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## **Strategies to prevent and reduce school dropout in children with sen**

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**Abstract.** Nowadays, disorders of all kinds are becoming more common, but new forms of approach are emerging and strategies are being sought to support the children concerned. This phenomenon is in constant motion and requires a lot of time and patience, involvement, passion and devotion from teachers, psychoeducators and support teachers. This topic is problematic, most teachers are currently facing it in most classes, whether we are talking about children with disabilities or not. There are several studies that show that the right guidance and the debate of customized strategies lead to favourable results, increasing pleasure for school activities, gaining total or partial autonomy and improved interpersonal relationships. The research we have done shows that this topic is a sensitive but also widely discussed topic, which is constantly evolving and working through various methods and strategies to achieve a satisfactory result, from all points of view. In this process it is necessary the involvement of teachers, families, but also children. Responsibility in decision-making and flexibility in such cases are two very important aspects to achieve favourable results. The research presented aims to study and implement strategies and techniques necessary to reduce school failure in children with special educational needs. The main objectives of research are as follows: Identify techniques for approaching content to capture students' attention; Highlighting the factors that contribute to combating school failure; Identifying work strategies to increase school progress; By comparatively analyzing the results of the two important stages, the preliminary, the initial test, and the final one, the differences recorded are defining. Thus, the common objectives are achieved differently from the experimental group because it already has the experience of a multi-level interaction, feeling the need and motivation to get involved and already having the knowledge to solve the requirements.

**Keywords.** special educational needs, strategies, school failure, motivation, education



### **1. The concept and particularities of the term CES**

The concept of CES first materialized in 1978 in Great Britain, later developing in the rest of Europe, and was based on the same goals and ideals for all children, whether we are talking about those with impairments or not. The originator of this concept was Margaret Hilda Thatcher, former Prime Minister of Great Britain and it was debated by the International Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand. Adaptations continue to appear in the following years, which leads to the recognition of the deficiency by UNESCO in 1995 and steps are taken to accept it and to process development strategies for the people concerned. Special educational needs (SEN) represent the educational needs of people with the characteristics of mental or behavioral impairments (ADHD), affective or emotional disorders (depression, anxiety, mutism, post-traumatic stress or eating disorders), severe learning difficulties or disabilities (dyslexia, Down syndrome, dyspraxia, etc.), language disorders (autistic spectrum disorders, delays in language development), developmental delays, physical or motor deficiencies, needs that can be solved with special support. This process aims to train individuals with special needs for excellent results both in school and in everyday life, thus helping them to gain their autonomy. "Special educational requirements (SEN) are defined as educational needs complementary to the general objectives of education that require an approach adapted to individual particularities and characteristic of a disability or learning difficulty" (Vrășmaș, 2015, p.66).

Special educational requirements refer to adaptation and recovery for some children with a view to school integration. The relationship between learning and mental development is not independent but interactive.

In his work, Emil Verza presents three methods of recovery: through learning (psychomotor, motor, cognitive, intellectual and verbal stimulation); through psychotherapy (the focus is on reducing negative emotions and feelings); through occupational therapy (based on recovery and skill development). (Verza, 1987).

The notion of SEN is similar to that of special education, but includes, in addition to deficiencies and disorders, the educational problems of children growing up in disadvantaged environments and refers to each deficiency separately. The school education of children with special educational requirements must correspond to the children's developmental needs, by adequately assessing the potential for development and learning and by ensuring the recovery of deficiencies or learning disorders. "Special educational requirements (SEN) are special educational difficulties, referring to a wide register of disorders that ranges from profound deficiencies to mild learning disorders" (Buică, 2004, p. 21-22).

Special educational requirements (SEN) - additional educational needs, complementary to the general goals of individually adapted education, characteristic of a certain deficiency or learning disorders/difficulties as well as medical/educational assistance. This sums up a number of functional limitations such as developmental/learning disorders, physical and neuromotor impairments, mental, auditory, visual impairments, language disorders, autism.

