PREVENTION OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

Greek National Report

PREVENTION OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

REPORT ON THE NATIONAL SITUATION

GREECE

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Abstract

This paper reports the national situation and the main national trends in Greece concerning the early school leaving phenomenon. The report is based on data coming from the study of the relevant research literature and especially on the research work carried out by the Greek "Transition Observatory" of the Institute of Education. Specifically, school dropout rate in the lower cycle of the secondary school education rises to 6.09% for the school generation entering the lower secondary school in 2000-01 school year. The case of dropouts at the Secondary School Education advanced level (Integrated Lyceum/Technical Vocational Institute) is particularly interesting, since a high level of differentiation is shown between the Integrated Lyceum and Technical Vocational Institute. The pupil dropout in the former is 3.32% and that of the latter is 20.28%. In total, the Secondary School Education dropout was estimated by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religions at 14%. According to that estimate, as well as to the EUROSTAT estimates, Greece, as compared with other European countries, occupies a middle position.

In addition to that study, 5 cases of school dropouts were studied and analyzed, including interviews with students who left early the school or at risk to do so, their parents, teachers and head-teachers, in order to identify both the deepest, actual reasons which cause early school leaving and the best practices to cope with the problem. The pathway of disengagement of the student from school leading to an early school leaving is described taking into account education factors, family influences, and personal and community factors. The main risk factors related to school and those related to family and social environment were identified and some means to recognize them are reported. Also protective factors for students (both those related to school and those not related to school) are identified and presented. Some examples of practical activities and projects carried out at local and national level to prevent early school leaving and their results are reported and commented. Interviews were also made on the subject to public officers in charge of education providing a wider aspect of the dropping out phenomenon.

1. Introduction

Social inequality in the post-modern times is directly connected with the unequal chances of access to education, as well as with the disparity which is manifested during both, compulsory and post-compulsory education schemes.

The education asset, which, according to Bourdieu and Passeron, each child inherits from its family background, largely determines its performance at school. "The heirs" are the good pupils and, as a result, those with the charisma to study and, obviously, to seek, upon the end of their schooling, positions of privilege and authority. Thus, supremacy reproduction is ensured [1]

In accordance with the aforementioned rationale, children coming from a low educational background show low performance at school, at least over the initial years of their schooling. Also, according to empirical research findings, achieved in various communities at different points of time, children coming from low social strata run greater risks of dropping out from school [2]

The superficial evaluative distinction of pupils between "good" and "bad", between charismatic and non-charismatic, which does not probe into the causes of the "bad" pupils' low performance, essentially validates, during the pupils' schooling, both, the absence of family education assets and the presence of various social and financial problems, which are faced by pupils in their family environments and which dissuade such pupils from being "diligent", as per formal educational standards.

According to S. Bouzakis, the evaluation mechanisms during school life and the selection mechanisms actually validate the social, educational and financial disparities among pupils and transform schools into mechanisms of social selection and social status perpetuation [3]

Thus, pupils get branded within the school environment microcosm as "bad" pupils and as individuals of low intellect, while, at the same time, they remain unassisted, i.e. without the respective psychological support.

The absence of "special" psychologists – social workers and professionals in general - who would deal with pupils as individuals and would help them acquire self confidence in order to get over, as much as possible, the additional problems they are confronted with, aggravate such pupils' resentment towards school environment, which looks hostile, and make them drop out from school before completing their schooling scheme.

2. Main national trends

According to information provided by the Ministry of Education and Religions (YPEPTH) [4].and the research work carried out by the "Transition Observatory" of the Institute of Education [5], more than 10,000 children abandon compulsory education (Primary and Secondary Schools) annually. In Attica and Piraeus 2,500 children abandon the compulsory Secondary School education (Gymnasium)

According to the research work by G. Stamelos [6], in 2002 school dropout in the Primary School Education has almost ceased to exist in our country However, according to the YPEPTH, a very small percentage of children that should enter the educational system never attend school. These children mainly belong to special social groups (e.g. gypsies, immigrants, etc.) [7]

The common feature of the above non-tourist areas is a low family standard of living, which, in the absence of financial aid from the government, leads pupils to join the job market at an early stage in order to contribute to the meager family income. On the other hand, in tourist areas the standard of living is higher, but the family needs for work force in the family tourist businesses, in addition to the absence of motivation obviously on the part of the school environment, are the reasons why school dropout is increased in those areas.

The case of dropouts at the Secondary School Education advanced level (Integrated Lyceum/Technical Vocational Institute) is particularly interesting, since a high level of differentiation is shown between the Integrated Lyceum and Technical Vocational Institute. The pupil dropout in the former is 3.32% and that of the latter is 20.28% [5].

In total, the Secondary School Education dropout with reference to pupils enrolled for the initial year (Grade One) of *Gymnasium* in the academic year 2000-1 was estimated by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religions at 14%. According to that estimate, as well as to the EUROSTAT estimates, Greece, as compared with other European countries, occupies a middle position [5].

Some additional interesting data coming from the latest survey carried out by the Institute of Education (Athens 2006) are presented through the following charts [5].

school dropout rates per **generation** in Greece (lower secondary education)

dropouts rates %

25
20
15
10
5
0

1981-82 1982-83 1987-88 1989-90 1991-92 1997-98 2000-01

student generation
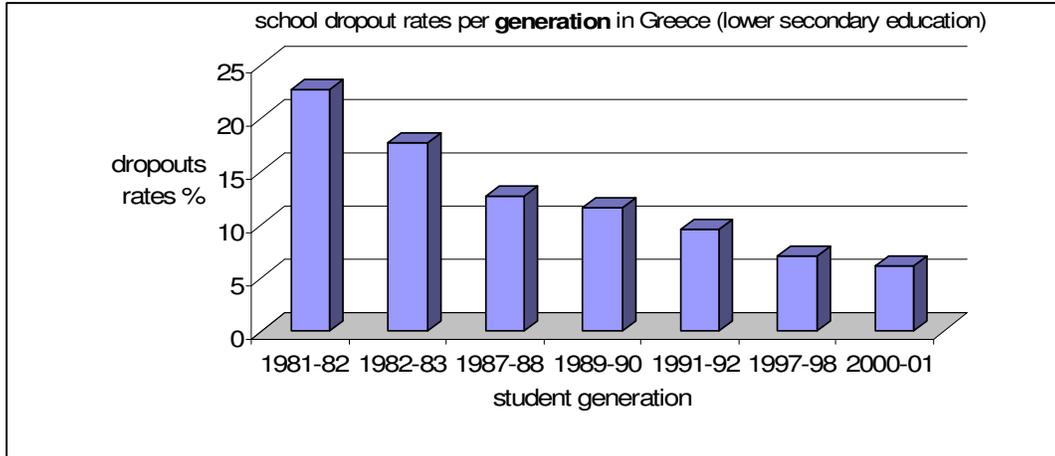
Chart 1: school dropout rates per generation in Greek lower secondary education (data from Institute of Education, Athens 2006)

dropout rates per level of secondary education (2000-01 generation)

dropout rates

25
20
15
10
5
0

6,09   3,32   20,28

lower   upper   technical-vocational
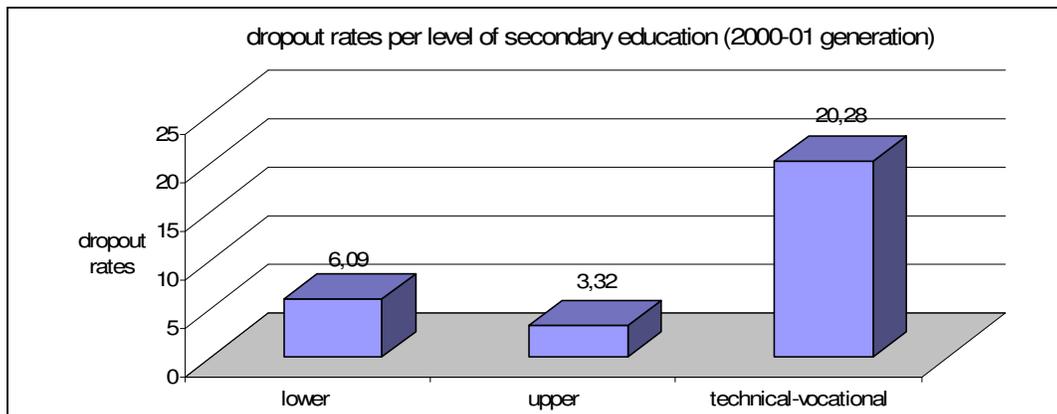
Chart 2: dropout rates per school level (secondary education, 2000-01 school generation) (data from Institute of Education, Athens 2006)

