Research Insights
Изследователски проникновения

EDUCATIONAL REASONS FOR EARLY SCHOOL DROP-OUT

Maria Teneva, Zlatka Zhelyazkova
Trakia University – Stara Zagora

Abstract. Education is a high human value and a right that every person has to take advantage of. In today's technological society, differentiated as a knowledge-based society, at the center of which the knowledgeable person is placed, a part of the young people leave the educational system prematurely. What provokes a person to make this fateful choice? Why, since the labor market needs highly qualified staff, a proportion of students chooses to leave school before they have mastered any professional skills? The reasons for dropping out of school are different. They can be differentiated generally as: family, social, economic and educational, personal reasons. The purpose of this article is to identify the educational reasons why students drop out of school. A questionnaire was developed in order to achieve the so set goal. The questionnaire was approbated with high school students. Research methods: content-analysis, survey, pertinent analysis of empirical data. The results indicate that educational reasons occupy a significant place among the reasons that the the students give for dropping out of school. In order to reduce the influence of the educational reasons for dropping out of school, targeted training of the practitioners is needed. The teacher who is interested in the future development of his or her pupils needs to work preventively to keep students in the education system. Particularly devoted to this activity should be teachers who educate students mainly from minority groups in whose ethnic perceptions education is not of a significant value.

Keywords: education; dropping out of school; educational reasons for dropping out of school

Introduction

The dynamism of modern times presents before the people ever higher requirements in terms of their creativity and adaptability to the rapidly changing conditions of social existence and professional realization. For the formation of such valuable qualities of the personality, the years of school education are of significant influence. Prominent scholars who have devoted much of their scientific quest to clarifying the issue of human development are Jean Piague (theory of

cognitive and moral development), Lev Vigotski (theory of cognitive development), Eric Eriksson (theory of personal and social development) Lawrence Colberg and Martin Hoffman (Theories of Moral Development). They unite around the idea that learning and education contribute to the development of the personality. M. Andreev points out in this regard that "Training is modeled on development" (Andreev, 2001: 63). The training performs its developmental function more effectively when it has a special developmental focus and involves students in such activities that develop sensory perceptions, motor, intellectual, volitional, emotional, as well as the motivational sphere. The years of school education are an important period for the development of the personality. We should not understimate the fact that people preserve their potential for development almost throughout the whole of their lives. In this aspect, P. Radev points out that "there is no uniform optimal course of development. Development takes place in several positions simultaneously, and progress or retention in one position does not necessarily have to be considered progress or retention in other directions" (Radev, 2005: 475). Education is one of the many factors contributing to both the individual and social development of the student's personality, and modern society should not remain indifferent to the identified tendencies for dropping out of a part of the young people from the educational institution. This has directed our attention to examining the problem of early drop-out of students.

Research problem

School is an important social institution that is called upon to carry out a public procurement aimed at the full social and labour realization of the personality. The way in which the school fulfills its educational and socializing function has a direct projection on the processes of personal self-acceptance and self-actualization of the students. Some of them fail to cope with the challenges with which the school confronts them and leave the school institution before they have completed their education.

When considering the generalized data on students who have dropped out of the educational system within the European Union, their number varies from country to country. According to the 2009 data on the number of school dropouts, the Member States of the European Union are divided into different groups: countries with less than 10% dropout pupils – Slovenia (3.9%), Slovakia (4.9%), Poland (5.3%), the Czech Republic (5.4%), Austria (8.7%), Finland (9.9%); countries where school dropouts are over 30% – Malta (36.8%), Portugal (31.2%), Spain (31.2%); Bulgaria holds positions among the countries with more than 10% of dropout students. The percentage of dropouts for the reported period in Bulgaria is 14.7% (Mihova, 2014: 144 – 145).

The statistics on this issue published by the National Statistics Institute (NSI) of Bulgaria for the period 2009 – 2016 is quite worrying.

