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***The effects of the socioeconomic status on the
academic achievement***

PhD thesis abstract

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KEYWORDS

- *school performance,*
- *school success,*
- *formal school failure,*
- *school dropout*
- *value brought,*
- *pedagogical value added,*
- *family environment,*
- *school environment,*
- *cultural and economic status of the family,*
- *individual adaptation.*

Introduction

The main objective of this thesis is to *examine and to analyze the social, economical and cultural background related to the academic achievement of secondary school students in Covasna County*. According to my hypothesis, the social inequalities coming from the family environment, form “the bosom of the family” largely influence students’ the academic achievements. The stated hypothesis is not based solely on the inferences and conclusions of relevant textbooks in this respect, but also on international reports and comments of specific studies, such as "OECD PISA 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009" (Barbara I., 2008) .

The choice of the discussed topic is justified by the fact that in Romania, as in other Central and Eastern European countries, more and more focus is put - not just in the media, but also on professional level – on the transition to an *education based on skills*.

Romania has participated for the first time in PISA studies in 2006, obtaining very poor results. The cause must not be sought in the weak capabilities of students, but in the education system that has a strong theoretical character.

The actuality of the dissertation topic is also supported by the fact that in January 2011 a new education law (Education Law no. 1/2011) came into effect, which emphasizes the acquisition of skills in schools, but unfortunately, even to date - (September 1, 2013) - a concrete and unique vision in this regard has not been yet outlined.

To the motivation for choosing the theme of my dissertation I could also add personal motivation, namely that during my work in Covasna County schools I frequently encounter children who, in social terms, are multiply disadvantaged, and this has such a significant effect on their academic achievement that in their case we often need to talk about children with special educational needs.

Chapter 1. School and education through social theories

1.1. Placing the theme in sociological context

This paper is primarily intended to study the effects of socioeconomic status on academic achievement. This problem can be addressed from several perspectives, such as the pedagogical, didactic, psychological, economic or the sociological one.

The branch of sociology which deals with the study of education systems, with the role of the school and education in society is the **sociology of education**. From this point of view, we can say that the theme of the dissertation fits in the domain of sociology of education.

As the sociology of education is neither uniform, nor homogeneous, it is risky to formulate a definition of normative value, however, in this dissertation I have presented some definitions, from authors Florian Znaniecki and Mohamed Cherkaoui (cited Hatoş 2006_b, 21).

Based on these definitions, I concluded that the sociology of education can not be limited to sociology of school, nor to the study of the ways and processes of socialization, this being more than knowledge of the very principle of the social formation as ontic reality and as an object of science .

Analyzing the topics addressed in this paper and we can conclude that they are treated both in terms of educational systems and in terms of families, **so the issue of this paper can be located exactly at the point where the issue of family education intersects the issue of education systems.**

1.2. Theories about the function of the school in society

For long, researchers have been examining the family background effect on schooling and academic achievement. Based on the gained experiences, several theoretical approaches have been laid down, of which I treated as follows:

The basic theory of the dissertation

The starting point in this study was the theory of social stratification laid down by French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. According to the author, there is a hidden competition, basically a struggle between different layers of society. In this perpetual competition between the different classes the essential means is the **capital**.

Pierre Bourdieu, in his essay entitled "*Economic capital, cultural capital, social capital*" (Bourdieu 1998, 155-176) shows, in addition to the economic capital, two more types of capital: *the social capital and the cultural capital*. Various forms of capital are mutually convertible within certain limits. According to Bourdieu (2008), through economic capital another type of capital can be acquired by certain, more or less expensive transforming activities.

Another theoretical starting point in my study refers to **equity in school choice**. As Bourdieu asserts, the school develops a selection system that excludes, by its nature, young people from "popular classes" so they often do not even get to enroll in a school that assigns a higher vocational education (Bourdieu 1978).

In this chapter I have also treated the issues of habitus and ethos.

East European theories

Before the changes occurred in the 1990s, due to the censorship of the time, studies of Eastern Europe could not treat openly the desegregationist or reproductionist issues of the education system. Even if this aspect of the education system was mentioned, it had to be presented as a specific feature of the Western countries.

After the fall of the Soviet block, the theories related to the role and effect of the school and educational system could be treated openly Eastern European countries as well.

Teorii reproductionaliste

Denis Lawton (1968, 66-77) argues that there are significant differences between students from different subcultures and their colleagues in terms of motivation for learning, academic achievement and school dropout. He concludes that it would be good if various cultural characteristics of pupils from subcultures would consciously occur in the attitudinal strategies of the teachers who teach them.

Basil Bernstein (1979, 78-94) notes that the communication that exists between teacher and student in the school can be decisive for the reproduction of social inequality.

Klaus Mollenhauer (2003, 129-164) believes that the main cause of social inequalities is not to be found in school, but in the family. In his view, the socialization impact of the family produces different schooling strategies, whose outcome is the precise reproduction of social inequality.

According to JWB Douglas (2003, 147-159), the school regenerates the social inequalities from the moment when schooling begins by applying such selection and filtering strategies that firstly take into account the students' capacities. Douglas demonstrates, however, that there is a clear relationship between the abilities of students and their family, socio-cultural, environment, so the selection and filtering that occurs when the schooling begins becomes in fact social selection.

JS Coleman (1959, 330-351) presents in his work, in terms of the adolescent culture, the interactions between institutional requirements and school groups organized according to certain rules. In his opinion, the school and teachers representing it are not aware of the younger generation's culture and their language codes, so their selection strategies, applied authoritatively, simply ignore them.