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dropout rates per grade at lower secondary education (2000-01 generation)

93,91

dropout rates

3,02   1,92   0,83   0,32

attended | not registered | 1st grade dropouts | 2nd grade dropouts | 3rd grade dropouts
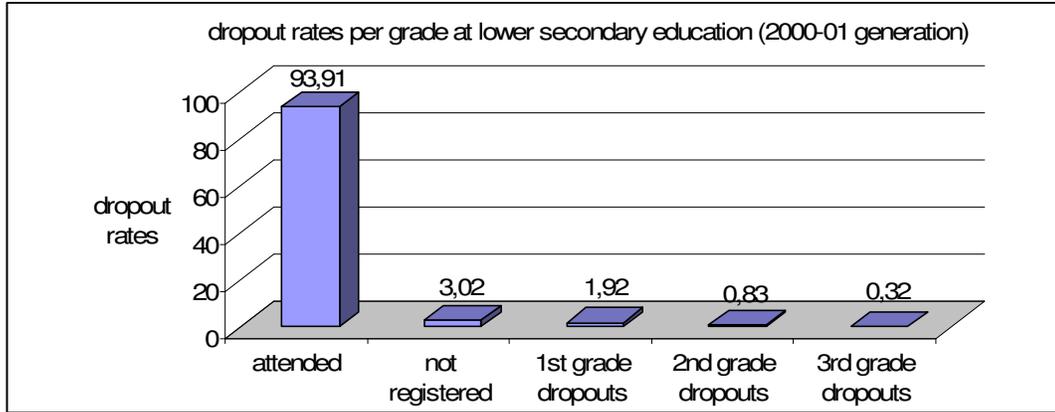
Chart 3: dropout rates per grade at lower secondary education (2000-01 school generation) (data from Institute of Education, Athens 2006)

dropout rates per grade at upper secondary education (2000-01 generation)

96,68

dropout rates

1,96   1,13   0,23

attended | 1st grade dropouts | 2nd grade dropouts | 3rd grade dropouts
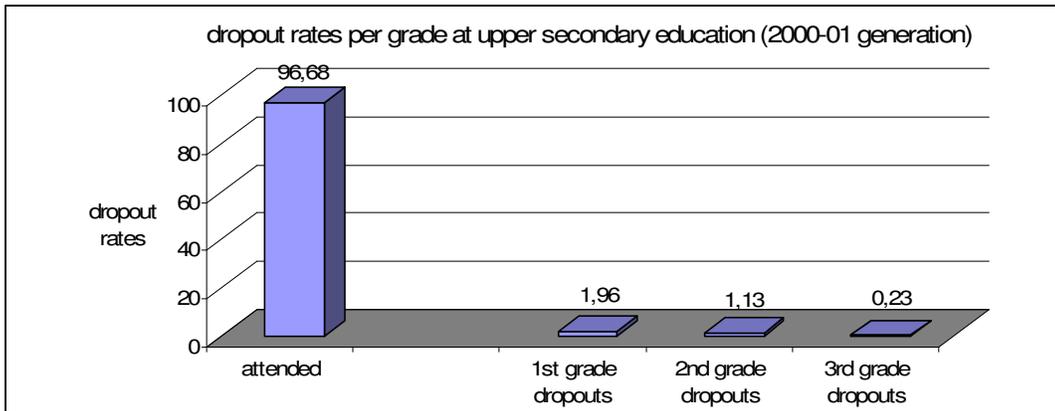
Chart 4: dropout rates per grade at upper secondary education (2000-01 school generation) (data from Institute of Education, Athens 2006)
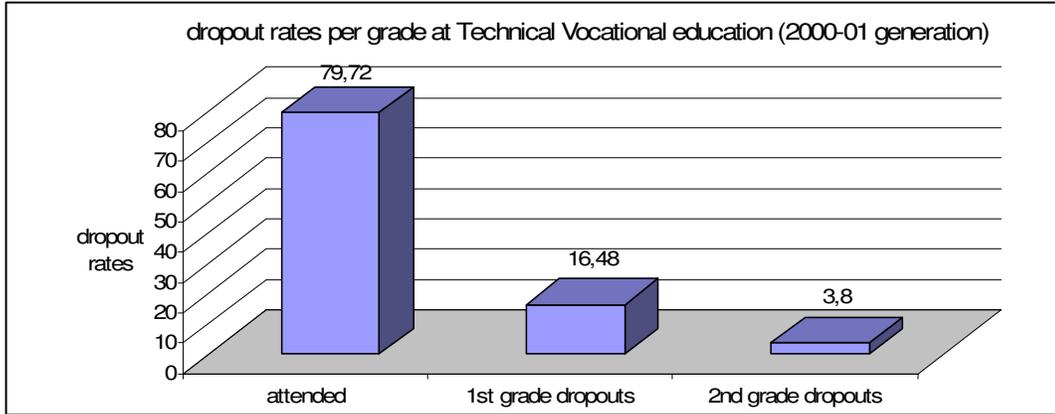
Chart 5: dropout rates per grade at Technical Vocationa education (2000-01 school generation) (data from Institute of Education, Athens 2006)
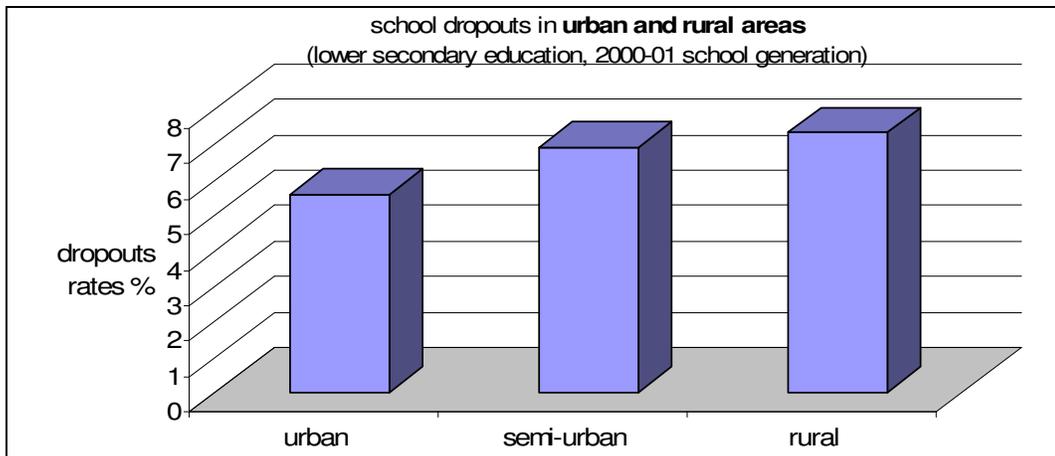
Chart 6: dropout rates in urban and rural areas (lower secondary education, 2000-01 school generation) (data from Institute of Education, Athens 2006)


