

INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND APPLIED APPROACHES IN INVESTIGATING INEQUALITIES ON THE LEVEL OF TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM ROMANIA

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Abstract: The technical high schools provide upward social mobility, or reproduce the existing social inequalities, inside the scene of Romanian educational system? The problem is complex and rises a series of inter-, and multidisciplinary questions. The research observes, measures and analyzes the elements and their intersections, inside emerging educational inequalities in the frame of different social science disciplines such as sociology, psychology and pedagogy, as well as communication sciences, to develop a functional explanatory model. Testing the multilevel statistical predicting model, the research contributes to better understanding of the phenomenon of school success, and the perspectives of furthering education and career. The findings, refer to education, and assessment of the upward mobility of students. By focusing on educational sociology terms and methods, the results recommend the alteration of the existing practices, with introduction of new and effective educational and organizational policies in Romanian technical high school systems.

Keywords: interdisciplinarity, upward social mobility, reproducing social inequalities, technical high school education, explanatory model

The study considers the fact that studying learning is an interdisciplinary activity. It looks at economy, pedagogy, psychology and sociology for explanations. The economic perspective in modernity's narrative (Andorka, 2006) is also a social expectation, as the youth is expected to get as many high level diplomas and technical training as possible. Getting the institutionalized knowledge doesn't mean just the lexical knowledge taught in schools that are valued by the educational system but also it means that those with degrees get a knowledge that is scientifically correct and also means that they can communicate easily with those who got the same education as theirs. They have to learn social and behavioral patterns and values that will help them to enter the work force but also to help them to further study. This knowledge helps them to try out and volunteer in many job descriptions and also helps them to be more adapt to challenges of the careers they choose.

Those who acquired higher educational degrees have heterogeneous competencies and they perform better in economically innovative environments while those who have lower educational

status their knowledge is useful only at local level and their knowledge is limited to specific work environments and mainly linked to worn out technologies that became available to them. This competency gap shows through the strategies of “Europe 2020”, which says that those individuals, who study at college or university level, basically became interchangeable with anybody else in the work place (COM, 2015). The psychological and sociopsychological viewpoints of the study look at the continued learning through the question of motivation and it studies it through their perspective theories. Motivation is a psychological term and points at those forces, urges and/ or activating activities, attitudes and decisions which can have life altering consequences but mostly they act through careers and the lives of individuals. The different motivational theories are showing us many dimensions, levels and facets that are contributing significantly to the learning achievements, to the career-path choices, to the aspirations and to the imaginary of the future. The empirical and psychological studies at one hand look at the mechanisms of choice in the light of institutional atmosphere and environment when young individuals consider joining learning institutions. When considering the institutional atmosphere and environment and their effects, than many sociopsychological hypotheses, research and theories come out regarding the motivation in the learning habits of the youth population. The most well known are: Cyril O. Houle’s (1961) sociopsychological theory on the three motivators for continuing adult learners; and also Clark and Trow (1966), Erdmann (1983), Sevier (1987), Taylor (1944), Campbell (1977), Huston (1981), Hossler (1989), Kallio (1995) and others. Byrne and his coauthors (2012) write about the fact that those young individuals who are *study-oriented* join higher education because they find satisfaction in continued learning, and they want their knowledge to be widened and they want to observe intellectual development. The *dedicated* ones pursue higher education because they think that learning gives them the right knowledge for the right professional results. The *activity-oriented* ones are motivated by extra-curricular factors, like meeting new individuals, getting into new situations, etc. There’s also a binominal look at the motivation. There are internal and external motivators. But there are also factors of the career choices which are dominating in the motivational field. This means that the environment, the familial background, the schools institutional atmosphere, the pressures of the peer group, etc can have major influences on one hand the motivation to pursue higher education (Lepper, 1988; Kuntsen, 2011) and on the other hand to point out more general sociological points of view regarding the higher educational demand (Vieira and Vieira, 2011; Pope and Pope, 2006).