Modernist theories

According to this theoretical approach, the education system plays a significant functional role both in the acquisition of status and of a professional qualification (Treiman, 1970, Parsons 1977 cited Blosfeld-Shavit 1993). The representatives of this theory argue that school selection repositions itself on meritocratic bases, so that *the impact of social origin in determining the educational chances and opportunities is diminishing*.

Neo-Marxist theories

There is a neo-Marxist approach in explaining the school / educational inequalities mentioned as *"a new class" theories* (apud. Szelényi and Aschafennburg 1993). According to these, in postindustrial societies the power is in the hands of the elite who own common properties or widespread cultural capital, which monopolizes the most important institutions in

the educational system, these having an important role in the distribution of positions and social privileges.

Rational choice theory

Boudon perceives the education route as a series of transitions, when at the end of certain stages or school cycles the student and his family must make decisions regarding further education and school choice. Learning and training at a higher level, or completion of the studies are the result of rational choices that arise through the cost-benefit model (secondary factor) defined by wealth and expected result. According to Boudon, as we move towards higher levels of education, the focus is transferred to the secondary effects in explaining educational inequalities.

Aspirational positions theory

We find the deepening of the specific model of Boudon's rational choice theory at Goldthorpe (1996).

Goldthorpe's conclusion is that the inequalities in educational opportunities can be understood not so much in terms of social class culture or the terms of cultural capital, but based on the rational actions featured in the model proposed by Boudon. Critics of the theory argue, however, that the choice of school is not necessarily a contradiction between rational decisions and following specific social class models (Scott 1996). The fact that people follow the values and norms to which they are emotionally "attached" does not mean by default that they would act unreasonably based on them.

1.3. Social functions of the school

- *transmission of culture*
- *transformation of individual personality*
- *economic*
- *workforce training*
- *legitimizing the current political power*
- *social (social net)*
- *supply of services*

Considering these problems, we question whether the school reproduces or transforms the inequalities existing in a society? Under sociological aspect, we call this function of the school **the function of reproduction or transformation of social structure.**

Chapter 2. The role of the school in maintaining or improving social inequalities

2.1. Pedagogical communication having a role in reproducing social inequalities

The main framework of the communication between teacher and student is the school, including the school hours. The whole significance of the teacher's way to talk is defined by the situation in which the pedagogical communication takes place, during which the pedagogical activity becomes way to impose and imprint the legitimate culture.

This use of the language does not favor those efforts which aim to measure the informational effectiveness of the communication.

2.2. School desegregation dilemma

This chapter starts from the idea that desegregation can be defined as a social problem, since this problem is involving many children who are injured in their values and interests by this phenomenon.

To understand the phenomenon desegregation, first I analyzed the history and the circumstances in which this concept emerged, both worldwide and in our country.

In the theoretical framework I have conceptualized, defined and identified the levels and types of segregation, and afterwards I have presented the theories connected to the desegregation dilemma: *segregationist theories*, *desegregationist theories*, and *neo-segregationist theories*, followed by my own vision problems related to segregation. This could be positioned somewhere between responsible desegregation of neo-segregationalism.

Finally I have concluded that, although desegregation of schools is a current actuality, unfortunately, most of the actions related to this problem take over certain "European models", without modification or critical standpoint (the theory of forms without substance), without taking into account that even in this country can not talk about a uniform society or uniform inequalities. This leaves schools apparently desegregated, or desegregated "on paper", a fact that will deepen the social differences even more.

2.3. School examinations as a factor of social selection

Acquiring the legitimate culture, i.e. the rapport towards the legitimate culture is not governed solely by the compulsory curriculum, but also embodied in the legal traditions of the exams. The specifics of this written communication mode is that it was written to address a single reader, that being the examining teacher.

In this way, the apparently clear school cult of hierarchies always contributes to the strengthening of the social hierarchies, always taking or adopting aspects of the reproduced social hierarchies (in the dual sense of the word).

Based on these findings, P. Bourdieu concludes that "*the school masks social selection by the appearance of technical selection, legitimating the reproduction of social hierarchy by converting social hierarchies into school hierarchy*" (Bourdieu 2008, 39). In this way, the privileged classes increasingly transfer their selective powers over to the schools.

2.4. The effect of linguistic reflections of social context on academic achievement

Language, as a basis for social contact and communication, has an important social function. As a result, the linguistic reflection of social context illustrates one of the major areas of study in sociology. According to William Labov (1973, 520), "*language can bring a very big benefit, as sensitive indicator of many other social processes.*"

According to Bourdieu (2008, 14-30), although the officially propagated teaching language is not the mother tongue of anyone, not even of the children from privileged classes, is not at all at the same distance from the languages of different social classes . Since the information effect of pedagogical communication always depends on the receptor's language skills, the unequal distribution between different social classes of the capital that can be valuable in terms of school, is in reality one of the most hidden mediations that outlines the relationship between social background and success in school, this fact being highlighted also by studies (apud. Bourdieu, 2008).

In this way, the trick of school mentality finally carries out the society preservation function. This function, however, is not just unrecognized by the specific school mentality, but these are not even willing to recognize it.

Chapter 3. Educational policies in terms of social inequality

3.1. Educational policies aimed at social development

The educational policies affecting the social development can be defined as follows (HATOS, 2006b) education as a means of reducing structural inequalities, as a means of empowering education for active citizenship, school and labor market integration, the school as a development institution.