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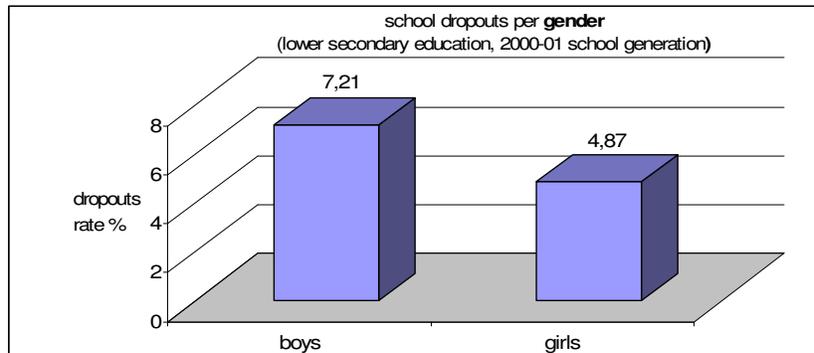
Chart 7: dropout rates per gender at lower secondary education (2000-01 school generation) (data from Institute of Education, Athens 2006)


% ΔΙΑΡΡΟΗ
1.83 - 4.89
4.89 - 10.79
10.79 - 17.08
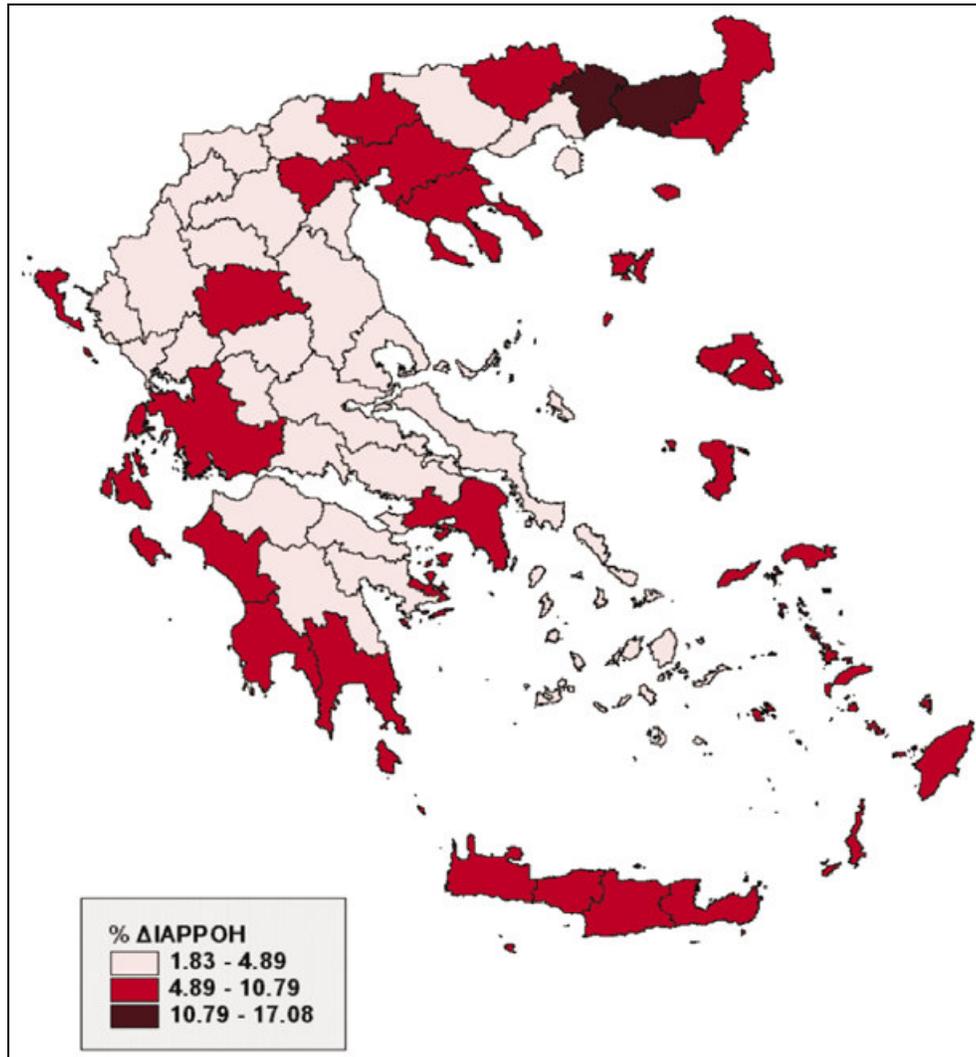
Chart 8. School dropout rates at lower secondary education per geographical area (2000-01 school generation) (data from Institute of Education, Athens 2006)

3. Main reasons and causes for leaving education

It is not just a coincidence, as recent research works in Greece have shown, that the number of pupil dropouts is higher in areas with low family income. Also, student dropout is higher in Technical Vocational Education, as compared with that in the overall educational schemes within the secondary post-compulsory education.

By summing up the basic causes of school dropout we are led to the conclusion that the main reasons are:

- The different education asset with which a child begins schooling. This is due, as mentioned above, to the low family educational standard. The consequence of that is the low performance of pupils with poor education assets, their branding as "bad pupils", their frustration and, ultimately, their dropout from school.

- A pupil's place of residence. Long distances between school and place of residence, according to research work, discourage pupils from continuing their schooling. Children living in rural areas are usually at a disadvantage as compared with children living in urban centers.

- The number of family members. Children of large families, especially of those with low income, face problems, mainly of financial character, and drop out from school [4]

Generally, research works have shown that school dropout is a fact involving many factors. It is a fact that touches upon several research fields, given that family structure and form, intra-family relationships, family socio-economic standard, education system structure and organization, pupil evaluation approach and the pedagogical methods used in addressing pupils with problems play a decisive role in preventing school dropout.

Therefore, with a view to approaching the fact in question in a more detailed way, we should classify the aforementioned factors in three basic parameters:

1. The socio-economic conditions which contribute to the development of pupil runaways.

2. The intra-family relationships and the way in which such relationships leave children unprotected in an environment that gradually becomes hostile for such children until its ultimate abandonment.

3. The intra-school relationships, as these are configured through the specific structure and organization of the educational system, which marginalizes the "weak" pupils until their ultimate "voluntary" eviction from the school environment.

These reasons and causes for early school leaving phenomenon identified by the relevant research literature have also been emerged clearly in the 5 case studies done in the frame of this project and they are presented and analysed in details in the section 9 of this report.

4. National bodies in charge of the prevention of the problem

- The Ministry of Education

- The Institute of Education "Transition Observatory" has been set up for research, collection and processing of data, in respect of school dropout, as well as for the identification of the basic causes of the situation.

- Regional educational authorities

5. National policies implemented to combat school early leaving

As far as school dropout at European level is concerned, in 2000 the proportion of the EU population that had left school early (having completed, in the best case, the lower cycle of the secondary school education) was approximately 20%. Within the framework of the strategic goal set by the Lisbon European Council, the Education European Council (Brussels 2003) set the following goal: By 2010 there should be at least a 50% reduction in the percentage of individuals dropping out from school early, as related to the year 2000 percentage, so that the average of individuals dropping out from school at an early stage may be equal or less than 10%.

The aforementioned Greek "Transition Observatory" has mapped the situation at geographic region and prefecture levels, so that action, especially in areas of high school dropout, may be taken. The mapping of the

situation at geographical region and prefecture levels indicates the high priority areas for related interventions within the educational planning [5].

Because, as we have mentioned above, one of the basic causes of dropout is school failure, pedagogical interventions have been studied by the Ministry of Education and the Institute of Education in order to find out how educational inequalities might be mitigated and how conditions for successful schooling of children falling short of "education asset" might be created.

Such interventions are: improved analytical programs and books, cutting down on teaching material, implementation of a flexible learning zone. The above measures, according to the Greek Ministry of Education and Religions, create the conditions for the development of intellectual ability and those driving forces that are necessary for a successful schooling, since they allow the development of basic skills (reading and mathematical abilities, ability for team work et al.).