Between the many important factors are not just the prices of the scholarly success but also chances for equal equity for having those communication and verbal skills that schools are requiring from their students in the curricula but also in the hidden curriculum. These are not accessible equally to all the students with different backgrounds. Those who come from lower social classes, from rural areas and have lower cultural capital in the family, or their mother tongue is not the one used as the lingua franca while teaching the curricula – those students will have limited language competency. They will be disadvantaged next to those who bring language competency from home, where they use it since childhood and practice it in their own community (Bernstein, 1996).

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The sociological point of view of the paper looks at mobility, reproduction of the social system and social mobility and interprets continued education as status acquisition, and also values it as converting and reconverting processes of social capital. Because of this the individual's social background comes into focus, and concentrates on the change (or possible change) that can happen because of education, and results in social status change, but also raises the invested social and familial capital and their change.

One of the questions of the research is that participating in the education system what kind of possibilities and mobility path are open or closed in front of the youth and how it contributes to their positive status change after finishing higher education? Of the existence of the social inequities in education and their reproduction Bourdieu (1978) wrote a theory that lasts time. His ideas are based on the distinctions that the existence of different capitals and their nature raise. According to these ideas capital is every resource that we can invest and has or we hope we have a return. Next to the economic capital Bourdieu (1986) considers social and cultural capitals as resources. These can help in learning, acquiring knowledge and getting diplomas. Social capital is used by Bourdieu but also by James Coleman (1988) as theoretically strategic concept. Coleman links the normative social action – where the social actors are acting on social values and rules, but also on prescriptions and expected obligations - with individual actions made by economic reasons. The concept of actions made by economic reasons is built on the utility of possibilities and maximization of the gains by the social actions. The functions of the social capital are double structured. One of them is social structure, and the other is a possibility given to the individual to act in the confinement of the structure (Coleman, 1988). Thus the social capital is diverse and some of the actions that are useful in case can be ineffective or harmful in others. The social capital consists of relationship networks and exchange conditions and their utilitarian functions that forms between individuals and help the actions and generates gain. Education in Coleman's case (1988) means investing in human capital. He points out that individuals exchange their social capital to human capital with the mediation of the educational system. (He disregards the reproduction of inequalities; he talks about it as a general fact) But Bourdieu introduces class considerations regarding the understanding of the supply of social capital in the social structure. This supply of social capital works by investing economic and social capitals and exchanging it to cultural capital, but also re-convert it to social and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1986; Pusztai, 2009).

Testing the prediction at a technical high school

(Preliminary history) In 2012 in Romania, Roth et al., has studied 3509 graduating class adolescent students' transition into young adulthood. In the 2nd wave of the research, in 2014, with online questionnaire process, young people who were asked in the first round were asked again about their intent in continued learning. From the 3509 young people asked at national level there were 1348 students who graduated technical high school. In total, 478 of us young people out of the technical high school then filled out the questionnaire.

The present study examined a population of 478 technical high schoolers. In our study, we used data from both waves of the research in order to understand and get more explanation about the technical high school student's inequalities and their further education opportunities. The questions in the questionnaire grouped around eight issues. These are: personal data, the family origin, education, the labor market, health, mental health and personality characteristics, intimate relationships, social environment, the future, the hobby, volunteering and other activities. The research question was that within the current Romanian educational system technical high school in the secondary education especially in the prevailing social conditions (class system or structure) is aiding the reproduction of inequalities, or serves mostly the intergenerational social mobility? The aim was to explain with the help of a logistic regression model, the continued education of technical high school students who finished secondary education. This model came with prediction too. This model helps to predict the chances of a successful Bacalaureate examination and chances for continued learning. "The social integration success is largely influenced by the value system along which forms the adolescent personality" (Albert Lorincz, 2007). Thus the focus is on family background, which is a major factor both for school success and failure, as well as for career choice that constitutes a huge problem in adolescence.

Using factor analysis and logistic regression, we found that for the studied population (N = 478 technical high schoolers): further education opportunities are best enhance by factors like having urban residence, also helps if the parents have higher education, and if the students have continued learning intentions. To a lesser extent, but chances increase if the student is female, if the student's family fairs better economically and the attitudes of the teachers are positive towards their students (teachers care about their students, they listen to their talking, if it is important for the teachers that the students attend school, if the students get encouragements from teachers, if counts for the teachers how students are valued, if they recognized the good qualities in their students).