Table 1. Number of the students leaving school by grade of education

School year	Number of drop-outs I-IV class	Number of drop-outs V-VIII class	Number of drop-outs IX-XII class	Total number of drop-outs
2009/2010	5 928	7 578	5 987	19 493
2010/2011	5 596	6 994	6 084	18 674
2011/2012	5 678	6 749	5 978	18 405
2012/2013	5 268	6 530	5 708	17 506
2013/2014	5 418	6 679	5 587	17 684
2014/2015	6 320	8 132	6 632	21 084
2015/2016	6 568	8 139	6 351	21 058

As can be seen from the data reported by the NSI of Bulgaria in Table 1, for the last seven school years (2009/2010 to 2015/2016), a total of 133 904 Bulgarian students have left school for various reasons. The generalized data allows to observe the dynamics of the number of dropouts. Their number is the smallest in 2012/2013, amounting to 17 506 students, the largest being in 2014/2015, amounting to 21 084 students. For the period 2009 – 2013, we have a dying dynamics in terms of the number of dropouts from school. The registered drop between the highest and the lowest number for the next four years amounted to 1987 students. After that, there is a three-year period of increase in the number of school dropouts. It is in this period that the highest number was recorded. The largest is the number of students who dropped out of school early in the school year 2014/2015. Their number was 21084 students.

Bulgaria is a country with deep traditions in the development of the idea of mass education. These ideas were born in our country as early as right after the Cyrillic alphabet was adopted by the disciples of Cyril and Methodius in the 9th century. The ideas of educating the nation are presented as a priority during all periods of the historical development of Bulgaria (Atanasov, 2006: 198 – 270). In this respect, striking is the fact that in the 21st century, when our country is part of the pan-European family, tens of thousands of children, adolescents and young people leave the educational institution prematurely every year. Young people are our future and, having this in mind, we need to address some fundamental questions. Can a society made up of a large number of uneducated and poorly educated people achieve a high economic, cultural and spiritual development of the state? What could the uneducated person contribute to national and world progress? These problems are very seriously considered by the governing bodies of the European Union and Bulgaria. The process of globalization of modern society has a significant impact on the development of the educational processes in Europe. Integration processes in the field of education contribute to the establishment and functioning of a pan-European educational area characterized by the promotion of student mobility,

co-operation between educational establishments, the improvement of the system for recognition of diplomas, competences and qualifications, facilitating adaptation to industrial change, in particular through vocational training and retraining[1)]. These progressive ideas from the beginning of the 21st century cannot conceivably be realized without targeted work in the direction of retaining young people in the educational space and motivating them to successfully complete and upgrade the educational stages and degrees. The Member States of the European Union are in solidarity with the view that the education of the personality is a permanent process that accompanies man throughout his or her life. The social and economic conditions of life are constantly changing. In order to be adequate to the changing conditions, one has to make a determined effort for permanent self-improvement, which also includes lifelong learning. The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning has been established. This document is aimed at uniting the different qualifications systems, facilitating the transfer of qualifications between countries, achieving the practical applicability of competences, both at national and European level[2)]. The ideas for optimizing the learning process through permanent learning are presented in the UNESCO report on education in the 21st century, which states that the realization of the idea of lifelong learning can be fulfilled through four main pillars: learning how to live together with others, learning how to learn, learning how to act and learning how to live/exist (Learning: The treasure within the UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century). In line with these ideas, a reference framework for key competences has been developed. It regulates the competencies that need to be formed through training within the Member States of the European Union. This idea is in the direction of more flexible transfer of specialists in different economic sectors in the common European area. Education in Bulgaria is implemented in accordance with the pan-European documents, which are the basis of the educational plans and the curricula for the secondary and the higher schools. It works purposefully towards the inclusion and retention of students in the educational environment. Schools are working on several national projects, the main goal of which is to reduce the number of dropouts and the re-entering of school dropouts. These are the projects “Making School Attractive to Young People”, “School for Self-Confirmation and Preparation for European Horizons”, the National Program “At School without Absences”. Despite the above-mentioned normative documents, the number of early school leavers is alarmingly high. The reasons for dropping out of school are sought in order to minimize their impact. The reasons for dropping out of school can be sought in several directions – economic, family, social, educational, ethno-cultural, institutional, health-related. On the basis of the differentiated problems of dropping out of school, a Strategy for prevention and reduction of the share of dropouts and early school leavers in Bulgaria was developed. The strategy aims to achieve by 2020 the total share of school drop-outs of no more than 11% of all pupils who

subject to compulsory education[3)]. For us, as an institution preparing pedagogical specialists for the primary and lower secondary schools, what is interesting is the educational reasons for dropping out of school. It is important to understand what makes school difficult for children, what they do not like in the institutionalized learning environment, what provokes them to interrupt their education prematurely. This would assist us in the preparation of young teachers at the university in identifying ways to improve their pedagogical interaction with pupils, to optimize the didactic technology of the lesson, to motivate students more effectively to study and to assist students in rationalizing education as a supreme human value, which has its positive projections on the prosperity of the individual, as well as on the development of society.

