

Early School Leaving in Greece and Europe and Educational Inequality: Actions and Policies against Educational and Social Exclusion

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Abstract

A key issue regarding the educational policy in Greece and the European Union is the early leaving of the school. On the one hand, rises the problem of under-birth that some developed countries face and, on the other, the existence of economically and socially non-productive people, who nevertheless consist a part of the society. In our time and more than ever, society must overcome various obstacles in order to achieve the development and sustainable growth which is also Europe's strategy for this decade. In this study the authors examine early school drop-out by focusing on the social causes and on the research findings that have been carried out, indicating measures and strategies for prevention and treatment. A second part of the study concerns the presentation of the European Union's educational policies in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy, with the aim of showing the progress of the strategic actions in the education of Greece. Our study shows that the EU member states are making great efforts in order to achieve the best possible result in education in the shortest possible time: That is, to form efficient teachers and schools by emphasizing and empowering the elimination of social and educational exclusions, as an integral part of the pursuit of progress and development of the society and the economy.

Keywords: early school leaving, drop out rate, educational reforms, educational policies.

Introduction

The development of human personality in terms of physical and mental structure is essentially influenced not only by the immediate social environment of small groups (family, group of relatives, group of friends, peers), but also from the wider local environment, with its organized institutions (educational institutions, social and pedagogical organizations, through a part of daily interaction). Social organizations (public services, social control institutions, media) in a wider context contribute to the shaping of a personality as secondary socialization factors and according to the political, economic, social, technological and, above all, cultural structure of the society (Geulen & Hurrelman 1980).

The issue of early school leaving.

Education is a human right founded by international, European and national organizations (UN: 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Article 26, Unesco, Education for All, OECD, Eurydice Network, EU Council of Europe, Bologna and Copenhagen Process, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 14, Constitution of Greece, Article 16) and is understood as an institution with a deliberate and planned social function that has the effect of shaping the human personality. However, in Greece, although it is compulsory to attend kindergarten (one year), elementary school

(six years) and secondary school (three years) (article 73 of Law 3518/2006 and article 2, & 3 of Law 1566/1985) and despite the fact that the legal system will punish a parent or guardian who fails to enroll or supervise the child's education (Article 458 Penal Code), there is a high rate of early school leaving from Greek schools, before the completion of their mandatory Education (Transition Observatory, 2006, 2008). Early school leaving is due to a variety of problems, individual, family or social. According to research findings, the factors that are related to this early drop out are mainly:

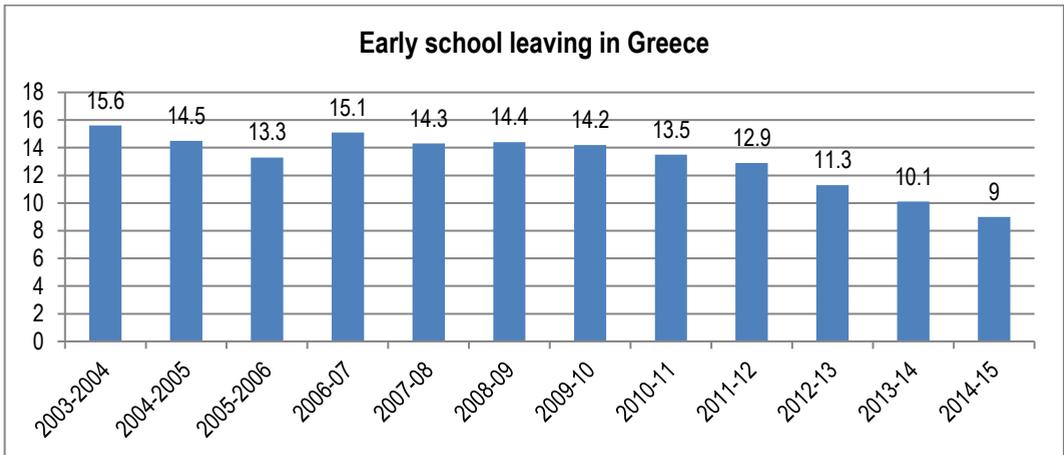
(A) the family circumstances: a low educational, economic, social level of the family who is unable to support, supervise or follow the student on his or her learning process, which shapes a person's desire or indifference towards education, a household's poverty and material deprivation, the elaborated or untreated language code etc. (Slaughter & Epps, 1987; Tzani, 1988; Hinshaw, 1992; Katsikas, 1995; Hickman, Greenwood & Miller, 1995)

