 1, R Square has the value of 0.1660111, hence we may observe that 16.60% of the variation in student's deficient school results is explained by the absence of motivational factors, assistance and counseling, taking into account the fact that other influence factors are held constant. Furthermore, Adjusted R Square is 0.158630667, therefore 15.86% of the variation in student's deficient school results is explained by the absence of motivational factors, assistance and counseling, knowing the fact that the impact of other potential factors is taken into consideration.

After having established the level of correlation that exists between the two variables of the study, we can establish the model, which, in its general form, is:

$$\hat{y}_i = b_0 + b_1x_i \quad (1)$$

If we proceed towards formulating the model with respect to our studied variables and Table 2, the econometric equation is:

Deficient school results= 2.57+ 0.39 \* Absence of motivational factors, assistance and counseling (2)

**Table 1. Regression statistics for the first research hypothesis**

	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F			
<b>Regression</b>	1	7.544121808	7.544122	22.49341	6.20376E-06			
<b>Residual</b>	113	37.89935645	0.335393					
<b>Total</b>	114	45.44347826						
<b>Coefficients</b>	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	
<b>Intercept</b>	2.570253843	0.375041623	6.85325	4.01E-10	1.827228771	3.313278916	1.827229	3.313279
<b>Absence of motivational factors, assistance and counseling</b>	0.393814802	0.083035611	4.742722	6.2E-06	0.229306285	0.558323318	0.229306	0.558323

Source: author's own findings

**Table 2. ANOVA for the first research hypothesis**

<b>SUMMARY OUTPUT</b>	
<b>Regression Statistics</b>	
<b>Multiple R</b>	0.407444597
<b>R Square</b>	0.1660111
<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	0.158630667
<b>Standard Error</b>	0.579130844
<b>Observations</b>	115

Source: author's own findings

In addition, the above equation tells us that there is a positive relationship between the two variables and apart from this aspect, there is also a positive slope that takes place. Furthermore, when assessing the coefficient of the independent variable, which in our case is 0.39, it tells us that this is the extent of the change in students' deficient school results when there is a 1% change in the absence of motivational factors, assistance and counseling. In other words, the greater the absence of motivational factors, assistance and counseling, the greater the deficiency of student's school results.

However, establishing the validity of the model can be done by analyzing the value of Significance F, displayed in Table 2, and making a comparison between it and  $\alpha$ , which is 5% (0.05). In our case, it has the value of 6.2 and since it is greater than 0.05, we may not reject H0 and we may say that the model is not applicable in 95% of the cases.

The second hypothesis that is to be tested is the one which claims that creating student counseling cabinets for finding better jobs can help to reduce poverty. We state the analysis as follows:

Null hypothesis (H0): Creating student counseling cabinets for finding better jobs cannot help to reduce poverty.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): Creating student counseling cabinets for finding better jobs can help to reduce poverty.

We acknowledge that creating student counseling cabinets for finding better jobs is the independent variable (X) and reducing poverty acts as a dependent variable (Y).

The coefficient of determination (R Square) displayed in Table 4 is 0.27, which means that 27% of the variation in reducing poverty is explained by creating student counseling cabinets for finding better jobs, given the fact that we do not consider any influence from other possible factors. By difference, the adjusted coefficient of correlation, Adjusted R Square, shows that only 7.2% of the variation in reducing poverty is explained by creating student counseling cabinets for finding better jobs, taking into account other factors of influence.

The next phase after having depicted the correlation is to build the econometric model, starting from its general form:

$$\hat{y}_i = b_0 + b_1x_i \quad (3)$$

Applying the general equation of the model to our variables and considering Table 5, we obtain the following model:

$$\text{Reducing poverty} = 3.58 + 0.23 * \text{Creating student counseling cabinets for finding better jobs} \quad (4)$$

**Table 4. Regression statistics for the second research hypothesis**

SUMMARY OUTPUT	
<b>Regression statistics</b>	
Multiple R	0.269806179
R Square	0.072795374
Adjusted R Square	0.064590024
Standard Error	0.54415635
Observations	115

Source: author's own findings

The type of relationship that takes place between the variables is a positive one due to the form of the previously stated econometric model. Besides that, the independent variable's coefficient, 0.23, is positive too, so from this we may judge that the reduction of poverty takes place with 0.23 when the creation of counseling cabinets is raised with 1%. If we restate this fact, the greater the creation of counseling cabinets, the greater the reduction of poverty. When evaluating the validity of the model based on Table 5, Significance F is 0.03 and its is smaller than the value of  $\alpha$  (0.05), therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected and it can be said that creating student counseling cabinets for finding better jobs can help to reduce poverty. In addition, the model is valid in 95% of the cases.

**Table 5. ANOVA for the second research hypothesis**

	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F			
<b>Regression</b>	1	2.626964	2.626964	8.871695715	0.003545255			
<b>Residual</b>	113	33.45999	0.296106					
<b>Total</b>	114	36.08696						
<b>Coefficients</b>	Standard Error	t Stat	P- value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	
<b>Intercept</b>	3.5814116	0.363056	9.864626	6.23384E-17	2.862132236	4.300690964	2.862132236	4.300690964

<b>Creating student counseling cabinets for finding better jobs</b>	0.229734451	0.07713	2.978539	0.003545255	0.076926199	0.382542	0.076926199	0.382542704
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Source: author's own findings

## Conclusion

The study pointed out the critical impact of education in advancing social welfare and providing the basis through which societies of tomorrow can thrive. What is more important is that the initial research hypotheses were validated by the regression analysis. Furthermore, the research also displays a solid belief from the respondents' part that Romanian education has to be reorganized to better meet the demands of its stakeholders.

Relevant aspects that need to be further studied are the opinions of students, parents and psychologists from the educational field, due to the fact that they are key beneficiaries and participants in the educational chain and their point of view is also valid in the analysis.

In what concerns the research limits, one of them is the short period of time for obtaining questionnaire responses and the other refers to the relatively small teacher database the authors had access to and the narrow geographical target selected (Bucharest and Prahova).

The results of the inquiry are applicable at the current moment only to the sample under study, meaning the pre-university teachers from Bucharest and Prahova and cannot be extended to the entire population. Moreover, there is a strong need for extending the research to other counties from Romania and perform comparisons in order to understand the issue at large.

Another aspect to be mentioned is that the applicability of the results is valid for legislative bodies within the educational domain, which can develop educational policies aiming at improving the quality of educational services in Romania and their performance in reducing social phenomena like poverty and social exclusion.

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