Methodology and methods of research

The object of the study is the early drop-out of schoolchildren.

The subject of study are the educational reasons for dropping out of school**.**

The aim is to differentiate and analyze specific educational reasons that cause interruption of education for part of the teenagers and adolescents**.**

Research hypothesis: Differentiating the educational reasons for dropping out of school would help to develop a pedagogical approach whose implementation in school practice would contribute to optimizing pedagogical interaction and reducing the number of dropouts from school.

Research methods: content analysis, survey, statistical processing of empirical data with Statistica SPSS.V. 16.0, pertinent analysis, correlation analysis.

Results

The study was conducted with 152 students who study in secondary schools in the Stara Zagora region. To differentiate the reasons for dropping out of school, an inquiry card has been developed which contains 29 close-ended questions. The questionnaire was presented to the students to be filled in anonymously. The questions included in the questionnaire are aimed at identifying different types of risk reasons that could lead to dropping out of school – family, social, educational, psychological, health-related. The subject of the present analysis is to identify the educational reasons for dropping out of school. The distribution of the data obtained is not normal, necessitating the use of nonparametric techniques in the analysis.

Since Bulgaria is a multiethnic country, it is of a research interest for us to find out whether there is a correlation between the students' belonging to a particular ethnic group and the existence of ethnically specific educational issues that lead to dropping out of school. This determined the contingent of the research, which encompasses students from the three largest ethnic groups in Bulgaria – Bulgarian, Turkish and Roma. The distribution of the students covered by the study by ethnicity is as follows:

Table 2. Distribution by ethnicity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Roma	72	47,4	48,0	48,0
	Bulgarian	62	40,8	41,3	89,3
	Turkish	16	10,5	10,7	100,0
	Total	150	98,7	100,0	
Missing	System	2	1,3		
Total		152	100,0		

As can be seen from the data in Table 2, the largest share (47.4%) is taken by the Roma students covered by the survey. The second largest one is that of the Bulgarian students. Their share is 40.8%. Students who ponted out belonging to the Turkish ethnic group represent a 10.5% share. Two students representing a share of 1.3% did not indicate their ethnicity. There are no pupils who have indicated belonging to a different ethnic group.

The study covered students from different educational stages and grades (from the primary to the high school stage), which also determines variations in the surveyed persons in terms of age. The age of the respondents ranges from 11 to 17 years. The distribution of the respondents by age is as follows: 17 years – 4.6%, 16 years old – 3.9%, 15 years old – 4.6%, 14 years old – 18.4%, 13 years old – 36.2%, 12 years old – 30.3%, 11 years old – 2%. The largest is the number of respondents aged 13 and 12 years. They occupy a total share of 66, 5%.

The study covers students who live and study in a medium-sized city and such who live and study in a village. Respondents from the city account for a share of 119 students (78%), and those living in a village are 33 students and represent a 22% share.

The distribution of respondents by gender is as follows: 71 pupils (46.7%) are female and 81 are male (53.3%). The sample is exhaustive and does not claim to be representative.

The statistical significance of differences in the responses is verified by a Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric k-test (Man-Whitney Post-Hock Test) – a nonparametric alternative to a single-factor dispersion analysis for comparison of three or more groups.

The prerequisites that must be met for the Kruskal-Wallis test are:

1. The dependent variable is built from “low” to “high” values before they are ranked.

2. The data for each group are independent.

The statistical hypotheses that are tested with the Kruskal-Wallis test are as follows:

H0: There is no difference in the distribution of the responses of groups formed by the ethnicity factor.

H1: There is a difference in the distribution of responses of groups formed by ethnicity.

The Kruskal-Wallis test ckecks the equality of distributions between the groups (which are three and more) and not an equality of the arithmetic mean values for the groups as in the dispersion analysis and is *statistically significant at p≤0.05.* Statistical significance means that there is a difference in the distribution of the groups.

The Kruskal-Wallis test shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the three surveyed ethnic groups in the answers of questions 20; 28 and 29, presented in *Table 3*.

