

IMPACT AND PROSPECTS OF A SECOND CHANCE EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME AS A SCHOOL REINTEGRATION MEASURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

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Abstract: *Getting young people and adults who have not completed compulsory education back into school is one of the current challenges facing most schools in disadvantaged areas. In this study, we aim to analyse the extent to which a complementary educational support programme represents a viable solution to this major problem. To this end, a marketing research was carried out based on the case study, which monitored the impact of the programme on the 41 young and adult participants. Research results reveal a positive impact of the programme with significant progress being recorded by the participants on all the variables analysed.*

Key words: *school drop-out, disadvantaged areas, educational programme, educational marketing.*

1. Introduction

Early school leaving is considered one of the serious problems faced by young people (Ripamonti et al., 2018) and finding solutions to address it has become a global concern (Portela-Pruaño et al., 2022). Thus, many countries have set out to address this problem through a wide range of policy measures (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020) that have as their main objectives the prevention of this phenomenon, the implementation of immediate interventions when there are risks of dropping out of school, and measures for the educational reintegration of early school leavers.

The problem of adults who have not completed their compulsory education and early school leaving by young people are complex phenomena, determined by multidimensional personal, social and economic factors (Bademci et al., 2020). These

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problems are associated with significant economic and social disadvantages (Schmitsek, 2022), the educational reintegration of those affected being necessary (Portela-Pruaño et al., 2022).

In the last two decades at the European Union level, dedicated school programmes have been planned and funded through the institution of Second Chance Schools with the aim of compensating for the consequences of high dropout rates and reducing social exclusion (Kiprianos and Mpourgos, 2022).

Despite this, European countries still face a very high number of school drop-outs with low educational attainment. Research in the field draws attention to the need to review educational and social policies (Bademci et al., 2020) and to implement reforms meant to increase the prospects for socio-economic integration of Second Chance pupils (Bitsakos, 2022).

Second Chance School programmes can offer young people and adults new opportunities for success (Meo and Tarabini, 2020). In this direction, specialists propose the development of curricula focused on increasing student involvement in the act of education (Spiteri et al., 2022), the revision of teaching-learning materials (Kotluk and Kocakaya, 2020) and the adoption of more flexible teaching methods and learning strategies adapted to difficult young people (Schmitsek, 2022) in order to improve the educational experience. They also propose that the transitions within this curriculum to be supported by career specialists (formal and informal guidance agencies and services) to help young people find appropriate pathways (Bereményi, 2022).

In order to prevent future dropouts from education and training (Portela-Pruaño et al., 2022) attention is drawn to the motivational and identity aspects of young people at risk (Gueta and Berkovich, 2022) as well as to the existence of a complex interplay of educational, family and economic aspects that push and pull participants to return to education (Portela-Pruaño et al., 2022).

The main reasons why young people and adults return to school are related to meeting needs that were generated by leaving school early (Kiprianos and Mpourgos, 2022) such as completing education and the need to undertake further studies, the need to be employable and the acquisition of key knowledge and skills (Keita and Lee, 2022).

Some research points to the current shortcomings of Second Chance programmes, such as a one-size-fits-all policy and pedagogical approach in schools as the differences in the specific experiences and the needs of students are being often overlooked (Schmitsek, 2022). Learners also face institutional and situational barriers that prevent their full participation in the program (Keita and Lee, 2022), with shortcomings in these programs leading to negative consequences in their subsequent transition to employment (Kelly et al., 2022).

In this context, in order to reintegrate and retain in school young people and adults who have not completed compulsory education, schools in disadvantaged areas need to find viable tailor-made solutions to these major problems they face. In this regard, in Romania numerous European projects have been implemented through the 'Human Capital Operational Programme 2014-2020', priority axis 6 'Education and Skills' within which Second Chance (SC) support programmes have been developed for young school dropouts and adults who have not completed their compulsory education. The aim of

these projects was to increase the number of hours of educational activities, to increase the level of education, to reintegrate into school and to support these young people and adults who have not completed compulsory education. Such interventions can help policy makers to implement programmes and measures to prevent the social and economic consequences of social and labour exclusion of young people (Maynou et al., 2022).

Based on the results of such pilot Second Chance education programmes using accelerated learning models, non-formal education policies can be recommended to ensure reintegration into formal schooling and graduation from secondary school (Smolow et al., 2015) if they prove their impact and effectiveness by training and by increasing the educational skills of graduates (Siew-Enget et al., 2015).

The research question considers whether implementing complementary educational support programmes of the Second Chance type on a large scale could be an effective strategy for reintegrating young people and adults who have not completed compulsory education into school and increasing the quality of educational provision in disadvantaged environments so as to meet their educational needs and lead to increased interest and motivation for education among them.

Specifically, through this study we aim to measure the impact of the complementary educational support programme 'It is not too late to learn' implemented by schools in Voila and Lisa Commune in Braşov County on the participants and whether such a programme, through the results it registers among the beneficiaries, represents a viable solution to the current challenges faced by most schools, in disadvantaged environments.