(B) the geographical factor concerning the student's place of residence, the distance to be covered from a student's house to and from the school, the remote rural or island regions (Lariou-Drettaki, 1993; Paleokrassas et al., 2001) and also individually some counties of our country (Vouidaskis 1996; Mylonas, 1999).

(C) the inadequacy of the educational system, mainly the school environment, the quality of the teacher (qualifications, characteristics, practices and effectiveness, Deci et al., 1981), the logistical infrastructure of the school units and the social scientific support regarding the work of the teacher (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). When teachers are distinguished for the stability of their behavior and style and are able to exercise control over their students, it is found that the students are positively influenced: they are more scholarly (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986), they are characterized by creativity and empathy as they understand better the texts (Koerner, Ryan, Bernieri, & Holt, 1984; Williams et al., 1994; Giavrimis & Papanis, 2008), all of which contribute positively to empower their desire to study (Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997).

(D) The failure to comply with the Law concerning early school leaving (Katsikas & Therianos, 2004; Study to combat school drop out, 2007; Petropoulos, 2000; Kyridis, et al. 2011).

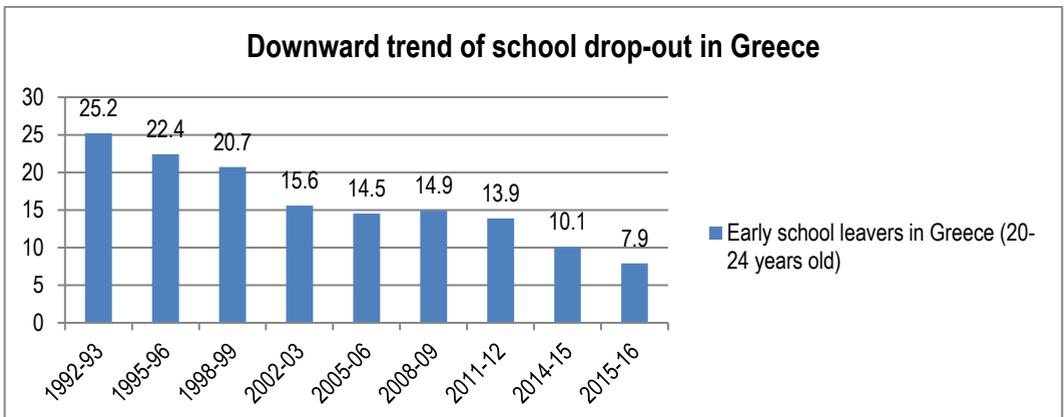
Young people who are part of this early school drop out and especially those who do not complete their compulsory education, are a most important issue not only for Greece but also for the European Union. Among the most important problems caused by early school leaving and by extend the degradation of the value of the school's institution are the educational and social exclusion. Educational exclusion also means insufficient development of individual skills, lack of skills, qualifications, and knowledge required for the future workplace and life and finally being in the list of economically and socially non-productive individuals. The consequence of educational exclusion is the social exclusion from jobs that require specific qualifications and are characterized by the length of time and regular wage earning leading to economic problems whose treatment is likely to lead the person into an offending behavior (Kedra, 2007; Lariou-Drettaki, 1993; Giavrimis & Papanis, 2008; Cummins, 1996). Despite the efforts made in Greece with every reform since 1977, such as free education, the extension of compulsory education, the reform of curricula and textbooks to make the learning contents more interesting and attractive to students, upgrading technical and vocational education, the problem of early school leaving remains an ongoing problem (Drettakis, 2004). According to the data from Transition Observatory on Research on the Educational Choices of Secondary Education Students and Initial Vocational Training and Training in the Labor Market (which examines the drop out in secondary education) and also according to national data from the Ministry of Education, there is gradually a decrease in the percentage of students who are dropping out school (Pedagogical Institute Transition Observatory. Survey 2001, 2006, 2008; European Commission, Education and Training. Monitor 2016, Country Analysis Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union).