Table 3. Statistically significant differences of ethnic origin and place of residence of the students

Question №	Factor			$\chi^2(n)$	p
	age	ethnic origin	place of residence		
11	0	0	0		
13	0	0	0		
14	0	0	0		
16	0	0	0		
17	0	0	0		
20	0	**1**	0	8,476	,014
22	0	0	0		
24	0	0	0		
25	0	0	0		
28	0	0	**1**	4,118	,042
29	0	**1**	0	21,440	,000
0 – no statistically significant difference; 1 – there is statistically significant difference					

In order to determine where exactly the difference is, i.e. which groups are statistically significantly different, additional Man-Whitney "post-hoc" tests had to be performed – one for each pair of independent group variables.

The corrected value of (p) of Bonferoni was used, as determined by the following:

$$p = \frac{\alpha}{n} = \frac{0.05}{n}$$

where *n* is the number of possible pairs.

In order to calculate the *magnitude of the effect*, the coefficient *r* was used, defined by the formula:

$$r = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}}$$

Our goal in differentiating the educational reasons for dropping out of school is to determine the nature of the difficulties which students have at school. Students enrolled in the study are asked Question 11 "What makes school difficult for you?". The question is multi-choice. The data obtained shows the following distribution, sorted by frequency of choice:

The most frequent is choice d) – "there is no good discipline at school, and other pupils keep me from being careful during the lesson", chosen by 75 respondents (49.3%). The fact that this is a choice for almost half of the respondents makes it significant for the sample.

The distribution by age and class of the so quoted statement shows that this choice is valid mainly for those born in 2006 and 2005 (fifth and sixth grade). It is chosen by more adolescent boys than girls.

Disciplinary order is one of the fundamental requirements for the normal course of learning. Reasons for worsening discipline in the classroom may depend on both the personality of the teacher and the personality of the student. As an important factor in this respect, we choose to outline the personality of the teacher, who through his or her professionalism should in each case find mechanisms to influence positively the behavior of the students. Distributing the teacher's attention correctly helps to identify the specific condition and engagement with the creative activity of each student at each phase of the lesson. This requires adherence to a certain disciplinary order. As J. Kuni says, "It is very important for the teacher to know what is happening at every stage of the lesson and at all times" (Charles, 2002: 7). This expectation towards the personality of the teacher is defined in the scientific literature as the principle of vigilance. In order for this principle to be applied effectively, the teacher needs to give the class clear and timely signals that he is aware of what is happening in the class at any time of the class. Regarding the proper management of time, human resource and technologies by teachers during the lesson at school, R. Clark points out the following, "I am ready to predict that 90% of the behavioral problems during the lesson arise at times when the teacher does not teach. This is the time when students begin to get bored and take the opportunity to do nonsense" (Clark, 2013: 242 – 243). If the teacher keeps a good working mode of the students, they will be engaged in productive activities at any given time. This would reduce discipline problems, help improve learning efficiency, satisfaction with the results achieved and keep students within the learning space.

The second choice of the respondents was the statement "The content of the textbook is too complicated for me" – 51 respondents (33.6%). Difficulties arising from the complexity of textbook content are mostly experienced by 12-year-old

students, followed by 14 and 13-year-olds. In terms of classes, these are the fifth-grade, followed by the seventh- and the sixth- grade students. Again, this tendency is more likely to be more valid for boys than for girls (32 boys/19 girls). The school textbook is a didactic tool that supports the teacher's activity and the student's activity. There are requirements for the scientific and structured content of the selected learning content, but also the requirement for accessibility of the volume and the content of the information according to the age and the psychological characteristics of the learners.

The other three statements on the matter were selected by a small number of respondents. Among them, the most significant is statement b) – "the teacher's way of teaching is incomprehensible to me" chosen by 15 pupils (9.9%), with approximately equal number of boys and girls (7/8) and valid mostly for those born in 2006 year (sixth grade) – 7 people. This answer corresponds to the ineffective teaching technology of the teacher during the lesson.

One of the factors that could cause dropping out of the school system could be the frequent absences from school. Through question 13, we aim to find out which the most common reasons are why students are absent from school and to highlight the educational reasons in this aspect. The results indicate that the most significant is statement b) – "due to an illness" – 93 of 149 valid choices, followed by a) "for family reasons" – 27 choices and g) "for other reasons" – not determined by the respondents – 20 choices. Illness as the main reason for absenteeism is pointed out by all respondents with a valid choice, without an outlined influence of a certain factor. Family causes are more valid for boys. Absenteeism caused by factors other than illness was mainly chosen as an answer by girls. Students do not identify specific educational reasons for absenteeism.