Table 1. *The increased chances of continued education in the logistic regression models*

Independent variables	The higher code meaning	Odds ratio Exp(B)	Explanatory power (Nagelkerke)
Want to learn more.	Yes	+86%	47,8%
Gender	Boy	-63%	
Residence	City	+184%	
The parent(s) education)	Higher education	+127%	
Financial situation of the family	Better financial conditions	+49%	
The perception of teachers' attitudes	Positive reviews	+5%	

The introduction of further variables into the model will no longer improve the explanatory power, and does not improve the predictive powers of the model. 71.96% of the students who graduated from technical high school graduated with success, from a total

of 478 students¹. 68.41% of the students who graduated from technical high school continued their studies, and only for 6 of them the explanatory and prediction model is not valid to explain their continued education choices. In their case, the calculated chances are less than 0,500. This data is *predilectly* shown for those students who choose not to pursue continued learning. The data demonstrate the predictive validity of the model, since for 97.6% of the cases the prediction is valid (N = 478). The prediction, as all projected probabilities do not apply to each individual case, since a successful examination has lots of conjectural factors, starting with the selection of examination problems, up to the examiners and correctors attitudes, etc, which cannot be predicted.

In April 2016, we tested our prediction at Bányai János Technical High School². We surveyed online those 12 graders, who participated at the Matura exam simulation. Our questionnaires were filled out online. The results (N = 31) showed that eight students are having chances for a successful graduation exam. At the summer and autumn graduation (in 2016, at the examined technical high school), eight youngsters managed to graduate³ from between all the seniors graduates. The predictive validity of our measurements was 100%.

The measurements were conducted on four dimensions, to assess the student's potential success at graduation examination. According to our prediction model: 1) the parents' educational level, the family's level of cultural capital, 2) the family's financial, economic, as social capital, the economic adequacy and 3) the perception of care from teachers, that is the effect of the school, and 4) the intention of continued education were taken into account.

Then, the test results were compared to the results achieved in the final examination. In our survey, a total of 20 girls and 11 boys participated. According to their spatial origin 16 of them came from small towns, 3 of them came from parishes, and 12 of them were villagers. The students living in rural areas solve the school visitation by commute or living in a boarding school.

1) For the parents education we received the following results

Table 2. *The education of parents (N=31)*

N=31	Father	Mother
Elementary School (Class V.-VIII.)	3	4
Lyceum (Class X.)	4	4
Technical School	9	3
Lyceum (Class XII-XIII.)	10	15
Lyceum + Master training	1	4

¹ There's a distortion here, because in the same year, in 2012 in Romania from those who participated at Matura exams 66.41% were successful. The Ministry of Education published data on all students while our data was collected in a way that students could chose not to disclose all data or to disclose it partially, because there's a social desirability to report only the positive and adequate data. (Rotariu, Iluţ, 2001)

² In Harghita County, in the town of Székelyudvarhely the Bányai János Technical High School it is regarded to be one of the biggest educational institution. The institution comprises 500 students and focuses on textile and woodworking industries. From three classes, each having 28 students, in total 31 students participated at Baccalaureate exam simulation.

³ Official data from the ministry of education regarding Matura exams (2016) <http://bacalaureat.edu.ro/>

Post secondary training	1	0
University	1	1
I don't know	2	0

From the second table data shows that mothers are more educated than fathers. The differences however are not relevant to the cases. And from both parents only one have a university

degree.

2) Taking in consideration the total income of the families, they group as follows

Table 3. *The total income of the family (N=31)*

Financial situation of the family	N=31
At most 500 RON	3
500-1000 RON	6
1001-1200 RON	9
1201-2000 RON	2
2001-3000 RON	7
3001-5000 RON	1
10001 RON and above	1
I don't know.	2

The size of family income calculated does not show the factual material, financial or social situation. The table shows that the family of the students declared income is very low, they are around the guaranteed income. Most of the students come from a family of four, and as Table 3 shows, more than half of the student's family's income is smaller than the minimal income per capita set forth by the government⁴.

