TEACHERS` REPRESENTATIONS AND BELIEFS ON EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

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ABSTRACT

Children` participation to education is an important concern for the entire educational system, for policy makers, but also for organizations, institutions, employers, etc. interested in what is happening in education, without necessarily being part of this system. With the intention of contributing to promptly identify students in early school leaving situation and to operatively intervene, extensive research was launched within the Erasmus+ Project "Active Cross-sectoral Cooperation for Educational and Social Success" (A.C.C.E.S.S.), having as target-group teachers and students from the four partner countries - Italy, Portugal, Lithuania and Romania. The research circumscribed a quantitative approach, consisting in the development and administration of two questionnaires - one addressed to teachers and the other addressed to students and to those who leave the school early, and a qualitative approach, conducted by the method of interview-based survey, in the case of students and by organizing focus groups with teachers. One of the aspects with a strong impact on the motivation and involvement / engagement of students in the educational process and, implicitly, on the management of the ESL phenomenon is represented by the representations / beliefs of the school managers / teachers / students. That is why part of our research has focused on investigating teachers' perceptions on these beliefs and representations.

Keywords: *early school leaving; teachers` representations/beliefs; motivation, school engagement, ACCESS project;*

INTRODUCTION

Early school leaving (ESL) is a recurring theme in the European educational space. For at least a decade, numerous analyzes, studies, researches, projects have focused on identifying the causes that generate this phenomenon, as well as on designing and implementing solutions meant to reduce its magnitude, prevent the risk of its manifestation or reduce its effects. The proportions of ESL, amplified by the current pandemic context, are likely to be of concern to EU Member States due to the multiple negative consequences, both individually and socially.

In European Commission documents, *early school leaving* refers to "those young people who leave education and training only with lower secondary education or less and who no longer attend any form of education and training" (European Council, 2011, p. 1).

Statistically, European ESL rates are measured in relation to the percentage of young people aged 18 to 24 who have only completed lower secondary education or less and are no longer integrated into any form of education and training.

It should be noted that in various EU documents, there are two interchangeable phrases that cover the same serious reality: *early school leaving* (ESL) and *early leaving from education and training* (ELET). In 2011, 6,4 million young people in Europe were considered *early school leavers* (European Parliament, General Directorate for Internal Policies, Education and Culture, 2011).

Early school leaving phenomenon predominates among at-risk groups, such as children and young people in rural communities, those from families with poor socio-economic status, belonging to a minority group or students who have repeated at least one year of schooling, or they dropped out of school. Since 2011, the European Council's recommendation explicitly provides that ESL strategies, designed and implemented in each Member State, should include prevention, intervention and compensatory measures, aimed in particular at groups at high risk of early school leaving, including here children from disadvantaged socio-economic environment, migrants, Roma and children with special educational needs (European Council, 2011, p. 2).

All these measures are in line with the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, which aimed to reduce the dropout rate from 15% in 2010, which meant that one in seven young people drop out of school and training too early, at 10%, by 2020 (European Commission, 2010).

It is already a truism that ESL / ELET has important individual, social and economic implications. Thus, young people who leave school prematurely are prone to the risk associated with unemployment or low earnings when they find a job.

Moreover, the financial implications of ESL are major: the cost of ESL calculated for entire lifetime is estimated at one to two million euros for each early school leaver (European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Education and Culture, 2011). The hight costs of ESL (private, fiscal and social costs) are analyzed in detail by Brunello and Da Paola (2014).

Understanding the importance of engaging in specific prevention and intervention actions, a number of projects focusing on ESL / ELET have been implemented at EU Member State level. One of these is A.C.C.E.S.S. Project (Active Cross-sectoral Cooperation for Educational and Social Success), carried out within the Erasmus Plus Program, which involved eight partner institutions from four EU member states, namely Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania.

A.C.C.E.S.S. Project aims to address, in a preventive manner, the problem of early school leaving generated, in particular, by school factors, by *strengthening the quality of the pedagogical act*, conditioned by the *improvement of the teachers' competences* and *the creation of a positive learning environment*.

1. EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT

According to a report prepared in 2014, entitled *Tackling Early Leaving from Education and Training in Europe: Strategies, Policies and Measures*, the consistent efforts made by most European countries have materialised in a decrease of the rate of early school leaving. Thus, more than half of the countries covered by this report were below the 10% target set by the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, and about a third of the countries had reached their national targets at that time (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice / Cedefop, 2014).

The EU indicator used for the transnational comparison of the weighting of the ESL / ELET phenomenon, updated for 2020, shows important variations in EU member states, from 2,2% - Croatia to 16,7% - Malta. Regarding the partner countries in the A.C.C.E.S.S. project, the following situations are registered: Italy - from 17,8%, in 2011, reduces the ESL rate to

13,1%, in 2020; Lithuania, which in 2011 was below the EU 2020 target of 7,4% respectively, manages to reach 5,6% in 2020; Portugal has a spectacular evolution, reaching from 23% - in 2011, to 8,9%, in 2020, and Romania registers a percentage of 15,6% in 2020, compared to 18,1%, in 2011, but slightly increasing, with 0,3% more than in 2019 (Eurostat, 2021).