As a possible reason for dropping out of school, the specifics of the didactic technology of the teacher during the lesson could also be considered. In order to find out what teaching technology teachers use most often at school, respondents were asked question 14, "How do your teachers most often teach at school?" Students had the opportunity to choose from the following answers: a) They present on themselves all the content of the lesson from the textbook; b) They use talk and discussion with the students during the lesson; c) They use group work and project work; d) They use role-playing games; e) They use experimental work, study trips. 151 respondents answered the question. There is a predominant opinion that teachers present themselves all the content of the textbook lesson (60.9%). This presupposes an authoritative style of work of the teacher, realized through the use of traditional didactic methods, such as narrative and explanation. Excessive use of these methods contributes to boredom and tediousness, and implies a passive presence of the students in class. In this way, the teacher can hardly awaken the pupils' curiosity about the subject matter they teach, it is difficult to motivate them to actively participate in the class, which repels the students to such an extent that

some of them are willing to leave the school because they do not find sense to visit such a boring and uninteresting place, as school, every day. The second next basic method of work of the teacher is "the talk and the discussion" (23.2%). The third position is occupied by the use of group work and project work, reported by only 9.3% of the respondents. Fourth comes that of role-playing (4%). The final position (2.6%) is occupied by the use of field work study hours and excursions with the class. More and more doctrines are united around the view that the attractiveness of the school institution for pupils increases when the student is drawn from his passive position of attending the classroom and becomes an active participant in the learning process. To this end, the enhancement of accessibility through the use of interactive methods, such as heuristics, discussion, brainstorming, didactic experiment, experimental work, project and theme work, study excursion, etc., contribute to the highest extent.

The following interdependencies on the factors studied were outlined:

In terms of age, there is no statistically significant difference between the respondents' opinions;

In terms of ethnicity, there is no statistically significant difference;

In terms of place of residence there is no statistically significant difference;

In terms of gender, there is a statistically significant difference $U = 2374{,}000$; $Z = -1.973$; $p = 0.049$. The impact strength ($r = 0.017$) is determined on the Cowen scale as very little, negligible.

The transformation of the school into a desired place for pupils is influenced in a positive direction by the extracurricular forms of work offered to students in accordance with their needs, abilities and interests. In this connection, Question 16, which was asked of the students to answer, covered by the study, is: "Do you participate in extracurricular forms of work in your school?". The question is with a multiple choice of answers – the first 6 statements describe possible out-of-class forms and the last one is negative. The distribution of choices outlines the following trend:

20 students take part in music or singing groups (13.2%), where twice as many are the girls than the boys, the prevailing being students born in 2005 (10 pupils) and 2006 (5 pupils). This choice is typical for the inhabitants of the village (18/2), the participants of Roma origin being twice as many as the two other ethnic groups;

19 of the students were involved in some other extraxurricular thematic activity (12.5%) – almost equally boys and girls, mostly born in 2004 – 2006, the respondents living in the city (18/1);

There are 19 people in sports clubs, representing a share of 12.5%, with a predominant number of the boys – 14/5 of all ethnicities and age groups;

There are 18 (11.8%) of the respondents who attend drama classes, the majority being girls (11/7), born mostly in 2006, 11 of whom live in the city. The respondents who have indicated this answer are mainly from the Bulgarian ethnic group (13 students) and five from the Roma ethnic group;

9.9% of the respondents (15 people), mostly girls, of all age groups and living in the village (twice as many as those living in the city), participate in dance groups;

Three respondents are involved in socio-psychological trainings, lectures, consultations, etc., all being boys. Two of them were born in 2005 and one in 2001, two of them live in the city and one in the village; two are from the Roma and one from the Bulgarian ethnic group.

A relatively large number of respondents – 64 students (42.1%) do not participate in any extracurricular forms of work at school. The boys (39 pupils) over the girls (25 students). The lowest is the number involved in out-of-school forms of work born in 2005 and living in the city (53/9). In terms of ethnic groups, the prevailing are the pupils of Bulgarian origin (30 pupils), who are almost equal to the Roma pupils (28 pupils), and five are representatives of the Turkish ethnic group. Against the background of the numerous Projects that the Ministry of Education offers to Bulgarian schools and the variety of extracurricular activities, it is a concern that such a large number of students do not attend any extracurricular forms of work that would help to increase their interest in the school institution.

