

Particularities of the Romanian rural education

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Abstract: *The education of preschoolers, pupils or young people that are part of disadvantaged or at-risk groups is a priority objective of political, socio-economic, cultural and civic organizations in Romania. Romanian rural education is facing a sharp drop in the number of pupils. Causes may be related to a large number of families with socio-economic problems, distances, limited access to cutting-edge information, and migration to nearby cities. Identifying causes accurately and measuring the impact on the quality of rural education is also a challenge from the perspective of educational marketing. Case study may constitute a starting point for further research to propose effective solutions to improve education in rural areas. The present work is an analysis of the situation of preschool and gymnasium educational establishment in one of the communes of the county of Braşov.*

Key-words: *marketing educațional, rural educationl, primary and secondary education*

1. Introduction

Education is considered a means of raising living standards, mitigating and preventing of various phenomena that have negative impact on children and young people and offering alternatives to poverty, social exclusion, discrimination, limited access to information, etc. Leaving school early has important social and economic implications, being one of the significant factors which contribute directly to social exclusion in later life. Significantly decreasing the number of young people leaving school early is considered an essential investment for future prosperity and social cohesion of the EU.

The educational reforms of the 1980s have resulted in an environment in which schools are under increasing pressure to market themselves. Difficulties arise in attempting to understand the market that is being served, in controlling the message about the school that is being conveyed and in attempting to reconcile the assumptions about education emanating from policy makers and legislators with the reality of school life in the postmodern era. Relational marketing, however, might help schools through some of these difficulties. (Farrell, 2001). Starting with The

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Treaty of European Union the main directions that education should develop in the next future were highlighted (Title XII - Educational, Vocational Training, Youth and Sport): developing the European dimension in education, promoting cooperation between educational establishments, developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States, encouraging the development of distance education (Tescăşiu, 2014). In the view of Enache (2012) the educational market proves to be a complex system and therefore, different educational markets have different educational needs and even if the concepts of educational marketing are applicable in all these markets, there is still a need for local analysis and local adjustments.

Regarding the marketing concept and its application to public school educational systems, drawing from the research literature, results that the natural market forces can create bridges or barriers between schools and communities so that there is advisable to develop marketing strategies as means of establishing more effective school-community exchanges and ultimately more productive working relationships. Chris James and Peter Phillips (1995) studied different aspects of marketing in education and they stress that this is a relatively new area of interest in educational management. In their paper they use the notion of the 'marketing mix' to examine the practice of marketing in a number of schools within England and Wales, but they find little evidence of the development of sophisticated market driven approaches within the schools they studied.

Literature suggests that the huge gap between urban and rural education is embedded in the disparity in educational investment, children's educational attainment, school quality and the returns to education (Zhang, 2017) and the lack of strategic planning is one of the dynamics that are putting the sustainability of rural education graduate programs at risk (Andrews and Taylor, 2017).

For example, the rapid economic growth in China did not eradicate its urban-rural disparity and imbalanced development in education. Chinese rural migrants bring children to urban schools, in a hope of breaking traditional poverty trap with better education (Zhang, 2017).

Education plays a crucial role in training workers, skills development and labor market integration. Due to poverty, background, ethnicity etc., access to education is also a serious problem for many Romanian children. Education is fundamental both for individual destiny and the economic development of a country. In Romania, it may be noted that strategic planning in education has become a necessity because the access to education is a serious problem facing the Romanian society, and especially the vulnerable groups (Mosora, M. and Mosora, C., 2013). A very important issue for rural space is the fact that the school education of the rural population is precarious, a phenomenon emphasized by the migration of the educated youth, especially those with higher education to the urban environment. (Chitu, 2006)

Although the number of children enrolled in education is relatively high, there are children, mostly from poor Roma communities, who do not attend school at all or drop out of school before they complete compulsory education (Eurochild, 2010).

In this context, school organizations have to define targets in response to the educational needs of students, parents and to the labour market demands. To have a competitive school, it is necessary that this should always be connected to the environment, education market and beneficiaries. Strategic development involves a continuous and systematic information flow as regards the internal and external environment of the school, a dynamic relationship with the outside (Brătucu, G. and Brătucu, T., 2012). Building strong relationships with the stakeholders can lead to a long term competitive advantage, these should be based on a strong communication and a smart use of the public relation techniques (Constantin, 2011).

Specialists consider that marketing does not have to be driven blindly by market forces, but instead can be used to build more useful and viable graduate programs that fit the highly contextualized needs of learners in the rural environment (Andrews and Taylor, 2017).

Marketing cannot, and should not be done without a consistent and committed quantitative and qualitative approach. This can only be achieved through market research which looks to gather, analyze and interpret information in the market. For this case, we are looking at schools, and the market which they form. It can be very tempting to overlook this step, but in reality, there is a market of competing schools in which every school finds itself (Prevot, 2016).

The authors Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2007) concludes their paper „ The incorporation of market orientation in the school culture: An essential aspect of school marketing” by suggesting some implications for future research on market orientation in schools and other educational institutions and highlights the significance of market orientation for understanding of school marketing in the era of competition and choice, (Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown, 2007) because without the ability to attract students, teachers, specialists, facilities, equipment, schools will cease to exist.

2. Research method

To identify the problems and determine the specific needs of preschoolers, pupils and their families from Voila community, with the support of The Mayor's Office and Voila Secondary School an analysis was conducted among the citizens of the village to identify problems and determine the specific needs of preschoolers, pupils and their families from Voila community. This study led to the present work. For this method of research to be effective, it was necessary to have a thorough analysis of the situation of the existent educational market in the region investigated through secondary data (records of the population register, the situation of children enrolled

in the educational system, the situation of school drop-out, records of people living from social benefits, supplementary allowances and records in support of the family, etc.). To identify the causes of the school drop-out, Town Hall employees of Voila conducted a survey among the population of ethnic Roma through 46 direct personal interviews - informal discussions with the parents of the children from this category.