Moreover, they promote enhancement of self-respect in any "weak" pupil as well, a fact that allows such a pupil's further stay in school. The "weak" pupils are supported by a Supportive Teaching Scheme, which has been instituted to address any special learning problems and prevent such pupils from dropping out from school. An effort is being made to enhance self-esteem in weak pupils through suitable further training of teachers.

"Induction Classes" and "Multi-cultural Schools" are in operation for the Integration and incorporation of foreign pupils. Special programs are implemented for the integration of children belonging to the gypsy community. School dropout in this case has been reduced from 75% to 24%. Second Opportunity Schools have been established giving the chance to young people who abandoned their schooling at an early stage to return to school.

6. Strategies developed at national and local level to prevent school early leaving

The issue of prevention strategies is important since prevention of a situation may often function in a more effective way than a redressing approach of it. During our research efforts, in none of the educational grades (education officials, school headmasters, and teachers) did we identify centrally organized strategies aiming at addressing the issue of school dropout.
The Greek educational system is quite centralized, a fact that was identified during our research effort, i.e. the decisions are made at ministerial and central administration levels. "The absence of central direction and planning in one single strategy addressing school dropout whereas it favors initiatives taken by teachers of some schools, leaves other schools inactive and unable to cope with the education needs of the pupils in the modern schools" [8].

The people in charge of secondary school education, who constitute those agencies that have to keep statistical data and direct the practices and actions of the schools in the areas of their jurisdiction, had clearly no central planning, no comprehensive national strategic goals, as they told us in relation to the issue of school dropout. The statistical data that they gave us were collected after our request. There was no direction or respective information on how to address the issue.

An initial finding at strategy level is that there are no directions nor institutionalized practices as part of an organized scheme dealing with the issue and originating from the Ministry, ending up at schools and, ultimately to the pupils who run the risk of dropping out from school or who keep already away from the school environment. The existing actions are not targeted but fragmentary, based on accidental identification of a pupil at risk and the sensitization of the school and the teachers who feel bewildered and unable to get involved in a situation because the centralized character of the central administration may give rise to problems for them, since there is no ex officio provision for them to play a part in such an involvement.

According to information given to us by officials of the secondary school education, what happens is that at the end of each school year each school has to send a statistical report, indicating who of the pupils failed to pass on account of absences (the annual report mentioned by headmistress Mrs. M.T. in our case study, see section 9), to the Secondary School Education directorate to which it belongs, which is then forwarded to the Ministry of Education.

From the aforementioned information, it primarily appears that there is no provision stipulating that any pupil running the risk of dropping out from school because of absences during the school year should be reported to the secondary school directorate, which, in its turn, should direct the action to be taken in order to reverse the specific situation. In the case where a pupil ends up in giving up his schooling, either due to absences or for any other reason, it does not seem, from our research work, that there is immediate briefing of the secondary school directorate so that some contact, may be maintained with the pupil who dropped out from school. Each school has details available, but the lists with the names and addresses of the pupils are not updated. This was found out from the start of our research, when, in our effort to find the whereabouts of such pupils from the data given to us by the schools, it proved difficult to spot them.   Thus, an initial issue emerges which is the timely listing and updating on the pupils at risk to drop out from school or on those who have already dropped out so that contact between school and such a pupil may not be lost.

In primary and secondary school education, where schooling is compulsory, the headmasters have the responsibility to inform the parents or the police about the pupil who gave his schooling up. However, in such a case the issue is addressed by means of advices sent to the parents without any penal liability being imputed. The role of action development at compulsory education level, as stated to us by the Chief of the Secondary School Education for Vocational Education, is undertaken by the Parents Association or additionally, in special cases where particular care is needed, by the Youth Counseling Station, which, however, deals mainly with offensive behavior cases or with pupils who have psychological problems.

At the Lyceum level (upper secondary school), where schooling is not compulsory and where, as commonly believed, very few pupils drop out – since it is supposed that those who want to continue have already made up their minds upon completion of their schooling at the Gymnasium level (lower secondary school)– the school and the teachers have limited action possibilities. These are restricted to timely advice sent to the pupil's family environment, when the pupil's absences are over 25, to the communication with the pupil involved – for an initial level of discussion and positive encouragement – and his/her parents so that, through joint action, the pupil's decision to give up his schooling may be averted.

Moreover, the institution of supporting teaching, which is organized in certain schools and which is aimed at helping pupils with learning difficulties to overcome them without having to join an extra-mural establishment (commercial coaching centers) not only is not operational in the schools that we investigated, but, also, it does not seem to have become a successful practice towards addressing the problem.   The aforementioned institution does not provide motivation to a teacher to participate, since the Ministry specifies that if all the teachers do not have their timetable properly completed no over-time payment is justifiable, which means that a teacher, in order to complete his/her timetable, will have to do supporting teaching without extra money. On the other hand, what is going to change for a pupil if the supporting teaching is to be given by the same teacher who teaches in the morning hours?

7. Identification of Training Initiatives in the area

The institution which has to keep Primary and Secondary School Education teachers informed and to provide further education to them is the PEK (Regional Further Education Centers), and usually provide introductory further education courses, mainly to newly appointed teachers, as well as other further education courses related to the solution of a variety of problems concerning daily school action and briefing on educational changes attempted in the field of Education. In this research project, at the respective PEK of Achaea

Prefecture, no further education programs for teachers on the issue in question have been implemented, as found out from the teachers approached.

The need for teacher further education came up to the surface each time the teachers approached tried to propose both at the teacher level and at the headmaster level some strategies aimed at addressing similar situations in the future. It was clear that, apart from the absence of time, which is an action-restraining factor for the teachers, the presence of specialists, i.e. of people who have been trained to address in an appropriate manner situations that lead pupils to stop their studies before completion, is necessary.

The teachers themselves clearly expressed the need for specialists operating at school level as coordinators of action groups ready to address school dropout.

Further Education of Teachers should be aimed at recognizing and identifying the features suggesting that a pupil is running a dropout risk; at recognizing the special learning difficulties faced by such a pupil so that the pupil may be helped to overcome the problem and not to be branded as indifferent for learning and worthy of rejection. In case where such features are recognized, the teachers will be in a position to direct the pupil involved to appropriate counseling stations, such as the K.D.A.Y (Identification, Evaluation and Support Center), to which pupils with learning difficulties and possible intellectual deprivation may turn, always with the cooperation of the school and the guardians, for formal recognition of the problem and its assessment.

Also, further education of teachers on pedagogical training issues as well, so that teachers may be informed on the implementation of modern pedagogical teaching methods aimed at activating all of the class pupils in the educational process and, through the application of appropriate teaching methods in the teaching process, the learning process may not remain for the few, privileged ones, but for all the children in the class, including those probably unable to perform in the traditional type of teaching. Lastly, further education of teachers and their specialization in the implementation of programs and methods enhancing intercultural education is considered to be necessary, as it now constitutes a fact, which we, as a society, ought to accept and deal with appropriately.

8. Identification of best practices

The investigation of the features that lead a pupil to dropout or even of the features indicating whether a specific action is successful and, therefore, it has to be repeated or extended is identified in this research work at an empirical level only and mainly at school and teacher levels. From our research work, it did not appear that teachers use some kind of planning or listing of details regarding the signs shown by pupils running the dropout risk. Dealing with the features which appear to be a kind of evidence about a pupil's dropout is clearly based on casual and unmethodical actions, which are based on the personal initiative of some of the teachers and which are assessed on the basis of the results, given that those people do not apply specific techniques whereby to check their actions.