For us, it was also of a research interest to find out if, provided that the school does not offer enough and various extracurricular forms of work for its pupils, they are still interested in, and visiting, any alternative forms of activities outside their schools. In connection with this, the students were asked Question 17 "Do you participate in any forms of further education outside your school?". The question has three alternative options: a) yes, I participate regularly; b) I visit from time to time; c) I am not at all involved. The distribution of the 150 valid answers to this question outlines a tendency according to which respondents who do not participate in any further training. These are 66 pupils (44%), followed by regularly attending such forms – 55 students (26.7%). Third are the respondents who participate in out-of-school forms sporadically – 29 students (19.3%). The answers to this question did not reveal statistically significant differences in terms of the factors studied: age, gender, ethnic origin, place of residence. The results indicate a high degree of correlation in the answers to questions 16 and 17 with all students who took part in the survey. We find that the number of pupils who do not attend extracurricular work at school – 64 pupils (42.1%) correlates with the number of those who do not attend any additional forms of education outside school – 66 students (44%). This fact should further focus the educators' attention on the need to offer extracurricular forms of work for schoolchildren, as the families of a large number of students do not find such an alternative for their children outside the school institution.

One of the factors that could lead to preventing the dropping out of school is the support that students receive when they encounter cognitive difficulties in mastering the curriculum. In order to find out to whom the students most rely upon when they have learning difficulties, we asked Question 20: "Who do you most often ask for

help when you have school problems?". We have the following distribution of data (152 valid replies by birth and gender factors and 150 – by the factor "residence"). With the highest frequency, respondents say that they are looking for help from their friends (all tested factors and groups), followed by those who rely on help from their parents, the third position is taken by those who turn for help to their teachers. The two last positions are taken up by the answers of the students seeking help from the school director and those who rely on the help of the pedagogical counselor/psychologist in the school. The specificity of the answers received provokes questions about the functions and pedagogical roles that the pedagogue performs in his or her professional activity. In her research, Y. Merdjanova reveals the interrelationship between the professional interactions and the professional roles that the teacher performs in the learning process (Merdjanova, 2010: 246). The researcher points out that in his/her professional activity the teacher interacts at different levels and implements a large set of roles, some of which are: informant, expert, *partner, counselor,* programmer, *consultant, coordinator, mediator,* interlocutor, observer, educator, role model, prognostic visionary, *regulator, friend,* artist, *diplomat, assistant, connoisseur, associate, mediator*, speaker, *moderator*, etc. We find that some of the important roles that the teacher performs in the learning process relate precisely to his or her perception of the student as an authoritative personality, a professional who is ready to offer his help and support at times when students are in difficulty. The students' answers to this question are in a negative correlation with the above differentiated professional roles of the teachers. It should be considered as an embarrassing fact that the students covered in the survey in school situations are willing to seek help and assistance from their friends and their parents and not, as it should be, from their teachers or from the pedagogical counselor/psychologist in the school.

A significant difference between the differentiated answers to this question is highlighted by the ethnic origin factor and should be checked for statistical significance.The Kruskal - Wallis test shows a statistically significant difference in the ethnicity factor of this question ($\chi 2$ (3) = 8,476; p =, 014

When compared through the Man-Whitney U test (post-hoc), the dependencies are established, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Man-Whitney U test, question № 20

Groups	U	Z	p	r
Roma -Bulgarian	1731,000	-2,338	,019	0,20
Bulgarian -other	306,000	-2,531	,011	0,29
Roma -other	503,000	-,839	,402	0,09

Using the adjusted Bonferoni coefficient (p = 0.0167), it is evident that there is a statistically significant difference between the assertions about who the pupils turn to for help in case of school problems – between the representatives of the Bulgarian and the self-identified as "other" respondents. There is no statistically significant identifiable difference between representatives of the Roma and Bulgarian ethnic groups. There is no statistically significant difference between the answers of the Roma and the self-identified as "other" groups. The power of impact (*r*) on the Cowen scale is defined as typical and larger than the typical in the comparison between Bulgarian, Roma, Bulgarian and self-identified as "other" ethnic groups. Among the Roma and the "other" groups, the power of the influence of the factor is very weak, it basically does not exist.

Our research focus is directed towards identifying the reasons for low student success rates, which can be seen as a factor that provokes dropping out of school. Respondents were asked Question 22 "If you have learning difficulties and low success rates, what are they due to?". The question implies eleven responses. The most frequent statement is: "I struggle to answer" – 30 students (19.7%), followed by "irregular performance of homework" – 26 students (17.1%) and "low concentration of attention" – 23 students (15.1%). The next position is occupied by the students who answered: "lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem" – 20 students (13.2%); "Irregular school attendance" – 19 students (12.5%); "poor family conditions" – 12 students (7.9%) and "fear of testing" – 12 students (7.9%).