"The concept of learning barriers includes any factor that prevents learning. This was perceived as a social, emotional, physical or intellectual difficulty and prevented normal school attendance. The current conception admits the fact that the difficulty does not reside within the individual but in the way education is organized" (Gherguț, Psihopedagogia for persons with special requirements, Ed. 2, 2006, p. 101).



## **2. Peculiarities of development of children with SEN**

Disorders appear at different stages of development and affect personality differently, depending on the individual. Any deficiency presents some kind of disorder that affects mental functions such as language, self-control, etc. The child with special educational needs who has affective deficiencies will constantly experience states of frustration embodied in psychological reactions, depression, crying, nervous tension, which can be difficult to control. The absence of therapeutic interventions in these situations lead to effects such as: inferiority complexes, frustration, isolation, fits of anger. Even if some of the particularities of the child with special educational requirements are evident in the shaping of the personality, they can be diminished through educational measures and through appropriate therapeutic programs.

### **Learning difficulties in children with SEN**

The characteristics of learning disorders were classified by R.J. Gregory as follows:

- a mismatch between the ability to learn and that of another field;
- removal of various specific causes of other disabilities (sensory, affective);
- barriers of an affective or social nature that have consequences on the personality; (Gregory, 1992).

Learning difficulties are manifested by difficulties in writing, reading or reasoning and are located within the student or between him and the environment, i.e. between problem-solving strategies and challenges in the school environment.

Deficiency is seen as a weakness and the improvement of the situation depends on the help of the specialist in the field to remove the obstacles.

D. Popovici (1998) highlights the fact that an additional cause of learning disorders consists in "the presence in the student of another type of intelligence, different from school intelligence" (Popovici, et. al., 1998).

In other words, children with deficiencies, regardless of type, are assigned some complementary qualities that they discover either alone or with help, and work is done to exploit them to replace the less favorable activities for them. In terms of school activity for children with SEN, in relation to the general objectives, the specific objectives will also be followed in terms of compensation, therapy, learning activities, but especially in language disorders which are a priority.

### **Particularities of development**

The process of transformation and change of psychological functions is reflected at the level of four areas of the child's development, namely: physical, mental, social and structural.

In the process of development, the child accumulates knowledge, skills, skills, achievements and adapts.

Development has individual peculiarities that require assessment, approach and understanding. Due to the specifics of development and the factors that influence development, imbalances may occur.

The development of the child with CES presents a series of imbalances for the organization of the learning/empowerment/rehabilitation process.

Difficulties in child development can be found at different stages of development, the most common being:

- developmental delays mean the consequence of hereditary factors or inadequate care;



- developmental disorders, it is about neurological, psychological, behavioral manifestations;
- mental disability implies a deficit of attention, hearing, sight;
- learning disorders.

### 3. Strategies to prevent school failure

Over the years, several studies have been carried out on the school dropout rate in Romania.

In the 2012-2013 school year, percentage values of "1.4% (percentage representing 24.4 thousand students)" (Apostu, et. al., 2015) were recorded compared to the following year which was estimated by 0.4 percent less.

Thus, it can be seen that gradually, the statistics show an improvement in dropout at the school level.

On June 3, 2015, the Government of Romania approved the Strategy regarding the reduction of early school leaving, an act that determines the decrease in the number of young people who pass the last grade of secondary school, but do not continue with their studies. The aim of this strategy is to address individual needs and promote school integration.