3. Study results

In addition to Voila village the commune has six other villages. The commune has an area of 86.42 Km² and according to the census of 2011, 2503 inhabitants.

In Voila commune there were 399 children in January 2017, out of which 325 were of school or pre-school age. In primary education, 102 pupils are structured in 5 classes within two schools. Preschool education takes place in 5 kindergartens that function in school buildings of Voila, Dridif, Cincsor, Simbata de Jos and Voivodeni. 74 children are between 1-3 years old, so they are not yet enrolled in the educational system.

The situation of enrollment in the various forms of education of the children in Voila commune is presented in Fig. 1.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Enrolled in Voila school	240	73.85
Enrolled in other educational establishments	53	16.31
Never been enrolled in school	19	5.85
Dropped out from school	13	4.00
Total number of children were of school or pre-school age	235	100

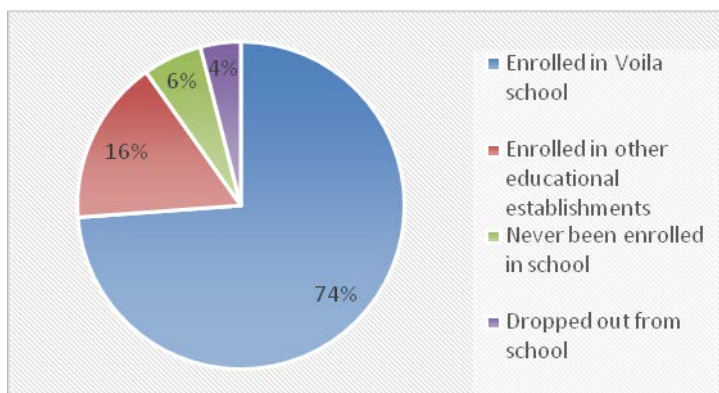


Fig. 1. *The situation enrollment of children in the educational system of Voila commune*

Of the 325 children aged over 3 years only 240 are enrolled in some form of educational establishment (preschool, primary or secondary) at Voila school. The reasons why 26.2% of children of school or preschool age are not enrolled in one of Voila's educational establishments are multiple.

First of all, in recent years, the phenomenon of transferring children from families with a medium or high socio-economic level to schools in Făgăraș has increased. In 2016-2017 school year, 53 children, representing 16.3% of all the children of school or pre-school age in Voila were transferred to other schools. The reasons most often cited by their parents are that Voila's educational establishments do not offer an after-school program and the very poor results obtained by 8th grade graduates at the capacity exam.

Two other categories of children contribute to the formation of an undesirable picture of the educational system in Voila commune: children who have never been enrolled in school (5.84%) and children who have dropped out of school (4%). The main reasons for these situations are: lack of identity documents issued by the Romanian state for children born abroad and the 3 years age limit for enrollment in the educational system. There are also situations in which children alternate the periods when they are taken abroad by the parents with periods when they are left at home in the care of relatives. The phenomenon of adults migrating abroad is frequently encountered among Voila community. From the school records, 29 of the children enrolled in one form of education have one or both parents abroad (emigrated) for long periods.

In Voila there are, at the same time, a large number of children coming from families with a poor socio-economic situation. According to the evidence in the Voila Town Hall, 85 children of preschool or school age (representing 26.15%) come from families living on social benefits.

The situation is even worse with regard to Roma children. In the Roma community in Voila there are 80 children, of whom only 29 (36.25%) attended a form of education. Most Roma children are not enrolled either for the benefits of the minimum guaranteed income or for the financial support allowance because they do not have identity documents (birth certificates / identity cards) issued by the Romanian state, or because their parents are abroad and have not prepared the necessary files to ask for financial support.

The Voila School is among the schools that are considered disadvantaged also due to the very low results obtained by the 8th grade students at the capacity exam. For example, the average score was 3.68 out of 10 in 2015-2016 school year. One reason for this is considered to be the high number of children missing school. Of the total of 240 children enrolled in the Voila School, 32 pupils (13.3%) have a high number of absences, 13 pupils (5.4%) are dropping out of school, 26 pupils (10.8%) get very lower marks, 8 pupils (3.3%) have to take a text and 20 (8.3%) had to repeat at least one school.

Dropping out school is common in Voila. Of the total number of school-age children, 19 children are not enrolled in school and 19 children have low-attendance in early education. School drop-out is most common among the Roma community due to the tradition of getting married early and because of poor socio-economic situation of families. In addition to these causes there is the parents' refusal to send children to school for unspecified the reason.

Another cause of dropping out of school can be the poor level of the parents' education. Of the children enrolled in Voila School 68% parents completed or less classes. At the same time, many children come from families with a poor socio-economic situation. A total of 107 people come from 36 families living on social benefits (guaranteed minimum income). Also 30 other people have the financial support allowance. The main occupation in the area is livestock and farming activities, and many times the children are very involved in it. Education for them takes a secondary place.

4. Conclusions

In order to improve the education situation in the Romanian rural areas, it is essential to implement educational marketing programs which, at the level of educational units, promote values such as non-discrimination, social inclusion, the importance of education, overcoming of prejudices, civic responsibility and social, religious or ethnic tolerance. The need to change behaviors is essential especially among families with a precarious socio-economic situation. Implementing "after school" programs in which students are given a meal and also the opportunity to spend more time taking part in learning activities in a less formal way favoring self-

expression. It could lead in time to an improved education in the Romanian rural environment.

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