As the most insignificant, respondents identify language problems – low communicative competence, inadequate knowledge of the language in which the training takes place – 9 pupils (5.9%); the ambiguity of the material taught by the teacher – 8 students (5.3%); chronic illnesses and other health problems – 6 students (3.9%) and lack of learning motivation – 5 pupils (3.3%). There are no statistically significant differences between the responses in the groups formed by the three factors studied. It could provoke serious concerns that the largest proportion of students are not able to differentiate the reasons for their school failure, which suggests that they would hardly overvome it. This study attempts to identify the most common reasons for dropping out of school. Respondents are asked Question 24: "Children who leave school early, most often have ..." with a choice of co-op answers. In answering this question, there are no statistically significant differences in the factors under review.

The answers with the greatest descriptive power are: low interest in learning – 57 students (37.5%), followed by serious difficulties in learning the material – 35 students (23.0%) and parents who do not support them – 21 students (13.8%). The answers given in the first two positions, which combined the opinion of the largest number of students (a total share of 60.5%), are in correlation. They are mutually presupposed. The weak interest in learning, as a consequence, contributes to serious difficulties in learning the material. On the other hand, the difficulties

in learning the study material imply lowering the level of student motivation for exercising study work. Thirdly, with almost equal share, are the problems with teachers – 19 students (12.5%); problems with classmates – 18 students (11.8%); financial difficulties of the family – 17 students (11.2%); positive attitudes to early marriage – 17 students (11.2%) and health problems – 17 students (11.2%). The financial difficulties of the family, as well as the attitudes for early marriage, are the most differentiated in the responses of the representatives of the Roma ethnic group. Fewer representations include: taking care of some of the family members (younger brothers/sisters, sick relatives, etc.) – 11 students (7.2%); drug/alcohol abuse problems – 8 students (5.3%); an obligation to work to financially support their family – 7 students (4.6%). Such answers are mainly given by students who are representatives of the Roma ethnic group. The smallest is the number of students who chose the option "problems with the law" – 3 students (2.0%), chosen only by boys living in the city. There are no statistically significant differences in responses to this issue between different ethnic groups of students.

Educational reasons for dropping out of school are highlighted by respondents with the highest significance among all other reasons. This provokes us to find out if students find any positive characteristics of the school, and if they find out such, what they like the most about school. Students are asked Question 28 "What do you like most about school?". The question has the option of multiple choices of answers - students can choose among the five possible answers. As the best thing in school, respondents determine the ability to interact with their friends and classmates – 50.3%, followed by favorite subjects and interesting school hours – 23.2%, and teachers – 16.6%.

Table 5. Man-Whitney U test, question 28

	What do you like most about school?
Mann-Whitney U	1465,000
Wilcoxon W	8368,000
Z	-2,029
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,042

a. Grouping Variable: Place of residence

There is a statistically significant difference in the responses to this question by the "Place of residence" factor, between the deduced and ranged meanings established by Mann-Whitney's nonparametric test for two independent samples. In comparison, the U-test found a statistically significant difference (U = 1465.00,

Z = -2.029, p = 0.042, r = -0.165). On the Cowen scale the force of the ratio (r = -0,17) is defined as small and bending to the typical (0,10 <r <0,30).

Our research focus is on identifying what students are relying on so that they have a higher success at school that would help them to stay longer in the learning space. Respondents are asked Question 29 "What helps you to achieve better success at school?". The question provides the possibility of a multiple choice of answers. Among the most important factors for their school achievement, the students point out family support – 41.1%, followed by teacher support – 27.2%, friends' support – 14.6%. The fourth position is taken the option "my own merits", by choosing the answer "myself" – 15.2%. The least significant are the answers given by "other people in my community" – 1.3% and support from the pedagogical adviser – 0.7%. The specifics of these answers reveal a tendency, according to which students perceive their parents and teachers as authoritative individuals in their lives. This implies that in their quest for success they rely heavily on their help and support. Towards the end of the fourth grade (the eleventh year of age), personal self-esteem is characterized by relative autonomy and objectivity (Teneva, 2012: 73). This trend is also highlighted in the answers of the surveyed students, whose age is in the range of 11 – 17 years. The results indicate that 15.2% of the respondents believe in their own abilities and rely on themselves for achieving high school success.