Source: KANEP 2015: 405

According to the European Commission's Education and Training Report 2015, Greece has achieved its national and European objective under the Europe 2020 strategy (following the objective set by the Lisbon European Council and the European Education Council, Brussels 2003): the dropout rate for schools and education is less than 10% (for Greece in 2014 it was 9%). Despite these positive findings, significant differences between geographical districts are noted. It is also underlined that some regions have particularly high rates of early school leaving, such as the eastern region of Eastern Macedonia (the quitting rate was double the national average) or in the northern and southern Aegean and Epirus regions (KANEP 2015).

It is noted that the geographical particularities of each region (ease of access to the educational establishment or not), even the economic situation of the families, various religious reasons (cultural identity of Muslims), the low educational level which is associated with the negative attitude towards education, are decisive factors and act inhibitory concerning school attendance. It is also noted that boys abandon education to a larger percentage than girls, as confirmed by all previous surveys conducted by the Pedagogical Institute (Transition Observatory, 2004, 2006).



Source: Eurostat Online data

Through all these data and information, certain categories of students who do not appear in official statistics should also be counted. Such are the children of the former Soviet repatriated children, the children of the Gypsies, the children of

foreigners, especially the Albanians¹, or children with disabilities who do not register and do not go to school at all most of the times. The categories of these children are not included in the drop out indicators. In the most dramatic category are the children who are exploited by circuits who thrive on human weakness. The inability of the welfare state to exercise control over these crimes and integrate these children into education creates an even more problematic situation.

Ways to eradicate early school leaving and results of researches.

Education is one of the most profitable investments a society can make for the progress and development of both society and the economy. Within this context, all states are promoting actions and programs to make schools more effective and to increase the student's desire to attend school. Through different strategies and policies, schools are designed to become attractive to all students regardless of their socio-economic background, ethnic origin, cultural background, etc. With the aim to reduce the educational inequalities and to prevent social exclusion, measures are being taken to make schools more effective, to respond to the economic reality of our century, and to make every young person "capable of being educated". Moreover to help students to adapt successfully to the labor market developments and to respond with flexibility to a constantly changing environment (Kedracka, 2007).

It is therefore proposed to change the attitude of the school towards this particular problem. First of all, with the timely detection of students who may drop out of school and the implementation of flexible training programs for students facing increased risks of non-completing their compulsory education. Frequent communication with their families and with out-of-school services enables the chance that valid information on the consequences of early retirement will be provided. (Sosa, Johnson & Johnson, 1988; Catterall & Stern 1986; Hahn, 1987; Epstein, 1984).

Since the children leaving school often face learning difficulties, it would be very important that these children would have learning support during the school year to support them with any difficulties they encounter (Nichols & Nichols, 1990; Rumberger, 1995).

For this reason, it is necessary to strengthen the teacher in his work with students who have learning difficulties and are at a different level from that of their classmates, with supportive teaching (Nichols & Nichols, 1990).

The effectiveness of the teacher and the school in general is also judged by the increase of students' performance scores especially when this happens beyond expectation. For this reason, a low-performance student should be evaluated differently so that he/she is not placed lower than the whole class on a daily basis (Scales, 1990). Furthermore, a major demand from most teachers is to reduce the number of students inside the classroom. Another issue is that living in remote areas or poor (low income or poor) households favors school dropout. So, there is need for policies that provide increased incentives for completing compulsory education. There is also a need for increased spending on education and political multilateral decentralization and regional development.

Suggestions and policies to prevent early school leaving in Europe.

The reasons for prompting students to drop out of education vary greatly from country to country, and from region to region in each country. To this end, the Council of the European Union notes that 'Policies to reduce early school leaving need to be adjusted to the specific situation within a local area, region or country; There is no single solution for all Member States' (Council Recommendation 2011 / C191 / 02). The strategies should combine social and educational policy and should aim at addressing multiple causes.