This study will start from the hypothesis that the participation of young people and adults in the activities of the Second Chance support programme had a significant positive impact on them. The research had the following objectives: (O1) To determine the degree to which young people and adults participating in the Second Chance support programme – 'It's not too late to learn' had a positive development in terms of the following aspects analysed: Communication, Math/Science/Technology Skills, Digital Technology Skills, Learning Skills, Social and Civic Development, Entrepreneurship, Creativity/Cultural Expression, Health/Personal Hygiene; (O2) Identification of the variable on which the Second Chance support programme – 'It is not too late to learn' had the greatest impact.

2. Methodology

The research method used in this paper was case study. The case study was based on a single case method (Yin, 2009) and reveals aspects of EU-funded supplementary education programmes and their impact on school drop-outs and adults who have not completed their compulsory education from disadvantaged backgrounds. After an in-depth documentation of education funding programmes targeting school drop-outs, the Second Chance support programme – 'It's not too late to learn' implemented in schools in Lisa and Voila, two rural localities in Braşov county, was selected as it addresses the problems faced by most rural schools in Romania. The project focused on specific

activities to reintegrate young people and adults who have not completed compulsory education into school.

Participants benefited from a training and coaching programme consisting of consultations, tutoring and counselling, tailor-made according to their needs and the related study programme. The support activity took the form of an after-school programme, complementary to the compulsory school programme. This programme included hot meals, which were necessary due to the disadvantaged location and the fact that most of the school dropouts and adults who did not complete their compulsory education in the areas covered by this particular school's district come from families with a difficult socio-economic situation.

The targeted support programme ran from 2020 to 2022 with 41 young people and adults who dropped out of school or did not complete their compulsory education. After the implementation of the programme, the question of its impact on the beneficiaries from an educational point of view was raised. In this context, measurements for eight categories of items were carried out before the start of the programme and after the implementation of the programme.

In order to carry out the research, an evaluation sheet was designed in the form of a questionnaire with 27 items, grouped into the eight categories. The teachers made observations and administered a series of tests to assess the level reached by each pupil in terms of the aspects researched. A scale ranging from 1 point ('very low' level) to a maximum of 10 points (equivalent to a 'very high' level of development) was used for assessment. Through the variable analysed we seek to determine how the support programme implemented in the schools influenced the educational pathway of the participating young people and adults.

In order to measure the variables analysed, the teachers who teach in the evaluated classes evaluated each participant before the start of the project activities (T1). During the programme, tutoring and consultation sessions were held on subjects included in the curriculum (Romanian, Mathematics, French, English, etc.), with content reflecting topics from the SC curriculum adapted to the level of knowledge of the participants. At the end of the implementation of the project (Q2), the teachers carried out a new evaluation of each pupil at that time by filling in the evaluation sheet.

The measurements resulted in numerical scores at two points in time: before and after the project activities. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences - SPSS platform was used for the analysis and the Paired-Samples T-test was applied. The results were validated by triangulation using alternative sources such as: the evaluation reports of the interventions of the Human Capital Operational Programme 2014-2020 (Ministry of Investment and European Projects, 2021) and a review of relevant national and international literature on the problem of early school leaving.

3. Results and Discussions

The results are presented in relation to the research objectives. Thus, in order to determine the impact that the Second Chance support programme – 'It's not too late to learn' had on the participating young people and adults in terms of the variables

analysed (O1), measurements for 27 items, grouped at the level of each student into eight groups, were collected through the individual evaluation sheet. The value of each variable resulted from the calculation of the average score of the items related to the group. At the level of the whole sample the mean score for the eight variables was calculated. The resulting averages for the variables analysed refer to the two moments at which the measurements were made, T1 - initial measurements and T2 - measurements after at least two semesters of the project (Table 1).

Table 1

Crt. no.	Variable	T1	T2
1	Personal health/hygiene	7.3293	8.7439
2	Communication	6.6667	8.3252
3	Math/science/technology skills	6.6634	8.4146
4	Digital technology skills	6.9919	8.7236
5	Learning skills	6.6829	8.4512
6	Social and civic development	7.2683	8.935
7	Entrepreneurship	7.2317	8.7195
8	Creativity/cultural expression	7.3171	8.8049

In the initial measures (T1) the variable 'Health/personal hygiene' obtained the highest average, 7.32 points. For the measurements taken after at least two semesters (T2) the variable 'Social and civic development' obtained the highest average, 8.93 points.

A comparative analysis of the mean scores obtained for each variable at the two points in time (T1-T2) shows that for all the variables analysed there was an increase in the mean score (Figure 1). The largest difference between the means calculated at the two points in time was 1.76 points and was obtained by the variable 'Learning skills' (O2).