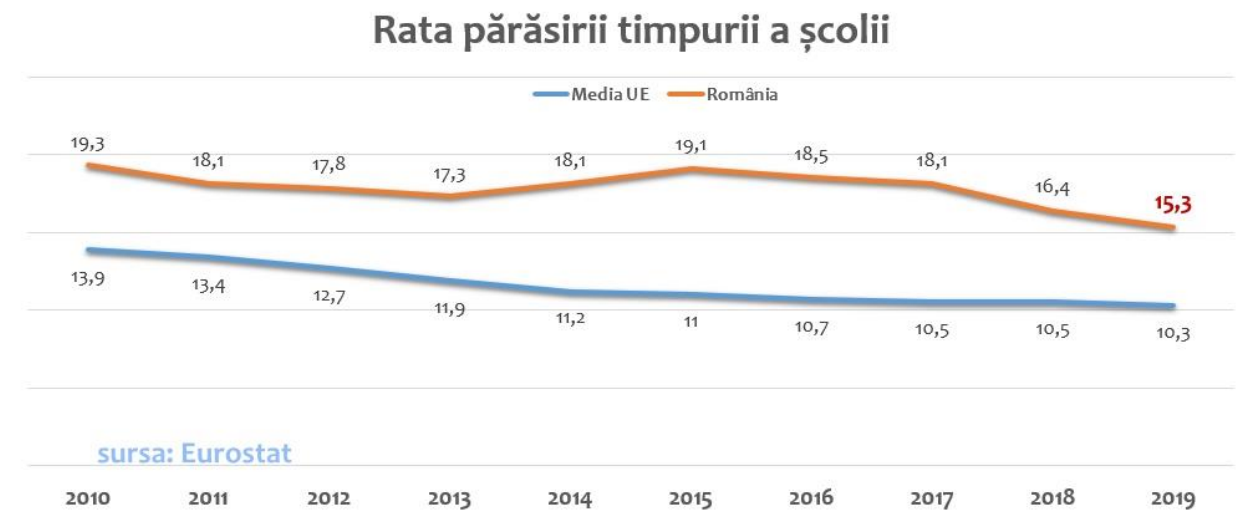


Figure 1. Early school leaving rate

School dropout consists in the decision to interrupt school progress before the end of the education level. This is associated with abandoning the endeavor before promotion. When this happens, the student is removed from school records within three years, so he has the option to resume his studies.

School dropout is divided into two categories:

- students who drop out of school;
- students who drop out of school in the last year of education;

The prevention of school dropout consists of a set of measures within schools:

- removal of risk factors;



- strengthening of protective factors;
- behavior modeling;
- communication.

The reintegration plan for people who drop out of education is based on several milestones, namely:

- involving representatives of local authorities in educational projects;
- involvement of parents in various thematic and collective projects;
- involvement of students in sports, artistic activities, competitions;
- training of teaching staff in activities specific to school dropout;
- the development of educational programs of the "new chance" type or various psycho-pedagogical assistance services;
- developing partnerships between institutions to prevent school dropout;
- advising and guiding students;
- promoting school success;

All aspects of a school nature such as learning difficulties, absenteeism, school failure, correctness, repetitions, and so on are some of the problems that are reflected in the adaptation to the school requirements, to the integration into the collective, which leads to a lack of motivation and an increase in disinterest against all the activities requested by institutions and society.

### **3.1 Ways to prevent school failure**

Defining the strategy to avoid and fight against school failure involves determination. School failure occurs, except in serious situations, not as a general but individual phenomenon. Thus, preventing and combating failure requires knowing the concrete form of manifestation and the specific causes that generated it. In this sense, teachers must provide the student with the appropriate social framework for differentiated development up to individualization through the discovery and cultivation of personal skills, an individual rhythm of learning.

The situation of school failure is explained by various handicaps, adaptation difficulties, behavioral disorders. Preventing and combating school failure requires knowing the form of its manifestation and the causes that generate it. Following some assessments, it is determined how many children are at risk of dropping out of school, respectively the type of disability they suffer from through different work methods, such as role-playing, observation, debate, and following these activities carried out, the students' attraction and motivation for the various tasks is increased, thus being more receptive (Cămănanu, et. al., 2016).

### **3.2 The role of the school**

The school environment is characterized by an affective neutrality in relation to the family environment that can create difficulties in school adaptation.

Teachers introduce a new image of adults compared to that of parents, less tolerant, less affective, but more authoritative. Globally, in most countries, children identified with special educational requirements "are more likely to be excluded from school" (Ramberg, 2020, p. 91).

The same result can be reached with students from small classes, who must be integrated into society, with support from teachers and psychopedagogues. Among the school-related causes: subjects that students should not perceive as a burden, the rigidity of the learning rhythm, the lack of school materials, the level of training of the teaching staff and last but not least the teaching



strategies used. Teachers must take into account the particularities of development and learning of each student, opt for differentiated teaching methods, adapt teaching tools, provide students with a sustained motivation for the acquired knowledge. Along with behavioral intervention strategies, a series of methods adapted to children with special educational needs (SEN) can be adopted.