The Lisbon European Council (23-24 March 2000) held a special meeting to set a new strategic goal for the Union in order to "*strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy*". Amongst others this goal is aiming to reduce the drop out in secondary education. In order to achieve the goals of the Lisbon European Council, several innovative actions were discussed at the Commission of the European Communities "*Report from the Commission The Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems*" ([COM (2001), 59 final, Brussels, 31.01.2001, 5688/01 EDUC 20] approved by the **Stockholm** European Council (2001).

In Barcelona (March 2002), the European Council welcomed the 'Agenda for a Comprehensive Work Program for 2010', which included a detailed timetable for the implementation of the specific future objectives of educational and training

¹ According to Institute of Education for Foreign and Intercultural Education, (IPODE), 80.6% of foreigners come from Albania and Bulgaria is the next country of origin, at 3%.

systems. The Council of the European Union on 5. May 2003 [84/10/03] in presidency Conclusions about the Implementation of the "Education & Training 2010" program and the European benchmarks in education and training set targets to have all Member States by 2010 reduced by half the rate of early school leavers compare to the rate in 2000, to achieve a European Union (EU) average rate of 10% or less and that at least 40% of 30 to 34-year-olds should have completed tertiary education or the equivalent.

A new strategic framework for European cooperation "Education and Training 2020" (ET 2020) began by 2010, that provides common strategic objectives for Member States, including a set of principles for achieving these objectives, as well as common working methods with priority areas for each periodic work cycle (Official Journal C 119 of 28.5.2009). The framework should address the following four strategic objectives: Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality, Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training, Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

About the early leavers from education and training it is very important that by 2020, the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%. Ministers of education must cooperate and exchange knowledge and best practices in order to encounter the problem effectively.

The report of the work group (European Commission, Education & Training, Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, November 2013) regarding early school leaving, examined and exchanged best practices and reached key messages to those responsible, in the form of practical tools to control the implementation of policies with examples from different countries. [European Commission, Brussels, 31.1.2011 COM (2011) 18 final].

The working group on School Education (2014-2015), in addition to the key messages for implementing the Global Approach to Early Dropout Education (Education & Training 2020, Schools policy. A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving DG Education and Culture, has created an online 'European School Toolbox' School Education Gateway (European Toolkit for Schools) with a variety of tools and examples of good practices to promote school success.

The Council of Europe with the conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school (Council of the European Union, Council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school, Brussels 23 November 2015, 14441/15, EDUC 310) invites the Member States and the Commission to:

Take advantage of all the possibilities available In the context of the ET 2020 Strategic Framework, advisory research and studies to develop and disseminate examples of successful policy practice.

Use EU funding such as Erasmus +, European Society the Fund and the European Strategic Investment Fund, to support and implement measures aimed at reducing the rate of early school leaving.

Share examples among Member States of the most effective practices, to tackle early and cooperative practices at school and to relieve educational and wider dissemination through the eTwinning community and Gateway School Education.

It is expected that EU countries will continue to work together for the school education through working groups, in order to achieve the objective of reducing the rate of early school drop-out below 10% for all Member States by 2020.

Policies to prevent early school leaving in Greece.

The problem of dropping out of school is an issue that concerns all European countries. In Greece, especially since 2000, efforts have been made to implement measures to prevent and to deal with early school leaving, since the factors affecting attendance were not limited to the educational, economic and social capital of the family, but also to geographic (remote or island regions) and religious (minority) factors (Perisinakis, 1975; Tompaedis, 1976; Cassotakis, 1981; Tzani, 21988; Lariou-Drettaki, 1993; Kavadias & Katsikas, 1994; Paleokrassas et al. 1996, 1998; Stamelos, 1999; Mylonas, 1999; Petropoulos, 2000; Drettakis, 2004 et al.).