Within the educational policies addressing the labor market integration possibilities, we should mention *the quality of curricula*. These curricula should be oriented towards improving labor market success, so knowledge and teaching strategies must be designed so as to be as usable as possible in the local economy.

3.2. Equal opportunities and academic achievement in the Romanian educational system

If we look at education from the perspective of the last 23 years in Romania, probably the most pronounced specificity of this system is the continuous change, and also its inertia and resistance to change. Another specific aspect is the system's inert oscillation between centralization and decentralization.

The educational system in Romania has implemented in the last 20 years several actions aimed at equalizing the opportunities, taking into account the differences due to school environment, minority ethnicity, different types of disabilities, etc.. Among the many programs and measures aimed at equalizing opportunities in educational institutions, we can identify the following major trends that seem to manifest in the form of educational policy:

- Equal opportunities and social inclusion of Roma children
- Measures and programs to combat illiteracy and education of each student,
- Measures and programs on the equalization of opportunities between rural and urban environment
- Measures and programs for the education of students with visual impairments or those at risk.

In conclusion, we can state that the implementation of reforms by implementing educational policies that demonstrate long-term effects takes more than four years, and as such the government cycles and the frequent changes of domestic policy obstruct the positive development of the education system in Romania.

Another observation is that compared to the strategies and programs aimed at equalization of opportunities in education, the number of acts that strategies and programs aimed at maintaining and enhancing academic achievement among students is quite low.

Chapter 4. International Review of PISA results

4.1. Comparison of PISA test results in the OECD countries

In this chapter, by comparing data from PISA studies conducted in 2000, 2003, 2006 and 2009, I tried to identify certain international trends related to student performance in reading and mathematics.

Looking at the differences between the average scores obtained in reading and mathematics by OECD countries, we can identify a trend of worsening of the results as the difference between 2009 and 2000 is -10/-5 points, between 2009 and 2003 is -4/-6 points, and between 2009 and 2006 is 1/-2 points.

Compared to year 2000, only a few countries have made dramatic changes in 2009, for example Latvia, Poland, Chile and Hungary at reading tests and Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Greece

at math tests. Analyzing the situation of Hungary and Poland, we can confirm that these countries, taking into account the shortcomings of their own education system, reported by PISA studies, have established some educational and social policies aimed at improving these problems.

Based on the performed analyzes (Paired Sample t Test), we concluded that we can not identify statistically significant differences in student performance in the three tests conducted between 2000 and 2009. However, changes between 2003 and 2006 appear to be slightly more significant, especially in the math and reading tests, which can be put onto the account of the changes brought to the tests' level of difficulty, or of the fact that many countries have become OECD members in 2006.

4.2. Comparative analysis of views about the role of schools in contemporary societies

Even if the individual benefits of education are difficult to dispute, the development effect of the investment in education at societal level is a controversial topic. Going on this idea, we can identify several educational policies that even if they have the same goal - to increase individual benefits - however, apply different approaches.

Educational policies that are based on Talcot Parsons's functionalist/structuralist conception claim that the school has to meet the needs of the market. According to this view, a well-developed educational system must first consider the human resources development selection, and fair allocation, and promoting social cohesion by transmitting the core values of a certain society to the new generation.

Another approach to the role of school in society emphasizes the human capital. *"Economists of the human capital school, Becker (1997) and Denison (1964) aimed to demonstrate that investment in schools is a productive investment, this producing not only individual but also social benefits"* (Hatoş, 2006_b, 2).

In conclusion, the schooling does not have the same efficiency in all countries, so that we can enunciate that *"theories that attribute to human capital the virtue of directly producing wealth belong to an obsolete school of thought."* (Hatoş, 2006_b, p. 2)

The representatives of the credentials school have launched the first criticism of these functionalist utopias (Collins 1979). According to these authors, diplomas do not attest the professional or educational skills of the individual, only suggest, in very general terms, certain qualities of the person.

Another way of perceiving the role of education is communitarian vision. This vision emphasizes the social cohesion and social inclusion, and also stresses the importance of community, the dependency of individual welfare to belonging and to relationships with communities, which manifests itself in associations and networks.

Chapter 5. Presentation of the research methods

5.1. Research objectives

The main object of this paper is to attempt to answer the question: **is there or is not there a relationship between students' achievement and their social situation?** This paper proposes an evaluation of the influence of social factors on the academic achievement and success in school of students in Covasna County.

Following primary objective, the research objectives can be classified into the following categories:

I. Objectives related to the evaluation / study of the socio-cultural and economic situation of the family:

- Family environment
- Economic situation of the family
- Cultural situation of the family

II. Objectives related to the evaluation / study of the educational environment:

- School environment
- The relationship between school and family
- The favorable climate of learning

III. Objectives related to the evaluation / study of the adaptation profile of individual students:

- Self-esteem
- Adaptation
- Optimism
- School commitment
- Avoiding problems at school

IV. Objectives related to the assessment of performance targets:

- Average of the marks obtained at the studied objects in previous school year
- Evaluation of obtained marks against the classmates' marks
- Self-assessment based on the marks
- Application of tests: mathematics test, PISA and reading test, PISA
- The results of the national assessment: the marks in mathematics and language

5.2. Hypotheses

The hypothesis related to the primary objective of the present research refers to the influence of the socio-economic environment on academic achievement and success in school in Covasna County.