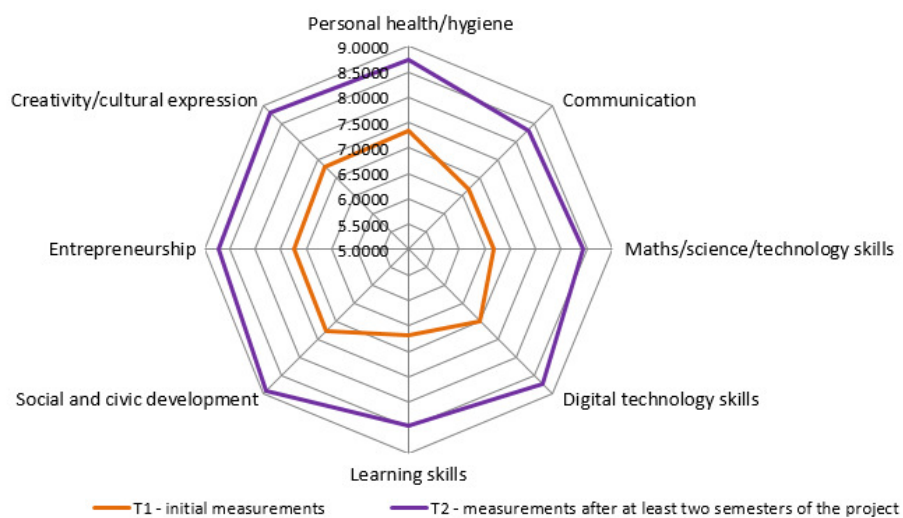


Fig 1. Averages obtained at level sample at the two time points (T1 - T2);

In order to measure the influence of the SC support programme – ‘It is not too late to learn’ on the variables analysed, the difference test between the means obtained before the start of the SC support programme and after at least two semesters of the SST support programme was carried out for each variable.

Testing was carried out using the Paired Samples t-Student test, obtaining the means of the variables at the two points in time as well as the results of the tests applied (Table 2).

Table 2

Crt. no.	Item	T1		T2		t	p	d
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation			
1	Personal health/hygiene	7.3293	1.85273	8.7439	1.28997	-11.246	0	-1.41463
2	Communication	6.6663	1.34582	8.3249	0.99333	-14.890	0	-1.65854
3	Math/science/technology skills	6.6634	1.36047	8.4146	0.98223	-16.026	0	-1.75122
4	Digital technology skills	6.9917	1.76134	8.7236	1.101928	-12.714	0	-1.7319
5	Learning skills	6.6829	1.40871	8.4512	1.01738	-12.183	0	-1.76829
6	Social and civic development	7.2683	1.46682	8.9351	0.94028	-13.404	0	-1.66683
7	Entrepreneurship	7.2317	1.44524	8.7195	1.10141	-12.704	0	-1.4878
8	Creativity/cultural expression	7.3171	1.32762	8.8049	0.93125	-13.111	0	-1.4878

T1= time point 1- before the start of the project; T2= time point 2- after at least two semesters of project implementation; t = the value of t from SPSS; p = significance threshold Sig (2-tailed); d = difference between means;

For all eight variables analysed, the values for the initial T1 measurements are lower than the values for the subsequent T2 measurements, with all differences being statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

The results obtained by the t-Student test show a statistically significant difference that highlights a positive impact of the SC support programme carried out, thus confirming the research hypothesis, that the participation of young people and adults in the Second Chance support programme activities had a significant positive impact on them in terms of the variables analysed.

4. Conclusions

The research started from the question: what is the real impact of complementary SC support programmes on young and adult participants from disadvantaged backgrounds?

The aim of the work was to participate in improving the level of knowledge about the results of the implementation of the complementary Second Chance support programmes in the field of education, namely the programme implemented at Voila and

Lisa schools 'It is not too late to learn'. The main objective of this work was to determine the degree to which young people and adults participating in the Second Chance support programme – 'It's not too late to learn' showed a positive development in terms of the following aspects: health/personal hygiene; Communication; Mathematics/science/technology skills; Digital technology skills; Learning skills; Social and civic development; Entrepreneurship; Creativity/cultural expression.

For all eight groups of variables analysed, the sample means at the two points in time were statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$), with increases in means after the project activities compared to before for all variables analysed. The largest resulting difference between the means calculated at the two points in time was 1.76 points and was obtained by the variable 'Learning skills'.

These results indicate a positive impact of the Second Chance support programme – 'It is not too late to learn' on the young and adult participants in terms of the variables analysed, confirming the general hypothesis of the research. This paper has a number of limitations resulting from the limitations of the research method. The main limitation is the impossibility to extrapolate the results to the whole curriculum addressed to young school drop-outs and adults who did not complete their compulsory education. However, we can conclude that the support programme analysed has proved its effectiveness through the impact it has had on the participating pupils, providing them with opportunities to consolidate the knowledge they have assimilated and the skills they have acquired, the possibility to accelerate their learning through educational activities, consultations, tutoring, counselling carried out in addition to the compulsory school programme. We believe that depending on the specific conditions of the marketing environment in which the school operates, such programmes can be adapted or adopted as such on a large scale, leading to a concentration of efforts by schools in rural areas to attract and reintegrate into education the segment of the population that dropped out of school early, this being one of the current challenges facing most schools in disadvantaged environments.

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