There is a statistically significant difference in the Kruskal-Wallace test on the ethnicity factor of this question ($\chi 2$ (2) = 21,440 p =, 000).

By comparison, the Man-Whitney U test (post-hoc) establishes the dependencies presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Man-Whitney U test, question № 29

Groups	U	Z	p	r
Roma-Bulgarian	1420,500	-3,727	,000	0,32
Bulgarian -other	201,500	-3,848	,000	0,43
Roma - other	434,500	-1,547	,122	0,16

Using the adjusted Bonferoni coefficient (p = 0.0167), there is a statistically significant difference between the assertions about what helps the students for their better school success among the representatives of the three ethnic groups of respondents. The impact strength (r) on the Cowen scale is defined as typical and larger than the typical in the comparison of the Bulgarian and the Roma, on the one hand, and the Bulgarian and the self-identified as "other" ethnic groups. It is determined to be insignificant, tending to weak, when comparing the Roma and the "other" group. At the highest level, pupils of Bulgarian descent rely on support from parents and their teachers, while Roma students mostly rely on

support from teachers, friends, and in third place on their parents. This has its logical explanation as the students surveyed indicated that a total of 31.6% of their mothers have primary or basic education (13.2% with primary and 18.4% with basic education) and as many of their fathers have such education but with different distribution (8.6% with primary and 23% with basic education). With no education at all are 9.4% of the mothers and 7.2% of the fathers who are parents of the Roma children. The lack of education, as well as the low level of parental education, correlates with low confidence in them on the part of the students as factors contributing to higher school success. This provokes the need for these students to seek help in overcoming school problems outside their family.

Conclusion

As a result of the conducted research, we drew the following conclusions:

1. Among the reasons for early school leaving, with the highest importance the students highlight the educational reasons.

2. The attractiveness of the school is mainly found in the possibility of interacting with the group of classmates and friends, followed by the favorite subjects and the interesting school hours.

3. In the event of school problems, they are most likely to seek help from their friends, then from their parents and their teachers. With the lowest degree of confidence is regarded the help from the pedagogical counselor/psychologist in the school, whose professional characteristics include namely help and support for the students.

4. The difficulties in school the students associate to the highest degree with the lack of discipline in class and the ineffective teaching methods of the teacher.

For the overcoming of the school difficulties and the improvement of their school success, students rely to the highest degree on the support from their family and their teachers.

The research hypothesis was confirmed. Differentiated are educational reasons for dropping out of school, as well as factors and prerequisites related to the research problem. They are credible grounds for creating an effective pedagogical approach whose implementation in the school practice helps to optimize the pedagogical interaction and to reduce the number of dropouts from school.

NOTES

1. Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000. Presidency Conclusions.
2. European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQFLL) http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/broch_bg.pdf [visited on 14.04.2018].

3. Strategy for prevention and reduction of the share of dropouts and early school leavers (2013 – 2020) – www.strategy.bg/FileHandler.ash?filed=3302 [visited on 16.04.2018].
4. Instruction for implementation of project activities SUCCESS http://uspeh.mon.bg [visited on 16.04.2018].
5. Learning: The treasure within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/15_62.pdf [visited on 12.04.2018].
6. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm [visited on 05.04.2018].
7. National program "At school without absences" -https://www.mon.bg/?h=downloadFile&fileId=5675 [visited on 18.04.2018].

REFERENCES

Andreev, M. (2001). *The learning process. Didactics*. Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski.

Atanasov, Zh., et al. (2006). *History of pedagogy and Bulgarian education*. Sofia: Veda Slovena – ZG.

Charles, C. (2002). *Building classroom discipline.* New York.

Clark, R. (2013). *The End of Boredom in Class.* Sofia: East – West.

Merdjanova, Y. (2010). Transformation of the key competences of the modern teacher in the context of social interaction. *Strategies of the Educational and Scientific Policy,* 3.

Mihova, M. (2014). *Education policy of the European Union. Problems and priorities*. Plovdiv: Astarta.

Radev, P. (2005). *General School Didactics.* Plovdiv: Paisii Hilendarski.

✉ **Dr. Maria Teneva, Assoc. Prof.**
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6397-4828
Dr. Zlatka Zhelyazkova
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9982-0268
Faculty of Education
Trakia University – Stara Zagora
Stara Zagora, Bulgaria
E-mail: mariya.teneva@trakia-uni.bg
E-mail: zhelyazkova@pf.uni-sz.bg