To complete this information we add that, about half of the students who got into the sample pay 250 Ron for the first month for their boarding school (dormitory), which seems to be expensive, compared to the family's income. Similar high expenses are associated with commuting for those who do not move into school boarding's. Expenses related to schooling multiply in families where more than one child is at school age. Measuring the students' own perceptions and assessment of the financial situation of their families, we found that if measured on a scale from 1 to 10, then - and this is reflected in the data relative to the economic environment and perceived financial situation that they are in - the evaluations conforms to a regular Gaussian curve, with the left side being limited by the grade 3, and the right side is bordered by the grade 8. In the case of having material goods, we found that most of the families cannot afford even a one-week vacation (21 families), cars are only in 23 families, and air-conditioning is reported by only five students.

3) The influences of factors outside schools on success and then to the continued education and career choices:

The results show that student's appreciation is low regarding the influence of the school. The following table contains information on how the students appreciate their teacher's attention.

Table 4. *Appreciation of teacher's attention. (N=31)*

⁴ Since 1st of May, 2016, Romania, the minimal income per capita set forth by the government is 1250 RON, <http://24.hu/fn/gazdasag/2016/04/29/nagyot-emelkedik-a-minimalber-romaniaban/>

N=31	Not at all	A bit	A lot	Very much
	1	2	3	4
His teachers care about him.	3	19	8	1
Teachers are listening when the student is saying something.	9	7	14	1
For the teachers is important if the student is on the school or not.	6	2	7	9
The student is receiving a lot of encouragement from his teachers.	7	12	9	3
The teachers are appreciating the students efforts.	8	18	5	0
The teachers know the students best qualities.	8	17	5	1
The teachers are praising the students if they are working hardly.	6	11	11	3
It matters to the teachers what grades their students get.	12	12	5	2

When compared (based on Table 4.) the teacher's attentions positive and negative appreciations, turns out that most of them are appreciating it negatively. The proportions are as follows: negative range (1 and 2) 159 evaluations, the positive range (3 and 4) are only 84 evaluations. The importance of the issue is given by the teacher's positive influence, which strengthens the motivational forces of the school. In our case, this

indicates a lack of motivation, and shows a desire to improve teacher's attitudes towards motivation at least in the perception of the students who were surveyed.

4) Questions for continued education

The answers show that the desire for continued education is low (7 people want to continue education - 20% of the respondents). The primary motivation since enrolment of the students from technical high school is to learn a trade. Just those require Matura exams who want continued education, while others are looking for jobs for rapid returns as a conversion and reconversion strategy.

In this case, only seven students answered that they would like continued education. This also indicates with approximation that how many students have the necessary grit for tackling Matura exams with successful motivation.

The peer group is not a positive influence for continued education motivation. There's no competition for achieving successful Matura exams. This is essentially secondary or even lower objective to be reached.

Predictability and real results

Table 5. *Prediction and the Matura exam results in the Bányai János Technical High School. (N=31)*