Among the most important assumptions here mention the following:

- In addition to the obvious similarities, we can identify differences between performance and success in school.
- The factors that influence the most the academic achievement and success in school are related to social and economic situation of the family.
- Relying on the three types of capital listed by Bourdieu (1998), I assumed that students who have a higher cultural capital have better results in the tests involved in this research.
- As in the questionnaire was introduced a question about attending certain tutoring activities outside school hours, I assume that students attending these activities achieve better results in PISA tests and national assessments.
- According my hypothesis, the drop-out from school after the eighth grade is a fairly common phenomenon. The categories of students most exposed to this phenomenon are those who are from families with a precarious economic situation, and where the parental education level is very low.
- The academic achievements of students from disadvantaged and dysfunctional families are much lower than among their colleagues. I assume that from this perspective we can not identify a major difference between the schools.

5.3. Description of measuring instruments

The first the measuring instrument is a questionnaire, applied through **supervised self-completion** among students. In the second step of the research I applied **two tests** taken from the PISA-OECD (2006) studies. Although initially not included in the research project, I later decided to introduce the **national assessment results in 2013** the database.

The basis of the first measuring instrument applied in this paper is the questionnaire of Success in school Profile (SPP) laid down and developed by Professors Gray Browen and Jack Richman the School of Social Work, University of North Carolina of Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), adapted and applied in Romania, in Romanian and Hungarian, by the research group led by Professor Maria Roth (2009).

In the questionnaire I have introduced a few questions, which I took from the questionnaire applied in the PISA studies (Student Questionnaire for PISA, 2009).

The questionnaire also includes some questions formulated by myself, these do not add up to a dimension or an index, but, by their nature, they complete the rest of the data.

Through this survey I intended to realize a measurement tool that provides a framework for interpreting and understanding the academic achievement and success in school in the context of the students' backgrounds.

The above described questionnaire was completed with **one test in mathematics and one in reading**, applied in 2009 OECD PISA studies (Take the Test, 2009).

About the applied tests we can say that they actually measure the students' practical applicable skills. The essence of these exercises is the need for a pragmatic thinking from students.

The method of application of the questionnaire was the *supervised self-completion*. We performed the data collection also using the internet, by making online version of the questionnaire. At the applied I did not use the online version due to methodological considerations.

The initial questionnaire and the tests in mathematics and reading were tested in three rural schools and were completed by 70 students in total.

In conclusion, the questionnaire contains the following dimensions and indexes:

Profile of the social environment:

The educational climate in the school (dimension)

1. Support of the teachers (*index*)
2. School climate (*index*)
3. Family harmony (*dimension*)
4. The support received from parents (*dimension*)
5. Home learning environment (*dimension*)
6. Parental support for school activities (*dimension*)
7. The expectations of parents on school behavior (*dimension*)
8. Cultural activities (*index*)
9. Welfare of families (*index*)
10. Educational resources at home (*index*)
11. Possession of "classical" culture in the family (*index*)

Individual adaptation profile

12. Self-esteem
13. Adaptation
14. Optimism
15. School commitment

16. Avoiding problems at the school
17. Self-evaluation based on notes
18. Students' option of continuing their studies

The target group of the present study is composed by the eighth-graders in Covasna County.

The number of students in the eight-grade was 1902 in Covasna in the 2012-2013 school year, so I decided to send one questionnaire and a test package for each student. Finally I got back 1598 questionnaires and tests which is a percentage of 84.02% of all the questionnaires.

Chapter 6. Analysis of the reliability and validity of the measuring instrument

6.1. Reliability analysis of the dimensions

I have analyzed the reliability of the measuring instrument by calculating Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha), the standard error of measurement (standard error of measurement) and the percentage of scores which may be due to errors.

Based on Cronbach's Alpha values we found that most variables are within the "good" or "acceptable" area, and found Cronbach Alpha values below the minimum accepted only at three dimensions, which were taken over from the PISA survey.

Comparing Cronbach's Alpha values for the variables that appear in the national study, we found no significant differences between their consistencies.

In conclusion, the reliability of variables from the dimensions is "good" or "acceptable", which, however, suggests that the measuring instrument has produced fairly consistent dimensions.

6.2. Analysis of the validity of the dimensions

I have analyzed the validity of the measuring instrument by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient for testing the hypothesis which states that the variables from the same dimension must have a higher than 0.30 correlation.

We found that there is a very weak link between the items taken from the PISA study and the PPS survey, the sole exception being the strong correlation between the "school climate" and the "educational climate in school" ($r = -0.341$, $p < .01$).

The family climate dimension has the greatest validity. I have found significant correlation also between the variables that compose the *school environment* dimension. The results confirmed the validity of the *"cultural-economic situation of the family"* dimension, because of the variables of the dimension are grouped around theorized construct. In case of the *of individual adaptation profile* dimension, the data only partially confirmed the validity of the dimension.

On the level of the presented dimensions we can identify significant correlations between the variables of the individual profile, the family background and school climate, respectively.

Comparing the correlation coefficients with those obtained in the national sample, I have found that there are no great differences between the results, which once again confirms the validity of the measuring instrument.

Between academic achievement variables I have found very strong correlations, each coefficient having a value above 0.47, and thus confirmed the convergence validity of this dimension.

6.3. Factor analysis for the divergent validity of the variables

In order to study the validity of the construct I have conducted a confirmatory factor analysis, where I focused on whether the items included in different dimension will group around the factors theorized as identical dimensions.