This is clearly shown in the way Mr. Vassilis P. (see case studies in section 9), a teacher, answered; although he appears to be sensitized regarding the dropout of one of his pupils, he was late in getting information on the reasons that led his pupil (Nicos M.) to drop out from school. This specific case clearly shows the issue of "casualness" in identifying school dropout within the very school where it happened, as he mentions "*I was not in charge of the department and did not know the absences of the pupils*". If there was an action plan, even just at school level, if the pupil's problem had been discussed in the class council, the teacher would have been informed – who was sensitive enough to act and positively encourage the pupil – and could probably influence certain circumstances, as he himself mentions "…*I would have given a recommendation to the teacher with whom he had a problem and would have informed the Headmaster*" so that the specific case could be

addressed in a different way. The need for cooperation between the teachers within the same school is only too obvious in the above dropout case, where a teacher, through his clashing relationship with the pupil, had led the circumstances to such a point that the pupil was being loaded with absences, running the risk of becoming unable to stay in school and the other teacher, who could function as a protective mechanism, was not informed.

The need for briefing and coordination of specific action practices at problem prevention level, although regarded as important, cannot be fully met. However, there are institutional bodies, which, if they can operate with coordination, method and target, they can play a decisive part in addressing the issue.

First of all, the person in charge of the class, who can have a better picture of the class than anyone else, can inform the Class Councils, consisting of all the teaching staff of every class in the presence of the assistant headmaster, on the issues that need to be dealt with at learning level or on other problems concerning the pupils. By regular cooperation through those Councils, the teachers concerned may, first of all, be informed, propose solutions or recommendations in relation to the solution of specific problems concerning pupils and get activated in informing immediately and cooperating with the family involved before the problem becomes marginal.

Moreover, during the teachers association pedagogical meetings, which are convened once every quarter, namely at the end of each quarter and where discussion takes place about the learning and family problems of the pupils section by section, there is room for planning, organizing, implementing and monitoring specific practices, which will be operating in a preventive and protective manner for the pupils and will be encouraging cooperation with the parents. It could, however, become significantly helpful if at those meetings an action plan could be organized addressing the dropout issue.

At each Secondary School Education Directorate, there is a Youth Counseling Station, to which any school may turn, with the written agreement of the guardian, seeking assistance in dealing with learning and psychological and social problems of pupils. Also, the KESYP (Center for Counseling Support) with which schools communicate when dealing with issues of psychological and social care or vocational orientation of the pupils. The Centers for Counseling and Orientation, however, do not specialize their action in a specific target group, such as that of pupils who dropped out from school or pupils about to drop out from school. Schools approach those agencies in exceptional cases of problem situations, perhaps because parents are biased against those centers and refuse to admit that their child has a problem. Thus, agencies staffed with appropriate personnel and in a position to provide a lot for the protection of children against dropout get incriminated.

The KDAY (Center for Diagnosis, Assessment and Support), proposed by one of the teachers, to which pupils with learning difficulties and probable intellectual deficiency, always with the cooperation of school and guardians, apply for a formal acknowledgement of the problem and its assessment. The KDAY gives an official document to the pupil who has a problem which has to be submitted to the school, as e.g. in the case of dyslexia, so that the pupil's evaluation may be done in the right way. This helps in dealing with a probable school failure as a result of a pupil's learning difficulty and not as a result of a pupil's intellectual inability.

The SEP offices (offices of School Vocational Orientation) have been mentioned in a different part of this research work as capable of playing a positive role in the whole issue. The mark of current times is the transition into the community of knowledge, life long learning. Knowledge and learning constitute prerequisites for an individual to get integrated in society, to utilize all the wealth of civilization, as well to solve bread winning problems, to get professionally integrated and to have future continuous perspectives of professional

employment [9], [10]. Thus, vocational orientation, apart from a learning process, should take up a more active part in supporting pupils at a counseling level as well as at identification level, recognizing the individuals that run the risk of abandoning their schooling and help them overcome the difficulties they are faced with, to select educational outlets suiting their interests, their preferences, their goals. The SEP in order to achieve such a goal have to be staffed by appropriate personnel, specialized in counseling and orientation.

9. Case Study

This research work is based on data derived from interviews given by educational authorities, school headmasters, teachers, pupils and parents (the questionnaires used for the interviews have been attached to the report).

The educational authorities which participated in our research efforts consisted of Primary and Secondary Education officials from Achaea Prefecture, namely the Chief of the 1st Office of the Secondary School Education, the Chief of the Vocational Education Office and the Chief of the Primary School Education Office and one officer from the Institute of Education responsible for the nation-wide surveys on the school dropout carried out during the last decade.

The second group of interviewees in our sample includes three School Headmasters, one of whom being a Gymnasium Headmaster and the remaining two being Lyceum Headmasters. From the Gymnasium a total of 12 pupils dropped out over the last three years (equivalent to 4% of the overall dropouts), while from the two Lyceums two and three pupils, respectively, dropped out (it is pointed out that in one of the schools the dropouts were of Albanian origin). As far as it concerns the comparison of the situation in question with the dropout percentages in other schools of the same area, the interviewees estimated that the percentages were about the same as or lower (Gymnasium) than those of the remaining schools, a finding attributed by some of them to the fact that they are found in an urban area.

The teachers, who were included in our research efforts and whose views are set out below, were teachers, for at least one year, of some of the pupils who took part in our research project. Namely, three of them speak of pupils who have already dropped out from their school and one of the teachers speaks of one of his pupils who runs a dropout risk which was clearly marked in the two previous academic years.

The responses of the pupils were collected from 4 pupils who had already dropped out from school and one pupil under dropout. The parents of three of the aforementioned pupils who had dropped out from school (namely their mothers) took part in the interview procedure.

A fundamental concern of our research was to investigate the factors making young people abandon their school environment, through the words of the very people involved in the procedure, as well as the words of their environment (parents, teachers and wider agencies of the educational community – school headmasters and education officers). Thus, the research work was based on the investigation of four axes, whereupon our concern and interest moved. These axes are:

- The dropout risk factors (related to the school and external ones and the way in which we can identify them).

- The factors that could protect pupils against dropout risks (school and non-school).

- The gradual course of the pupil which often leads pupils to school dropout.

- The main causes of school dropout: educational factors, family influences, personal factors, community factors.

Appropriate people that can spot out the dropout risks and speak about them are all those who come in touch with and are involved, the one or the other way, in the educational procedure, affecting, to a higher or lower extent, learners in a positive or negative way and those are none others than the teachers and the parents, i.e. those who are called by a lot of sociologists as "the important others".

The responses given by the parents are focused on the sense of school failure as the basic risk element of learners. Expressions such as "he/she had (cognitive) gaps", "he/she should have been given some help in his/her lessons", he/she was a "careless, neglectful" pupil, "he/she was not fond of school homework", "he/she was not doing his/her homework", "it is a matter of teacher", "he/she might have suffered from dyslexia", characterize those elements that in the relevant bibliography are defined as school failure. Despite the phrasal differentiations, the prevalent view is that "school failure describes a pupil's condition which comes as a result of a deficient completion or non fulfillment of instructive and learning goals at a specific school level" [11]. Besides, as pointed out by Askouni et al. [12] "school failure, however defined, clearly shows, on the one hand, the weakness of the educational system to ensure genuine equality of opportunities, despite the efforts made towards that direction and, on the other hand, the inadequate political will on the part of every government to address boldly the disparities hitting education and get really interested in individuals or groups of individuals found in a disadvantageous position from the point of view of, linguistic, ethnic, cultural, religious and wider social particularities". According to other researchers [13], [14] school dropout, if it is not due to clear prohibition imposed by the family for social or financial reasons, is related to school failure.