In particular, the efforts have focused on making the schools more effective and attractive to students. Measures aimed in creating positive feelings regarding the school, as far as the children are concerned. Also, to promote the learning experience for children through writing new books, new curricula tailored to new social conditions, and introducing innovative action into schools (see Flexible Zone). Furthermore, and mostly because learning difficulties and the inability of students to respond to cognitive demands while at school, is considered as a factor that may lead to early school leaving,

the Ministry of Education has enacted the supportive Teaching program to replenish student gaps or to support their efforts. In Greece throughout the 2000s there is a large influx of migrants, whose children are attending Greek schools.

The main issue most foreign students are facing, concerns language and understanding. To integrate those students to the school so that they will not drop out, the Ministry of Education introduced Reception Courses, Tutorial Courses and Intercultural Schools. Moreover, measures have been implemented regarding the education and the integration of students belonging to special categories (Gypsies), by the introduction of special programs (Gypsy Education). In fact, according to the Pedagogical Institute, a significant decrease was noticed since the drop out rate was reduced from 75% to 24% (Transition Observatory, 2006), also according to the results of the program for Gypsy children. For the group of early school leavers, the possibility of attending and completing basic education through Second Chance Schools is also available (Nikolaou, 2009).

Following the economic crisis of 2009 and within the "Europe 2020" strategy on how to address the short-term crisis-related challenges, Greece's education sector has undergone rigorous fiscal consolidation with structural reforms by the end of 2015. The realization that there is a need to modernize the Greek educational system, ensured that education was addressed as part of the national development strategy. Within this context, it was considered necessary to increase public expenditure on education as the government's expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP is one of the lowest in Europe (Eurostat, COFOG). Greece, has a low early drop out rate (9% in 2014) when compared to the EU average (11.1%), which means that Greece has achieved the goals set by the Europe 2020 strategy.

However, it is underlined that the geographical factor maintains significant importance. In relation to the drop-out rate, there is also a wide variation between children born abroad and those born in Greece, but also between boys and girls.

Table 1. School drop-out at Gymnasium by sex

Cohort	Male (%)	Female (%)
1987-88	58	42
1989-90	59	41
1991-92	60	40
1997-98	62	38
2001-02	62	38
2003-04	62	38

Source: Transition Observatory, 2006, 2008

In the National Reform Program of 2015, Greece recognized the need to establish a strategic framework, in order to address low performance students, which is also an important factor in triggering early school leaving. Greece has pledged to shape the research framework strategy and focus on vulnerable social groups. (European Commission, Education and Training Monitor 2016, Country Analysis, Luxemburg). The failure of the educational services and the members of the educational community to exploit the findings of the researches concerning early school drop out over the years, and despite the fact that high rates of early school leaving have been highlighted in remote or island-tourist areas, have also prompted the perpetuation of the problem. In order for any research to be effective, the results should be considered not only in the educational act, but also in the formation of educational policies.

Every political decision in order to reform the educational system must be based and documented upon the basis of studies and research data. In Greece, it has been proved (Quality in Education, Survey, 2008) that the exploitation of research on educational policy is lagging behind. Research by individual researchers is not supported by national institutions, which means they are limited to just publish the results, while some of the research conducted by the Pedagogical Institute has led to pilot applications of some programs that have not been continued "because there is no institutional way to control and evaluate the design or feedback mechanisms and exploitation of findings by the Ministry of Education and Research" (Quality in Education, Survey, 2008: 335).

According to the Educational Research Center, (2002), educational research data have not been exploited, because changes in educational issues through political decisions are happening extremely fast, and there is generally a lack of confidence in the validity of the researches. Moreover data and results from other researches are not sufficiently highlighted in order to become widely known. This, of course, leads in a contradictory educational policy, inadequate evaluation of the measures and inability to confront the problems, as ascertained with the problem of early school drop out.

The policies, aiming to achieve the Europe 2020 goals for Greece, are identified in the context of more general educational reforms.