Analyses confirmed that the thirteen variables of the socio-economic profile saturate four factors that help to explain the total variance of individual adaptation profile in a proportion of 61%. In case of family environment, the five chosen factors help in explaining the total variance in a proportion of 54.5%. At the school climate, the three factors elected contribute to explaining the total variance in 60%. In case of the cultural and economic situation of the family, the five chosen factors help explain the total variance in a proportion of 48.3%. At the individual adaptation profile, the five factors taken into analysis help to explain the total variance in the proportion of 40.62%. In each case, the chosen factors saturate one factor.

In conclusion, only in the case of the welfare dimension of we can identify more serious problems, so I decided to keep these factors built after the original theory.

In case of academic achievement, the factors taken into consideration contributed to explain the total variance in a proportion of 61.7%. Excluding from this analysis the variable "self evaluation on the basis of marks", I found that the explaining of the total variance increases to 70.66%, which led me to exclude this variable from the factor construction.

In case of the success in school, the factors taken into consideration contributed to explain the total variance of academic achievement in a proportion of 49.5%. The explanatory value of the factor "Avoiding trouble at school" was the highest, followed by "self-evaluation based on the marks received in school" and "school commitment".

Chapter 7. Presentation of independent and dependent variables

The independent variables of the Covasna County students can be found in the first questions of the questionnaire.

In this chapter I have presented the following independent variables: school name, gender, nationality, age, area of residence, family type, if parents are working abroad and if so, how long has he/she / have they been gone, mother's occupation, father's occupation, mother's studies, father's studies, attending certain tutoring outside school hours and reading habits of students.

The data have conformed that the majority of students in Covasna County come from families which have both parents.

The percentage of cases in which one of the family members went to work abroad is 11.8%, which, based on studies in the field (e.g. Save the Children, 2013), can be considered a relatively low percentage compared to counties where percentage can reach up to 25% or 27%. We can not say the same thing about parental occupation because, surprisingly, 35.34% of the mothers of the surveyed students do not have a job, which means a very high percentage, even for Covasna County.

The statistics show that 31% of students are attending some tutoring outside school hours. This percentage is higher among students from urban areas and lower in case of rural students. The statistical data from this paper uphold that attending certain types of tutoring are in close connection with academic achievement. Results of the study confirm that girls read more than boys, because 73.5% of them use to read other books outside the required readings compared to boys, of which only 54.3% said the same thing.

We conclude the fact that most students "use" library, but the percentage of students who do not borrow books from the library at all is also quite high (26.8%).

Chapter 8. Presentation of the dimensions

This sub-chapter presents the 13 variables from the social environment profile dimension. These variables are included in the following dimensions: family environment, school climate, and cultural and economic situation of the family. In the second sub-chapter presents the variables of the 5 dimensions of individual adaptation. In the third sub-chapter also the academic achievement factor is presented. I have examined the reliability and univariate distribution of each variable, separately verifying the obliquity and the flatness of these distributions.

Chapter 9. Predictors of academic achievement

I have composed the academic achievement factor out of the following:

- a) mathematics tests marks, PISA;
- b) reading tests marks, PISA;
- c) 2013 national assessment marks at mathematics;
- d) 2013 national assessment marks at language

I have decided to use this factor as correlation and regression analyzes have shown that it has a greater explanatory value than the variables taken separately.

Using regression analysis, I have been able to identify ten variables that influence academic achievement in a significant way. The highest value in explaining academic achievement is that of the brought value factors ($\beta = 0.250$) and the home educational resources ($\beta = 0.201$).

In terms of academic achievement, the variables that tend to measure the cultural activity and "endowment" of the students and their families have no explanatory value, although there is a fairly significant correlation between these factors and academic achievement ($r = .245$, $r = .101$, $p < 0.01$).

Based on the data, it is shown that the ones who tend to have higher academic achievement students are the students who are optimistic, avoid problems at school, have a positive commitment to the school rules and adapt more easily to the external environment, so the more sociable students.

From the perspective of the family environment, the students' performance depends on the harmony that exists in their families, the support they receive from their parents for school activities and on the parental expectations regarding school behavior, but does not affect academic achievement of the students whether their parents praise and encourage them or not, and whether they talk to them frequently or rarely about their future plans, current events or about what happened in school.

Within the school environment, the academic achievement of students is primarily affected by the school climate, and in lesser extent the educational climate in school, so whether the students feel good at school, are not marginalized and have friends. Incidentally, the support of the teachers in the sense of their interest in the learning process, helping students in learning activities, etc. does not affect the academic achievement.

Based on demographic factors, I have found urban non-Roma girls, who have parents with higher education to have the higher academic achievement and rural Roma boys, whose parents do not have higher education to have the poorer academic achievement.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA factorial) confirmed that from between the education and occupation of parents, the mother's education and the father's occupation are the factors that influence the academic achievement the most.

Students in the sample obtained in each category, but also overall poorer results in the PISA tests than at the national evaluation of the same subject. These results support the research hypothesis, that students do not have the capacity to fully implement the skills acquired in school into practice, as these have a mainly theoretical character.

Finally, we can conclude that the predictors of academic achievement can be found primarily in the family's socio-economic and emotional environment, in the child's individual profile and the demographic factors. Realizing several regression analyzes, the factors that influence the most the academic achievement proved to be every time the **brought-in value** and the **educational resources / family welfare**, followed by **avoiding problems at school** and the **students' optimism**. Among the demographic factors we highlight the influence of **gender, area of residence, nationality** (Roma or not Roma), and the **mother's education**.

From the family climate proved to have explanatory value in each regression model the variables **harmony in the family** and **parental expectations regarding school behavior**. Of the three factors that compose the school environment, only the **school climate** factor has been shown to have explanatory value in each regression model.