The teachers, on the other hand, argue that such signs are spotted out at a very early stage, usually from the beginning of the academic year, with absences from the initial months, either out of "indifference", "lack of interest" in the lessons, pupils' "weakness" in the lessons, their "marks, ""he/she has got a pass because we provided assistance to him/her" or "aggressive attitude towards their teachers". The views of the teachers about the features of a pupil in risk are connected, on the one hand, with the sense of the pupil's failure to meet his/her instructive and learning goals and, on the other hand, with the expectations of the teachers from such pupils.

In accordance with quite a few of researchers, the teachers' expectations may affect the future performance of a pupil, the positive ones boosting performance motivation in pupils, whilst the negative ones undermining such a motivation and, therefore, leading, according to the conditions, to wrong actions, if not to complete obliteration of every action towards performance and progress [15]. Indifference, inability to follow, absence of interest, are expressions incriminating a pupil, as they move the burden of responsibilities to him/her, considering him/her as the sole liable person.   It is possible that such a pupil might have come across that attitude during his/her school course and might have greatly affected his/her self-image and self-esteem, both, as to his/her learning abilities and as to those concerning his/her personality [16].

That dimension is derived from the responses given by the pupils when they talk about their relationships with their teachers. They characterize them as indifferent, "I have been badly treated", our "relationship was indifferent", "I was not bothering them and they were not bothering me", "I used to have arguments with quite a few of them and I was ending at the headmaster's office for punishment", "because I was wearing ear-rings in the Lyceum 1st Grade and used to wear peculiar clothes, they did not show friendly feelings towards me, I was, moreover, a bad pupil". When appearance and behavior play an inhibitive part in the development of a healthy relationship between a pupil and a teacher, the pupil's isolation possibilities increase with all the consequences that such isolation may have. "It depends on our teachers" we are told by Dimitris, a pupil who still attends school, although he used to be at a dropout risk, emphasizing the other dimension in the subject of the teachers' role.

Parents, on the other hand, when they are not found near their children, when they consider as exclusive responsibility of a school the educational procedure and are at difficulty to identify those elements that will help

pupils with learning or other type of difficulties to get smoothly integrated in the school environment, cannot function protectively or counter-offsetting in the difficulties that a pupil is faced with in the educational procedure. Of course, there may often be financial, family or other reasons that do not allow them to be near their children, as, for example, in the case of Tassos's mother who comes from Albania and has the exclusive responsibility of bringing up her children (large, single-parent family), where it is very difficult for her, for objective reasons, to meet the school demands, especially when she has to send the pupil to work and the family survival depends on that. When a pupil is called upon to combine work with schooling – either in order to support the family financially, as in the case of Tassos, who defines himself the framework that would protect him by saying that "they should not have been sending me to work" (he means the parents), or because of personal need to become independent from the family, as in the case of Nikos G. and that of Medin – he runs the risk, due to fatigue and overload, to feel that he cannot cope and that he has to drop out from school.

A lot of teachers pointed out that the manner in which school dropout should be dealt with is related to communication and discussion, firstly and above all, with the pupil found at risk, as well as communication aiming at cooperation with the child's family, so that all of them together may function protectively so that they themselves, in their turn, may as well address the pupil's dropout course. Moreover, they use the flexible type of marking so that weak pupils may get a chance of not repeating the same class with all the negative consequence that this has on his/her psychology, as he/she feels inferior as to his/her peers who go ahead while he/she stays behind. Flexible marking and positive supports are fundamental reasons that keep Demitris still in classrooms, as expressed by his teacher "Yes, because this pupil continued with a lot of problems and is now found in the Lyceum 3rd Grade", (teacher, Mr. Constantine K.).

Nevertheless, in an effort to track down the course of a "runaway" pupil, it should be pointed out that the decision made by that pupil is not an instantaneous one. It is a process where problems get accumulated and, at some point of time, a cause is given (such as that in the case of Nicos where the cause was his conflict with his teacher) or in the case of Medin and Tassos where there was an accumulation of absences – some of which as a result of fatigue due to work for a living – and the children do not continue their schooling. The problem has long roots back in time..

From our research work, namely from our interview with Sophia (Nicos G.'s mother) one may understand that dimension, i.e. that the course of a pupil running the risk of dropping out from school at some of the education levels is, usually, predetermined by his/her Education 1st Level (Primary School). "*The problem began in the Primary School. In Primary School 1st and 2nd Grades, they had a teacher who taught them only Religion. She did not give them home work, exercises so that I, too, could assist them…. In the Primary School, where a child gets its educational foundations homework should have been given to the pupils. Not just Religion, grammar should have been given, as well as mathematics providing the chance to the parents to give a helping hand. They should have been given the chance of writing essays.*".

This happens because the Primary School is the place where prerequisites at cognitive and social levels are either created or not, a fact that allows or not a smooth integration in the educational process. If cognitive gaps have been created, a pupil feels that he/she is unable to cope and, thus, the conditions for gradual isolation are there and, depending on his/her character, he/she is led to the fringe of the educational process and activates the defense mechanisms in order to cope with his/her learning shortcoming. Those mechanisms may lead to aggressive behavior during a class – perhaps interpreted by some as "entanglement in the fringe" – and to respective characterizations (naughty, wild, indifferent), as in the case of Nicos G., where his behavior was the point on which his teachers focused or, on the contrary, as in the case of Medin, who kept himself to himself and did not bother anyone, as by adopting that attitude he did not create any problems in the classroom "*with the teachers our relationships were indifferent. I did not bother them and they did not bother me. As to my peers, I used to have three friends, in the remaining of them I am not interested at all, although I am a sociable person*". On account of his "good" behavior he may, probably, win his teachers' favor, who rewards him with words such as "good, conscientious child", helping him to pass and get to the next grade, as with Nicos (with the exception

of his hard luck to get into conflict with his teacher) who received compliments such as "*weak pupil but conscientious*" and "*good child*" etc.

In both of the aforementioned cases of pupils, the problem begins at the moment when the pupil does not achieve his/her smooth integration in the school class framework. The class is the point where a pupil comes in touch with the formal teaching system and, at the same time, gets socialized, as well as evaluated according to his/her performance rates. As stated by Talcott Parsons, the classroom is the most important means of socialization throughout the period from joining the Primary School 1st Grade to joining the job market [24]. The socialization process may be summed up in the development of consensus and the abilities of the individuals which are substantial conditions for their future roles to be exercised [17].

Thus, the pupil creates a "history", which characterizes him/her as opposed to the "important others" (friends, teachers), the teachers constituting, on the one hand, the "rival" group – as pointedly stated by Nicos G. "*with quite a few of the teachers I used to have conflicts and I was ending at the headmaster's office for punishment. With my peers I had no problems. Of course, I was not very sociable*" - and on the other hand the friends-classmates constituting the group that feeds with positive boost the "inferior" pupil (Institute of Education, 2006) – "*with my classmates the best* (*relationship*) (Nikos M.), "*my friends told me to come back and that the school may efface my absences*" (Medin). However, even if for some pupils, such as Tassos, marginalization is developed at a higher educational grade – "*by the 3rd Grade of the Gymnasium I was a good pupil (I was getting 17/20 average marks), in the 1st Grade of the Lyceum I failed in 6 lessons, I was not studying and I was not showing any interest. I found the lessons difficult and no one helped me*" – is the first stage and basic characteristic of his course towards his gradual isolation from school and his ultimate dropout.

When a pupil is found in puberty (as in the case of the youths whom we approached) the growth changes they go through in the biophysical, cognitive, emotional and social fields [18] and the effort made by an adolescent to build his/her personality up makes him/her what Kurt Lewin had called "marginal man" with all the negative effects on his mental life, insecurity, uncertainty and intense struggle for identity acquisition. His/her "position" in the classroom environment plays a significant part, as it constitutes achievement or failure of the development goal related to the social field and this is why it constitutes a presage of whether he/she will be led or not to abandonment of school.