It is also recommended that this set of differentiated approaches be complemented by family counseling and individual therapy. A necessary step is to accept specialized support.

### **3.2 The role of the family**

The family is the decisive factor in preparing the child for the adult stage. The hereditary basis and the educational climate in the family represent the formative process in which the adaptive behaviors on which the personality is built are formed. The contribution of the family and its role is essential in the development of the child's behaviors. It must be emphasized that there are also parents who, either out of ignorance or indifference to the child's development, do not take the necessary responsibility. And also there are naturally aspirational parents who want to see their children well educated and trained. The higher the cultural and material level, the greater the demand for children's success. Parents play a decisive role in supporting the child with minimal psychological effects. They must help their child in difficult times, give him love, support and trust.

The role is even greater in collaboration with the therapist. Following the formation and structuring of the child's personality, it is found that each child is unique in its own way and not all are educable to the same degree and do not have the same hereditary dowry. The adaptation of the educational process to children with special educational requirements is done individually and at different age levels. All students with learning disabilities require special education services to meet the demands and complete the specific tasks.

## **4. Research design**

The goal we pursued through this research is based on the search, study and implementation of strategies, techniques and methods that highlight the need for involvement in order to reduce school failure in children with C.E.S, especially those in special education.

Objective 1 : Identifying techniques for approaching content in order to capture the attention of students with SEN from special education

Objective 2 : Highlighting the factors that contribute to combating school failure

Objective 3 : Identifying work strategies to increase school progress

The research hypotheses are the following:

Hypothesis 1 : It is assumed that, by adapting the contents of the learning/special curriculum, to the level of the possibilities of perception and understanding of the students, learning failure can be prevented and avoided.

Hypothesis 2 : If the disruptive factors of learning are highlighted correctly, then we can achieve progress among students with SEN.

Hypothesis 3 : It is assumed that, by identifying and correctly applying work strategies to students with SEN, school progress registers a significant increase.

The batch of subjects : The research was carried out on two groups of students distributed as follows:

Batch number 1: 7 students of first grade A, (special education - the experimental group)

Batch number 2: 7 students of first grade B, (special education - the control group)



Peculiarities of the students participating in the research:

Table 1. Characteristics of the students participating in the research

Particularities	Experimental Batch	Control Batch
Age	8 years old	8 years old
Sex	2 girls & 5 boys	3 girls & 4 boys
Environment of origin	Urban/rural	Urban/rural
Functionality/ Family disfunction	Predominantly from united families	Predominantly from orphanages
Associated deficiencies	Infantile autism, mental retardation, delay in intellectual development	Infantile autism, mental retardation, delay in intellectual development

The students are enrolled in a form of special education at the School Center for Inclusive Education "Maria Montessori" Constanța.

The experimental group has the following characteristics: there are 2 girls and 5 boys, they come from united families, the children's deficiencies were mainly hyperkinetic with attention deficit, severe anxiety disorder, speech and language development disorder, mild mental retardation, learning disorder, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, associated deficiencies - Infantile autism, mental retardation, delay in intellectual development.

The control group has the following characteristics: there are 3 girls and 4 boys, they come from foster care centers, the children's deficiencies were mainly hyperkinetic disorders, hyperkinetic speech and language development disorder with attention deficit, mild/moderate mental retardation, acquisition and language disorder, mild mental retardation, associated impairments - Infantile autism, mental retardation, delay in intellectual development.

### **5. Applied program**

The initial testing of the subjects consisted of performing an activity carried out for both groups of children.

The activity was called "Autumn vegetables" and the main activity was recognizing the basic vegetables, (after watching a short animated presentation video) selecting them according to certain criteria, identifying its color according to a given requirement, solving a worksheet that asks them to complete a drawing with a vegetable according to the vegetable chosen initially.