The following factors in did not have any explanatory value of the academic achievement in any of the regression models:

- The support received from parents
- The home learning environment
- Cultural activity
- Support of the teachers
- Self-esteem

Chapter 10. Predictors of success in school

I have separated the academic achievement factor from the success in school factor because, at the factor analysis of academic achievement, I noticed that the exclusion of the factor "self-evaluation based on the marks received in school" from the academic achievement, resulted in an increase in explanatory value of the total variance of the academic achievement, from 61.7% to 70.66%. This led me to formulate a hypothesis, that there is difference between success in school and academic achievement.

On browsing the literature, I have concluded that in the definition of success in school are involved more factors than in defining academic achievement which is focusing solely on marks. Based on these findings, I have concluded that although there was a strong link between academic achievement and success in school ($r = 0.316$, $p < 0.001$), with a high probability we can also identify discrepancies between these terms.

Variance and regression analyzes confirmed that success in school has a much closer connection with most variables in the family environment, family environment, socioeconomic status of the family and individual adaptation profile than academic achievement, meaning that the proximal environment the students and their personality characteristics are in closer connection with success in school.

It can be said that the students who tend to have more success in school are the students who are optimistic, have a positive assessment of the school climate, have a higher brought-in value, have more educational resources at home, the parents' expectations on school behavior s are higher, are more consistent and adapt more easily to their environment.

Variables which do not influence success in school are:

- Harmony in the family
- The support received from parents
- School climate
- Cultural activities
- Self-esteem

The variable **support of the teachers** has no explanatory value regarding the success in school factor, as it did not have one in case of the academic achievement. Comparing these results with the results of the research conducted on the national sample (Hărăguș et al., 2009, 35-37), I have concluded that the teachers' support has explanatory value only when the dependent variable is the avoidance of problems at school, which, from a certain a point of view, can be considered an expected result.

With regard to demographic factors, based on the results, we have found being the most successful in school the non-Roma school girls, who have mothers with higher education and do not come from single parent families. Success in school is lower in Roma boys, whose parents have general or secondary education and come from single parent families or have no natural parents.

Interestingly the residence does not influence the students' success in school, even if it affects the academic achievement.

The results have confirmed that the academic achievement of students from single-parent families or without natural parents is low compared to students from other family types.

Comparing the results received with those regarding the academic achievement, we find that in case of academic achievement, the parents' studies induce a more evident differentiation than in case of success in school.

Chapter 11. Academic achievement versus success in school (similarities and differences)

Even though there is a great similarity and overlap between academic achievement and success in school, in this chapter I have tried, in addition to presenting those variables and factors which have in both cases and identifiable and significant influence on the phenomena in question, also to identify those variables and factors which differentiate between academic achievement and success in school.

The definition of success in school is very comprehensive, and does not only focus on achieving good results at school, as several areas are involved in the description of this term. Academic achievement instead describes student success in at learning, and is primarily expressed by the marks received at different disciplines, exams, quizzes, contests, etc..

In general, we can conclude that there are many similarities between academic achievement and success in school because most variables influence (or not) both these factors, but I have managed to identify variables that affect only one of the two concepts as well.

The analysis of variance showed that the mother's level of education and the father's occupation influence the most both academic achievement and success in school, but the mother's level of education and the and father's occupation are better predictors for academic achievement than for success in school.

Similarities found between academic achievement and success in school:

The following variables affect significantly the academic achievement and the success in school: the brought-in value, the home educational resources, family welfare, optimism, adaptation, gender, nationality (if self-declared declared Roma or not), mother's education and father's occupation.

The following variables do not influence the academic achievement, or the success in school: support received from parents, the teachers' support, cultural activities, self-esteem and whether one or both parents are working abroad.

The differences found between academic achievement and success in school:

- In case of the success in school, the most important factors are the ones related to individual personality traits and to the proximal environment's expectations, when in case

of academic achievement the most influential factors are the ones related to the family's status and economic resources.

- The parents' support in school activities has explanatory value only for the academic achievement factor.
- The possession of "classical" culture in family does have explanatory value for success in school, and has no explanatory value for academic achievement.
- The residential environment of the students has an impact on academic achievement, but does not affect the success in school.
- The academic achievement level is a better predictor of the success in school than vice versa. In other words, students with higher academic achievements will more probably have of success in school, but the reverse of this statement can not be enunciated with the same probability.

I have compared the academic achievement and success in school based on the mother's level of education and father's occupation. Thus I received the following four categories of results:

Students with poor academic achievement and high success in school (273/21, 55%)

Students with high academic achievement and high success in school (495/39, 07%)

Students with high academic achievement and low success in school (189/14, 92%)

Students with poor academic achievement and low success in school (310/24, 47%)

Chapter 12. Predictors of school failure

If we want to define the success in school then we can not overlook the issue of school failure. Definition of success and failure involve several relative terms, which leads to different interpretations, depending on the cultural and educational traditions of the countries, a fact which also occurs in the evaluation and selection systems. This relativity of concepts requires the identification of different categories within the concept of school failure, and based on the existing theories in the field, the existing definitions should be harmonized, at least at Ministry of Education and Research level, and in the same time, based on these definitions, tools for collecting data on drop- out should be developed. The measuring instrument described in this paper may be a basis for the development of this indicator, of formal of school failure risk.

Based on the categories of school failure, presented in this chapter, I have decided to use the term *formal academic failure*.