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No.	Gender	Prediction result/ Baccalaureate result	(Class IX.) Entrance exam results	Romanian language and literature class result (Class XII.)	Hungarian language and literature class result (Class XII.)	Mathematics class result (Class XII.)
1	2	0.33	6.00	8	9.5	9.5
2	1	0.54/5.56	5.7	9	7	5.5
3	1	0.04	5.55	5	6	8.5
4	1	0.14	4.06	5	5	5
5	1	0.47	5.26	6.5	8	8
6	2	0.26	3.65	8	6.5	8
7	2	0.10	4.63	5	6.5	7
8	1	0.21	4.26	5	5	6
9	1	0.04	4.11	5.5	7	7
10	2	0.46	4.16	5	5.5	6.5
11	2	0.53/6	3.13	5	6.5	6.5
12	2	0.34	3.70	5.5	7	6.5
13	2	0.06	3.93	5	5	5.5
14	2	0.21	4.00	5	5	5.5
15	2	0.03	3.78	6.5	5	5.5
16	2	0.07	4.00	7	8	6.5
17	2	0.07	4.81	5	5	5.5
18	2	0.72	4.35	6.5	5.5	5.3
19	1	0.63/6.1	5.03	5	5.5	5
20	2	0.85/6.3	3.30	7.5	8	7
21	1	0.87/6.41	5.75	6	7	5
22	2	0.18	3.90	5.5	6.5	5
23	2	0.09	4.33	5	6.5	5
24	2	0.15	5.28	5.5	5	5
25	2	0.25	4.98	6	6.5	5
26	1	0.69/6.65	3.91	5.5	5.5	5
27	1	0.85/7.16	4.71	5	6.5	5
28	2	0.46	3.68	5	7	5
29	1	0.50/6.53	7.84	9.5	7	6.5
30	2	0.11	4.18	5	6	5
31	2	0.04	5.33	7	6.5	5

The prediction values calculated - simplistically - shows that in the studied population (N = 31) what is the likelihood of a successful Matura examination conditioned with those factors taken into account which were highlighted in our analysis. If some individual's reported value is higher than the value of 0,500, than predictably it will be successful, or at least will have increased chances for a successful Matura examination (over 75% the likelihood of success is certain), while below the value of 0,500 the failure likely probable. In the studied technical high schools from the predicted eight 12th grade students at the summer session of the Matura exams only one had been successful, while at the fall session of the Matura exams the other 7 also took the exams successfully. Taken all this results into account the predictions were 100% correct.

Conclusions

The study examined four interrelated dimensions: success in school, continued education opportunities, the motivational effects of inequalities and their reproduction with various backgrounds taken into consideration. The technical high school students continued education is a complex phenomenon, which can be approached with holistic overview. Such a multi-level and interdisciplinary approach was used and it is recommended for further research. We focused on the various contextual influences (Fenyés-Pusztai, 2004, Fenyés 2008) and how they participate in the decision on continued education, or how they influence school success and how they influence inequality reproduction (Bourdieu, 1978).

On social statistical analysis made on survey results from Romanian technical high schools was found that vertical mobility was an intergenerational life strategy (Cărtână, 2000). However, the background of origin of students influenced greatly their life outcomes (Csata, 2004, Veres et al., 1998). The students from the lower social classes, mostly from rural areas, and with parents urging to follow short-term educational strategies, with lower aspiration levels, etc. - coming from this kind of environment, the student's (Veres-Papp Z, 2015 Dávid Kacsó et al. 2014) background-origin, and their contextual effects determine to a greater extent the choices for learning than for the theoretical high schools students. As the multi-factorial test scores, described in the essay, show that the students results from the technical high schools can be tested with success, following by the analysis of the factors of their familial background, which indicates that the school's effect is slightly contributing to the success of Matura exams (see Table 5.).

Though there is needed further research in every social science discipline, still some authoritative conclusions are emerging for education policy. The first step should be the elimination of the situation which puts 14 or 15 years old students to take decisive decisions which impacts there whole life path and career choices with exams on their skills and after that with enrollment into further education based on those exam evaluations. The technical high schools training it is inclusive, that is, the education should be transformed so that to help readjustment and to further education opportunities in a manner conducive to provide an opportunity for a higher level of technical courses in furthering education. There's a need for increased academic performances from teachers, as the informal effects of the school are added to the values of pedagogical knowledge. On

one hand low and on the other hand, the outdated technology and knowledge transfer grants just locally affordable and usable working and labor force.

However, these markets are very volatile and should be a fundamental responsibility of the schools to re-training and to give lifelong learning possible and to make it desirable to learn and to encourage graduates to do so. Problems with the lack of equal opportunities are many and complex, but the "education policy must be flexible to follow the changes" (Albert Lorincz, 2004), it has to create opportunities for vertical mobility, progressing towards knowledge society. "The social integration cannot be interpreted by itself alone. It always depends on a given social problem generating political, economical and interest related values" (Albert Lorincz, 2004).

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