Following this testing, we proposed to develop a work program composed of several thematic activities over a longer period of time, in which to observe, analyze the products of the activity and improve the school-family-society relationship.

The program we proposed was based both on the involvement of partners in the activities and on the modernization of work techniques in combination with the therapy hours that the students of this special education institution benefit from.





The program was entitled "Learning by doing", it took place over a period of two months and included several activities: Minigreehouse of my class, At the vegetable market, I know how to draw, Vegetable salad, I know how to be sporty.

Each activity was planned and had clear objectives to be achieved through the use of new work techniques and modern methods:

Activity 1 The "minigreehouse of my class" assumed that from a number of at least 3 vegetables (tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers) I would extract, together with the students, seeds to plant in a small pot, the attention being focused on the work technology, teamwork and tracking the evolution of plants.

Activity number 2 "At the vegetable market" took place with the contribution and support of parents, but also with the participation of external partners, collaborators who run a vegetable market. I went with the students and parents to the vegetable market, where they identified each object/vegetable, chose vegetables by different categories, size, color, texture and played the role of seller-buyer.

Activity number 3 "I know how to draw" took place in the classroom where the students watched a PPT presentation about fruits and vegetables, drew tokens with them and had to color the exact vegetable they drew, aiming to reproduce its exact color.

Activity number 4 The "vegetable salad" was aimed at socializing and putting into practice what they learned from previous activities. The students carried out this activity in the institution's kitchen, that cabinet specifically intended for learning life skills that this institution benefits from. The activity was carried out together with the students' parents, they were supported and interacted in order to make, present and serve this salad.

Activity 5 "I know how to be a sportsman" the students performed an applied course composed of basic and applied motor skills, such as: walking in balance, avoiding obstacles, jumping, carrying objects, as well as practicing fine motor skills by grasping and handling objects at tables.

Retesting of students from the experimental group is actually another action that puts the students in the position to actively and consciously participate in the lesson, then the results obtained by the two groups were noted.

The theme of the activity was this time in keeping with the season therefore related to spring "Spring flowers".

Pursued objectives:

- O1 – identification of flowers from several sources
- O2 – selection according to certain criteria
- O3 – making a bouquet of flowers
- O4 – the correlation between the 3D object and the representative drawing
- O5 – demonstrating empathy towards colleagues
- O6 – participation in the activity
- O7 – recognizing one's own work among those made by the whole class

Analyzing the results according to each theme and the way of supporting the students through the triple school-family-society partnership, we can conclude that the influence of external, extracurricular factors combined with applied, innovative teaching methods lead to an increase in the degree of involvement of the students, a better understanding of concepts, applicability in practice and the emotion triggered by participating in one's own training through implicit action.



Adapting to a school program and carrying out practical activities lead to increased school progress and of course to the prevention of educational failure.

The first hypothesis is validated, it is verified by the fact that it has been demonstrated that if we identify new working techniques in the class of students and correlate the content of the curriculum with the needs of the student, we can prevent the occurrence of school failure. The activities carried out demonstrate this fact through the results obtained together with the participating students and educational partners.

The second hypothesis presupposes that by identifying disruptive factors, students' academic progress is increased.

The analysis of the research identifies as disturbing factors the situation in which students are treated the same, the way of stimulation through encouragement, appreciation, by the family environment and especially the possibility for them to benefit from specific educational therapy within the school unit, as well as the material situation and their social

The third hypothesis is reached and verified, evidenced by the results obtained by the two participating groups, the difference being visible in the experimental group that benefited from new and different teaching-learning techniques and methods, the involvement of the action itself, that is, of the practice in addition to theory and combining the information presented with its implementation.

### **Conclusions of the research**

School failure can be prevented and even avoided only by involving several factors: the school curriculum adapted to the age, needs and personality of the students, the involvement of the family as an educational partner, the attraction of extracurricular partners as educational collaborators, the degree of training of the teaching staff, their experience and the pedagogical experience he has.

Last but not least, an important factor in preventing and combating school failure is the material basis of the school institution, which must provide each actor involved in education with those materials that keep pace with new technology and social evolution.

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