In our effort to outline the course of a pupil towards dropping out from school, we have to distinguish the pupil who will decide to leave school as soon as he/she completes a course of studies from the pupil who begins absences (usually one-hour absences) so that he/she gets gradually away from the place where he/she feels, in one or another way, that he/she does not belong – "*my friends told me to come back and that the school may efface my absences, I did not want*" (Medin) – to the point where he/she is compelled (on account of excessive absences) to abandon schooling.

Sometimes there is a transitional period from the moment of a pupil drops out from school to the moment he/she enters a vocational school, as Nicos G did, or the job market, as Tassos and Medin did, leaving in suspense-standby the issue of continuation of studies "*I want by next year to join a Technical Lyceum to read in order to become a car electrical mechanic and sit exams for a Technical University to read for Electrical Engineering*" (Tassos), "*if I am not accepted next year in the Technical Lyceum, I will come back here and we will see what is going to happen*" (Medin). The possibility of repeating his studies in some of the evening lyceums, after a lapse of some time, as Nicos G., is rather unlikely, as it is very difficult to work for a living and study at the same time.

A shared feature by all pupils is that the issue of dropping out from the school environment is experienced as a personal problem of the children themselves. "*I do not understand the lessons, I do not try either*" (Dimitris), "*in the 1st Grade of the Lyceum I failed in 6 lessons, I was not studying and I couldn't care less. I found the lessons difficult and no one helped me*" (Tassos), "*moreover, the lessons were difficult, but I would have coped with them*" (Nicos G.). Weakness in lessons, low performance are elements that contribute to school failure, which is one of the basic causes of dropout and negatively affects the psychological condition of such children. In most

of the cases they create guilty conscience, low self-esteem and lead pupils to aggressive behavior out of their inferiority complex, arising from learning difficulties, as opposed to their classmates at school and their teachers.

Also, it is typical that in most of the cases the need or wish for a job appears as the basic cause for dropping out from school. Apart from the cases of Tassos and Medin, where the issue of job is a bread-winning need, Nikos chose to get involved with athletics and identifies as cause his conflict with a teacher of his, although, as it appears from the specific interview, the aforementioned pupil had already chosen to get involved in athletics against his studies, either as a result of natural aptitude or as a result of his learning problems (but this conclusion can only be reached arbitrarily). The remaining pupils expressed the need for integration in the job market in a way that shows that the school constitutes an obstacle in their plans "*I did not want to study in a university. I wanted to open a car garage and become financially independent*" we were told by a pupil running the risk of dropping out from school, although he is still attending it.

Especially about the two of our pupils (Medin, Tassos), who come from Albania, the causes that led to their decision to abandon their schooling are identified as the difficulties they had in understanding the lessons, the difficulties to adjust to the school environment, the indifference on the part of the school environment to help them integrate. In the cases of foreign pupils, the question raised is whether school life may configure favorable conditions for a smooth integration of such pupils or whether any good intentions and legislative initiatives on the part of the state are hindered by a strong nation-centered tendency that permeates our educational system and Greek society as a whole. Tassos expresses in a better way that concern: "*I found the lessons difficult and no one helped me. I was coming from a different country (Albania) and whilst I suffered from dyslexia they did not approve my document, I was hearing comments about my origin and I was facing indifference. I joined the evening Lyceum, where I did not make it because the time-table was hard to follow… From the start until the middle of the 1st Grade of the Lyceum (of the evening school), when I gave it up because I was working for a bakery and was unable to cope with the load*". The Greek school – and on this point there is full convergence of views – showed and continues to show serious weaknesses in addressing the problems of repatriating and foreign pupils. It is a fact that is confirmed by the bibliography and statistical details regarding school dropout on the part of those categories of people [19], [20], [21], [22].

Moreover, non connection of education at the Lyceum level with the job market for pupils who have not the luxury of "a leaving certificate without job guarantee" functions in a preventive and not protective way in their effort to remain at school. "*I want to become an electrical mechanic and the school does not provide such knowledge to me. I will go, as soon as I finish to OAED (organization supporting unemployed people)*" we are told by the pupil (Dimitris) who runs risk of dropping out from school. The Technical Education seemed to have been established in order to prepare pupils for a professional career and had important differences from the general education provided by the lyceum. In the basic provisions of Law 2640/98, one of the goals of the secondary school technical-vocational education is the combination of general education with specialized technical vocational knowledge which helps professional integration in the job market [23]. From what it appears from the following statement made by the educator Mr. Constantine B., the technical education did not only achieve to meet its goal, "*He* (the parent) *was pressing the child to finish the Lyceum without realizing that his son had more chances to complete his course of studies if he joined the Technical Lyceum. A lot of parents have little respect for the Technical Lyceum*", "*And indeed, it would be good if the General Lyceum, not the Technical Lyceum, included special programs aiming at a specialization for the job market, in order to acquire some value*" (Tassos), "*I wanted to join the Technical Lyceum, but my father did not want me to do so*" (Dimitris) – but also in many cases ended up accepting the disqualified masses of children from the lower and middle strata.

As pointedly stated by Vergidis, nowadays, 'it is generally admitted as it appears even from the legal framework regarding further education of civil servants and, particularly, of teachers (laws 1943/91 and 2009/92) that the kind of education provided at all levels is not adequate for the whole duration of our professional life… If, however, the school does no longer provide adequate knowledge… resulting in an ever increasing need for

further education of adults" [9] then how can it protect young people with inadequate schooling, guard them against the problems of social disparities and exclusion in a society that technologically develops at very fast rates and sets the prevalent cultural standards in the countries and regions of the periphery?

For the teachers "*learning deficiencies*", "*low learning readiness*", "*lack of interest in learning*", "*absence of goals*", "*absence of vocational orientation*", "*absence of impetus and special approach on the part of the school*", "*absence of support on the part of the family*" are the basic causes of school dropout on the part of pupils. The majority of the teachers with whom we discussed the issue referred to causes related to the pupils themselves and their families, their weaknesses and deficiencies and do not particularly refer to the their own role or to the role of the school in the whole process.

The higher the gradation (school headmasters) the more general the causes become, as the relationship and contact becomes more formal and not so direct as with the teachers. Family, financial and cultural and social reasons and, especially "*poor financial family condition, indifference for learning on the part of the parents, the need of the pupils to get a job. Also, absence of vocational orientation in foreign pupils who do not know what to study, since they do not command the language and do not have good interconnections*", "*school failure, entanglement with the school fringe*", "*bread winning reasons…*", "*usually dropout appears among pupils with low social and educational background*", bring forward again in the speculation fore the theory of the education asset.

The education officials, also, make more generalized statements, such as financial reasons as "*especially the need of pupils for a job*" geographical reasons "*big distance between place of residence and school unit*", social reasons "*special groups, gypsies*", personal reasons "*a pupil's low self-esteem*", "*causes arising from the family environment, the educational level of parents*", "*absence of encouragement and support on the part of the teachers*", "*if it (the school) facilitates those pupils who are compelled to work for a living*".

10. Conclusions

From the research works carried out by the Transition Observatory, it appears that most of the pupils that drop out from school at the Secondary School/Gymnasium level have as a common characteristic the low family socio-economic and educational level, as well as their low school performance at the Primary School and Secondary School/Gymnasium levels. As to the remaining characteristics, however, there is a wide spectrum of variation, e.g., as to the point at which they drop out from school, the extent of work involvement, family attitude etc. As far as the identification of pupils tending to drop out from school, the Institute of Education research workers think that it is not difficult to spot such pupils.

This research work has dealt with the causes and factors leading to school dropout and the deficiencies that make fighting against it difficult, through the views on the issue of those directly involved (Officials, Headmasters, teachers, parents and pupils). The qualitative analysis of the situation by means of a random sample that was selected was aimed not so much at tracking its extent (besides, there are already data on that) but at identifying the causes and the way in which the whole issue is interpreted by the factors of the educational system, from superior staff to pupils.