In particular, three institutions are involved in addressing and reducing early school leaving: DIOFANTOS CTI which will rationalize the results of the students database in a national, regional, provincial, local and unit level, in order to measure early school leaving (through the MySchool Information System), the Institute for Educational Policy in a consultative role and the Transition Observatory. All three institutions will work together to analyze data and indicators to address compensation and supportive measures at a national level. It also foresees the development and implementation of actions for early school drop out through the operational programme (2014-2020) "Human Resources Development, Education and Life Lifelong Learning". The Education Priority Zones pilot project, aims to improve the performance of students basic skills with additional support measures to combat school failure and drop out of repatriated and foreign pupils (equal education with native pupils and social integration). For students from vulnerable Social Groups, measures and actions of intercultural education are being implemented, with emphasis in culture and social inclusion. In these schools that are part of the Educational Priority Zones the implementation is supported by transnational partnerships, Reception Courses and reinforced teaching.

The "Social School" program aims to raise awareness and educate parents and teachers regarding the issue of social behavior in students and the formation of the active citizen at school. Similar policies are also being implemented in order to increase participation in education and, more specific, to expand the participation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. As far as students with disabilities, the new law aims not only to improve the structures, but also to take individualized support measures for all students. Within the context of modernizing the educational system (aimed at reducing educational inequalities and avoiding social exclusion), so that schools are effective, interesting and attractive to all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, national origin, cultural background, etc. the introduction of ICT in education was launched in 2010 ("Digital School" project). The planned interventions are aimed at consolidating innovative teaching, integration and exploitation of digital technologies in education, as Greece is included in the EU countries with the lowest levels of digital skills (European Commission, Education and Training Monitor 2016 – Country analysis, Luxemburg, p. 126).

Based on the specific policies and measures implemented, after adopting the national strategic policy framework for early school leaving, the aim is to address the phenomenon of school failure and drop out in Greece, to increase participation in education and to modernize the Greek educational system.

Conclusion/ Discussion

The effectiveness of preventing early school leaving requires an action program that ensures a consistent prevention policy embraced by the whole school community (awareness among all teachers and interference in all departments rather than selectively). Any prevention policy should also include interventions in the family environment of students, as family conditions (cultural, social and educational level, household poverty, parent expectations, place of residence, etc.) have a significant impact on the students' desire to attend school.

Since the student's family background affects significantly the poor performance in basic skills (PISA, OECD) and therefore the rates of early school leavers (European Commission, 2015), financial support (eg. increase of the family allowance), is important in order to address the socio-economic disadvantages through a variety of initiatives. Furthermore, the educational level of each family, especially if the family is experiencing a deprived socio-cultural environment needs to be strengthened through social initiatives (educational, cultural).

Such prospects are foreseen in the Europe 2020 strategy, in order to increase participation in lifelong learning. By strengthening the Lifelong Learning Centers network with the involvement of regional and local communities, universities, social partners and civil society, the goal is to widen access to lifelong learning for vulnerable groups (early school leavers, Unemployed, unskilled workers, etc.) (National Reform Program, 2016 available: [European-semester-national-plan_greece_2016_el.pdf](#)). An equally important issue is the cooperation of the schools with social welfare and mental health institutions and services. Educational poverty resulting from early school leaving has long-term consequences, leads to social exclusion and forms unemployed citizens, economically and socially non-productive individuals.

With the Europe 2020 strategy, Europe's efforts aimed to ensure that teachers and schools are effective by emphasizing the elimination of exclusion as an integral part of the pursuit of progress and the development of society and the economy.

These objectives are reflected in the Europe 2020 strategy, through the actions and programs it promotes, given that education is one of the most profitable investments a society can make. (Natriello et. al. 1990).

In daily life the circumstances require full citizen participation in the economic and social reality. Early school drop out is followed by educational and social exclusion and creates individual and social problems (costs for society). Skills, such as critical thinking, research, creative problem-solving are mostly cultivated through education and are considered essential and necessary for a knowledge-based society. therefore It is appropriate, now that there is also the political will, as demonstrated by the Europe 2020 strategy, that the findings of the surveys and the programs implemented are properly explored, that the efforts to improve the quality of the education provided are supported and to provide the best conditions for children to develop positive feelings for high levels of education.

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