In this paper, the group of pupils with formal academic failure is made up of 216 students who have not registered or have not presented (in only 5 cases) at the national assessment, which

represents a percentage of 13.78% of the sample. These students, without having received a mark at the national evaluation, may not enroll in any school for further studies.

In the comparison between all students in the sample and the group of students with formal academic failure, I relied primarily on validation methodology applied by researchers Rose and Bowen. This method is called in the literature inter-groups discriminant validity (known-groups validity).

In conclusion, similar to the five educational risks identified by Rose and Bowen (2005) in the United States, I have identified the following conditions that can cause formal academic failure in Covasna County:

- Ethnicity: Roma
- Parents' labor market status: unemployed
- Education level of parents: 1-8 grades
- Poverty (see students' self assessment or the dimension welfare)

Comparing the average scores of students in the sample (t test), with average scores of the students in the group with formal academic failure, I have found significant differences in 13 of the 19 variables.

I did not find significant differences in the following variables: the family, the support received from parents, the support of parents in school activities, the educational climate in the school, the teachers' support and school commitment.

I found the biggest difference in self-evaluation based on marks variable and the success in school factor, so I have concluded that students with formal academic failure have the biggest differences from their peers regarding school success.

The results confirmed that the cultural activities of the students with formal academic failure are much more reduced, and their families are more probable not to have classic literature, poetry books and artworks in their possession.

In conclusion, the variables that influence the most the formal academic failure are primarily related to the family's economic factors (family welfare and educational resources at home). Based on the results (see optimism, adaptation, self-esteem, etc.), we can assume that the school failure leaves its mark on the individual profile of the students, who thus become less optimistic, less confident and adapt harder to their proximal environment.

In the final conclusion, we can affirm that the presented measuring instrument effectively measures both the academic success and failure. Applying this measuring tool, in addition to being able to evaluate a student's predisposition for academic achievement and success in school, I was also able to identify those criteria that predict the possibility of repeating a grade or dropping out.

Chapter 13. The pedagogical value added by schools

The pedagogical sciences, similar to the value added used in economics, we can see more and more frequently various attempts by which scientists and various educational institutions will measure are trying to measure the value added by the teachers or by the educational institutions. The premise of these attempts is the observation – also confirmed in this paper - that we can not treat students enrolled in a certain level of education as a homogeneous group, nor those enrolled in different schools. Comparing schools based only on the students' results is a poor way to assess the role of schools' and teachers' effectiveness.

In this chapter I have repeated the statistical analyzes described by authors Balázsi and Zempléni (2004), to see what are those variables that can best describe the socio-economic situation of the family of origin of students in Covasna .

Primarily I identified the optimal model using multivariate regression analysis, choosing between the possible models the ones that have the greatest explanatory value. In the second phase I have conducted an exploratory factor analysis, and so I was able to identify the variables that best describe the brought-in value.

- Mother's occupation
- Father's occupation
- Mother's level of education
- Father's level of education
- Approximately how many books you have at home?
- How many computers / laptops are in your family?
- How many bathrooms do you have in the house?

I believe that assessing the students' and schools' performance in terms of this factor is a new idea in the Romanian educational system.

Based on the brought-in value we can, by a linear regression analysis, define the pedagogical value added as the difference between *the estimate and the actual performance of the schools based on the brought-in value index*. Deviation from the expected performance means that in those schools the students performed better or worse than a "typical" school in the county that has students from the same socio-economic and cultural environment.

Analyzes for each test confirmed that an increase in the brought-in value also causes an increase in the student's performance. The biggest difference exists at the mathematics tests, and lowest at the PISA reading tests.

The above results show that Covasna County's schools manage to balance only partially these disadvantages caused by the socioeconomic entourage, as the value brought-in by students significantly influences the academic achievement.

Analyzing the effect of the brought-in value on academic achievement *I found a quite big difference between the brought-in value of the students from urban and rural areas.* The urban schools transmit to their students a higher added pedagogical value, and the difference due to the locality type on the performance of students in terms of brought-in value is constant.

Conclusions of the research

Conclusions regarding the academic achievement

The predictors of academic achievement can be primarily found in the socio-economic and emotional family environment, in the child's individual profile and in the demographic factors. I found that the factors that influence the academic achievement the most are the brought-in value and the educational resources / family welfare, followed by avoiding problems at school and the student's optimism. Based on demographic factors I found that best academic achievement is obtained by non-Roma the urban schoolgirls whose mothers have a higher education and whose fathers are private entrepreneurs or employees with higher education. The lowest performance is obtained by rural Roma boys, whose mothers had completed only 1-8 classes and whose fathers do not have a stable job.

Factors which **do not** influence the academic achievement are: receiving support from the parents, home learning environment, cultural activities, teachers' support and self-esteem.

Conclusions related to the success in school

The results confirmed that the **success in school** is in a much closer connection with most variables related to the family environment, the socioeconomic status of the family and individual adaptation profile than academic achievement. Thus the students that tend to have success in school are the students who are optimistic, assess the school climate more positively, have more educational resources at home, whose parents have higher expectations on school behavior, are consistent and are able to adapt more easily to their environment.

The variables which **do not** influence success in school are: the harmony of the family, the support received from parents, school climate, cultural activities, and the self-esteem.

Based on demographic factors, I found that more likely to have success in school are the girls whose mothers have higher education and do not come from single parent families. The success in school is the lowest in case of Roma boys, whose parents have general secondary education and come from single parent families or have no natural parents.

Similarities and differences between academic achievement and school success

The analysis confirmed that the majority of variables influence by both these factors, but there are variables that affect only one of the two notions.