The conclusions in this work agree with the view expressed by many theorists that the existing educational system, as it is operated, has the largest share of responsibility in the creation and preservation of the conditions that lead a lot of youths to their exclusion from further education. Social and financial disparities and the educational asset of pupils cannot on their own lead to "rejection" of the unprivileged young people. When the "safety net" of the system itself is perforated, then the field lends itself to the preservation and reproduction of those disparities and their diffusion into education.

As far as it concerns the causes leading some pupils to drop out from school at an early stage, as these resulted from our research work, the prevalent ones are need for a job, low school performance in combination

with low self-esteem, bad relationships with teachers and indifference on the part of the latter, as well as discontentment of pupils in respect of the courses offered and their opinion that schools do provide adequate means for their future professional life. Shared opinion by all the pupils who participated in this study is that their school did not try to meet their needs, a fact that should not leave us indifferent to. When the pupils themselves state that they are disappointed with the educational system and when the system itself rejects them, we cannot shut our eyes to a problem which will be perpetuated and which needs immediate solution.

The absence of organized strategies and method aimed at addressing the fact of school dropout is apparent and pointed out by all the categories of the interviewees. There are significant gaps in the identification of the pupils who have dropped out from school, as well as in the provision of incentives to continue their schooling. And while (thankfully) there are people showing to be concerned with the issue and willing to provide their practical assistance, they are given neither adequate motivation nor the required means to do so. Therefore, we need to address the issue in a holistic, coordinated and controlled way. The problem starts up in any school unit and it is there that any problems and worries of pupils can be identified and then be forwarded upwards. This means that any legislative reforms that may take place in the name of equality of opportunities for all can provide very little if they are not based on the actual needs of the pupils and this can happen only within the school itself.

In this research work we collected and processed very interesting views from education officials, teachers and parents. The views, however, that roused our interest and concern are those of the pupils. It has been made clear that their untimely abandonment of school did not constitute so much a conscious decision of theirs as rather a submission to the "persecution" imposed by the educational system itself, by not creating the conditions for them to overcome the difficulties they were faced with. Even though the school did not *convince* them that it is in a position to ensure for them a good professional future, they are clearly disposed towards continuing their learning and it is really worth while providing to them the incentives to do so.

11. Recommendations

Regarding the factors that we assume as capable of protecting pupils against dropout and abandonment of the school environment, these are directly related to the mitigation of the aforementioned reasons that cause the specific situation.

- Socio-economic conditions: for a great number of research workers, the issue of equal opportunities is not an exclusively school issue. There is a need for broader economic changes capable of helping families to address the current   financial stalemate. According to press research works, a great percentage of the Greek households is currently overburdened with loans from banks. There is no provision for major social child benefits and the result is that child upbringing is entirely a family responsibility without government assistance.

- As far as intra-family relationships are concerned, a serious effort has been made recently with the institution of parent schools, but there is a considerable   shortage of psychologists and family councilors in schools.

- As regards intra-school relationships, we should stay at two points:

  1. the administration of the school unit
  2. the class as a "social system", as pointedly referred to by Talkot Parsons [24]. Although the class constitutes a part of the school unit, there are, nevertheless, individual features of intra-school relationships which develop only in class environment.

The school unit: In view of what has been stated above, the way in which a school unit is administered influences pupils both, in their understanding of their individual positions among their peers within an organized

system and in assimilating democratic or non-democratic operational rules of the particular system to which they belong. A School Unit is a means of socialization and political awareness since pupils constitute part of an institutionalized community to which they tend to become integrated and within which they develop personality and the kind of characteristics that will enable them to assume, as adults, respective roles.

Therefore, a school community unable to assimilate and integrate all pupils within itself means that it does not follow the methods and techniques that solve the pupil integration problems; on the contrary, it perpetuates and intensifies them if, ultimately, a part of the learner potential, usually the socially and financially weakest, drops out from school at an early stage.

As we know, in Greece, the current method governing the administration of primary and secondary education school units was institutionalized in 1985 by virtue of Law 1566/85. The headmaster and the teaching staff association are, according to the law, the administration instruments. The pupils participate through their associations in their assemblies regarding issues that concern them but without the right to vote.

Obviously, in an entirely centralized system, such as the Greek one, the issues concerning the pupils are focused, in the view of the legislators, on matters regarding excursions and happenings. The remaining issues are determined by the Ministry of Education and Religions. The question raised in this case is whether pupils experience a democratic intra-school environment capable of helping them to get integrated in the whole.

By democratic school environment we mean the environment which will mitigate the particular features of those children that, for certain of the aforementioned reasons, are unable to get normally integrated in the school environment. The manner, in which the school unit operational rules are imposed, as well as the use and the kind of punishments, in addition to the decision-making method, are the elements that characterize an administration as authoritarian or democratic.

The Class: is the point where pupils come in touch with the formal teaching system and, at the same time, get socialized and evaluated according to their performance rates. As stated by Talcott Parsons [23], the class constitutes the most important socialization means throughout the period from entering Grade One of the primary school to entering the Job Market. The socialization function may be summed up in the development of consensus and the skills that are essential preconditions for individuals to practice their future roles.

As we understand from what has been described above, an important role in the prevention of school dropout is played by both, the Headmaster of each school and the Teaching Staff Association, given that they are the administrative and pedagogical instruments of each school. The way in which problems are dealt with, as well as the way in which pupils are treated, especially pupils with problems, determine to a great extent the development of a positive or negative climate in schools.

Therefore, further education and sensitization of teachers on this particular matter is of great importance. In Greece, apart from an induction course on general pedagogical issues and some further education efforts for in-service teachers, such efforts have not been made so far.

What has been set as an imperative need, mainly at school level (headmasters, teachers) is the reinforcement of the schools by specialized personnel (special advisors, psychologists or social workers), who, having undergone special further education on the dropout issue, will be in a position to help the pupils who face quite a few of schooling problems, as well as the teachers themselves so that they may address such pupils in an appropriate manner within the framework of the power and responsibilities attached to their roles and positions. To an intervention by a Municipal Authority [10] asking for psychologists to be appointed in schools, the response was negative. For anything they want, the Ministry of Education will step in and only in cases of needed counseling they can call a psychologist. The institution of School Counselor, as operating at the moment, cannot help in addressing the issue, as it is rather activated at pointing out to the teachers matters of didactic character.

Lastly, the need for upgrading and widening the institutional role of the SEP (School Vocational Orientation) offices has emerged. Apparently, those offices, at some point along their course, lost their initial orientation and goals which were to help pupils select their profession on the basis of the market needs, as well as to support emotionally and psychologically pupils with learning or other kind of difficulties so that the causes of school dropout may be dealt with in a timely manner.

As to the funding necessity, the views are dissenting. There are those who believe that the solution of the problem of school dropout is not a matter of funding, but a matter of sensitization and those who believe that funding necessity is crucial in order to implement appropriate programs of hiring specialized staff targeted at that direction for timely and effective addressing of the problem. We agree with the latter view, as we think that without the appropriate funding and central planning on the part of the Ministry, without coordination between specialized personnel of the secondary school education offices, schools, parents, local community – agencies of local self government, region, employment services – there can be no substantial intervention.

As pointedly stressed by D. Vergidis "in Greece, education expansion and social pressure for even more education are particularly intense. Historically…what, more than anything else, marks education growth is a contradiction between a quantitatively spectacular super-education of a great, be it, minority and illiteracy or superficial knowledge of the population…" [9]. Thus, whereas the educational reforms created the conditions for the decrease in the number of registered illiterate people and reduced the percentages of dropout indices in our country, as compared with the European countries, they have not been focused on the essence of that goal, which is the significance that the kind of education offered by the Greek society has, as related to the ever increasing training and further education needs, as these arise from the very fast rates of technological development, affecting, in their turn, the configuration of professions in the job market.

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