Analyses of variance confirmed that the level of education and parental occupation are better predictors for academic achievement than for success in school.

The academic achievement and the success in school are influenced by the following variables: the brought-in value, the home educational resources, family welfare, optimism, adaptation, gender, nationality (if self-declared Roma or other nationality), the mother's education and the father's occupation.

The academic achievement and the success in school are **not** influenced by the following variables: support received from the parents, teachers' support, cultural activities, self-esteem and whether one or both parents are working abroad.

In conclusion, I have identified the following differences between academic achievement and success in school:

- In the case of success in school, the most important factors are related to the variables concerning the individual adaptation and the expectations of the family environment
- In the case of academic achievement, the most influential factors are related to the family's status and economic resources.
- The parents' support in school activities has explanatory value only in the case of academic achievement.
- The possession of "classical" culture in family has explanatory value for success in school, but has no explanatory value for academic achievement.
- The residential environment of the students has an impact on academic achievement, but does not affect the success in school.
- The academic achievement level is a better predictor of the success in school than vice versa. In other words, students with higher academic achievements will more probably have of success in school, but the reverse of this statement can not be enunciated with the same probability.

Conclusions regarding the formal academic failure:

In conclusion, similar to the five educational risks identified by Rose and Bowen (2005) in the United States, I have identified the following conditions that can cause formal academic failure in Covasna County: Roma ethnicity, unemployed parents, education level of parents: 1-8 grades and poverty (see students' self assessment or the dimension welfare)

Comparing the average scores of students in the sample (t test), with average scores of the students in the group with formal academic failure, I have found significant differences in 13 of the 19 variables.

I did not find significant differences in the following variables: the family, the support received from parents, the support of parents in school activities, the educational climate in the school, the teacher's support and school commitment.

Based on the results, I have concluded that students with formal academic failure have the biggest differences from their peers regarding the success in school.

In conclusion, the variables that influence the most the formal academic failure are primarily related to the family's economic factors (family welfare and educational resources at home). Based on the results (see optimism, adaptation, self-esteem, etc.), we can assume that the school failure leaves its mark on the individual profile of the students, who thus become less optimistic, less confident, etc..

In the final conclusion, we can affirm that the presented measuring instrument effectively measures both the academic success and failure.

Conclusions regarding the brought-in value and pedagogical value added by the schools

The following variables describe best the brought-in value: mother's occupation, father's occupation, mother's level of education, father's level of education, number of books in the family, number of computers / laptops in the family, number of baths.

Analyses for each test confirmed that an increase in the brought-in value also causes an increase in the student's performance. The biggest difference exists at the mathematics tests, and lowest at the PISA reading tests.

Analyzing the effect of the brought-in value on academic achievement *I found a quite big difference between the brought-in value of the students from urban and rural areas.* The urban schools transmit to their students a higher added pedagogical value, and the difference due to the locality type on the performance of students in terms of brought-in value is constant.

We have found that evaluation methods are primarily supported by the public institutions, and only the independent institutions and the NGOs speak in explicitly about the socio-cultural and economic status' influence of the students' academic achievement.

In the **final conclusion** we can state the fact that the schools in Covasna County alleviate the social inequalities with which the students arrive at school only partially, and the segregationist nature of the educational system is still persisting.

Conclusions regarding non-dimensional variables:

- The students attending tutoring outside school ours have some better results both at school and at the national assessments.

- Girls read more than boys.
- Most students "use" the library, but the percentage of students who do not borrow at all books from the library is quite high (26.8%).

Other findings:

- The family environment influences the students' individual adaptation, especially their self-esteem, adaptation and optimism.
- The family environment influences academic achievement and success in school more than the schools' environment, but based on the beta coefficient values, we can also conclude that the school environment dimension has a weak influence on the academic achievement and the success in school.
- Students who have a higher cultural capital obtain better results at the tests used in this research.
- The academic achievement and the success in school of the students who do not have natural parents is low compared their peers from other family types, and in case of the students originating from single-parent families, the success in school is even lower. But results have not confirmed that the number of children in a family would affect the children's academic achievement and success in school, confirmed the findings of the authors Andor și Liskó.
- The students from the sample obtained both in each category, as well as overall poorer results in the PISA tests, that at the national evaluation of the same material, which supports the hypothesis that the students do not have the capacity to fully implement in practice the skills acquired in school, as these skills still have a mainly theoretical character.

Recommendations for the applicability of the results

The application of the questionnaire among students can help the work of school counselors, as comparing a student's answers, his/her predisposition for performance, success or failure can be predicted.

Based on performance evaluation practices used in the U.S., I consider that the evaluation of students' and schools' performance of in terms of brought-in value and added pedagogical value and is a new idea in the Romanian education system, which in the future could form the basis of other similar evaluations. This model can identify the most effective schools that can make progress with students who come in with socio-economic disadvantages, which could provide important information and data for educational policy making.

Epistemological (rhetorical) questions

1) The question whether is it right thing when we describe academic achievement through math and language tests.

2) Another problem is the dilemma of global education and the fidelity, i.e. the validity of those standardized measurement tools that try to assess the academic achievement treating all education systems in the world as a homogenous market

3) How can we distinguish between academic achievement and success in school? How do these concepts appear in the literature and how are they interpreted by the authors and readers? Are they synonyms, or not?

4) What is the best way to capture the factors influencing dropout? Where and how can we identify the students who have dropped out of school? Can we rely on the educational institutions' statistics?

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