Of the four Member States, only two are below the 10% - the target of the EU on the *Europe 2020 Agenda*, Lithuania and Portugal, while Italy and Romania exceed it. In fact, Romania has missed the national target of 11,3%, for 2020, while at EU level, the ESL rate is 9,9%, so the goal set by the *Europe 2020 Strategy* is achieved.
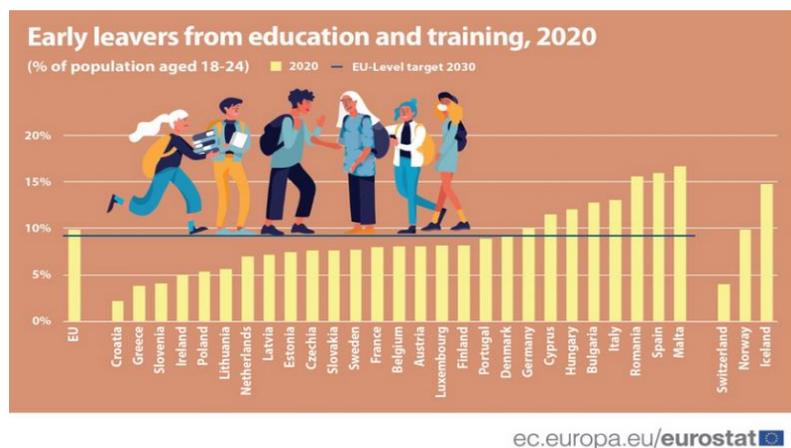
Fig. 1. EU – Early leavers from education and training (Source: Eurostat, 2021)

In this context, the focus on ESL / ELET needs to be maintain in the next period, too. The EU 2030 Agenda also integrates this issue, which is still considered a challenge, all the more so as the Covid-19 pandemic has generated consequences in this regard as well. The goal for every EU Member State is for more young people to obtain a higher secondary education diploma, and the EU's associated ESL / ELET target is that by 2030 the proportion of people leaving early education and training systems to be below 9% (European Council, 2021).

Referring to specific ESL / ELET indicators, in Romania, *The National Recovery and Resilience Plan* presents worrying data, especially for children and young people who are part of risk groups. Thus, the lack of equity of the educational system is reported as the main challenge, but also it is the factor that explains, to a large extent, the failure of the 11,3% target.

The same document states that more than 1 in 10 students in a cohort entering the 5th grade drop out of school by the end of the 8th grade (especially in the 7th and 8th grades), and by the end of the 10th grade, the value is about 2 out of 10 students. If in large cities, the ESL rate is below the EU average and correlates with the nationally set target for 2020 (11.3%), rural area, it is at a level of 26%, the trend being upward (Ministry of Investment and European Projects, 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic has added to the numerous causes of this phenomenon, exacerbating it, especially for students from vulnerable groups.

Regarding the etiology of ESL / ELET, as we showed in one of our studies, this complex phenomenon is generated by a combination of causes that can be associated with the social environment, the family environment, the school environment and / or emerge from

particular aspects related to the personality structure of those who decide to leave the educational system (Drăghicescu, Marcozzi, Stăncescu, 2021, p. 97).

A conceptual model relevant to the way in which risk and protection factors interact with respect to the ESL phenomenon, similar to a certain extent to the one developed by us, within the A.C.C.E.S.S. (Drăghicescu, Marcozzi, 2020), is illustrated in the following figure.
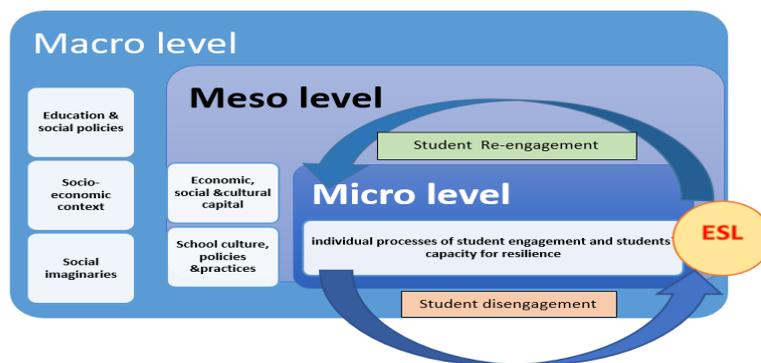

Fig. 2. ESL – Conceptual Model (Source: Van Praag et al., 2018, p. 4.)

Analyzing the results obtained by 2015, based on close monitoring of ESL, the EU Council emphasized that early school leaving is the result of a series of ”personal, social, economic, cultural, educational, gender and family factors frequently interconnected and is linked to situations of cumulative disadvantage, which often have their origin in the preschool stage” (European Council, 2015, p. 37).

The model of ESL risk factors proposed in the Orienta4YEL project is in the same direction, highlighting: personal challenges, family circumstances, social relationships, institutional features and structural factors (Brown et al, 2021, p. 8).

As Tomaszewska-Pękała, Marchlik and Wrona (2015, p. 79) have shown, ESL can be analyzed at several levels: individual (micro), school (meso), and systemic (macro).

Most studies focusing on ESL / ELET address micro (individual) and meso (family) factors, highlighting their substantial influence on ESL risk. Those studies identify a number of issues related to the family environment (emotional, physical abuse, disinterest in education, conflicting environment, poor socio-economic level/financial insecurity, low level of education of parents, of mothers, in particular, low expectations, low support for the child, abuse of alcohol/substances, dysfunctional family relationships etc.), but also many elements related to the individuality / personality of the student (low motivation for learning, behavioral disorders, disengagement, learning difficulties, communication difficulties, absenteeism, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, low aspirations or lack of clear, well-defined aspirations, lack of consistency, stress, anxiety, disabilities, etc.), demonstrating the causal relationship with the ESL phenomenon (Traag & van der Velden, 2011; Gonzalez Rodriguez et al., 2018; Araujo et al., 2020; Bayón-Calvo, 2019; Brown et al., 2021; Van Praag et al., 2020; Nairz-Wirth & Gitschthaler, 2020).

Some of the causes, also located at the meso level (according to the conceptual model of Van Praag et al., 2018), are associated with the school environment, an aspect highlighted in a series of studies and reports that address, rather, general problems of educational systems, which can negatively impact ESL / ELET rates, such as repetition of a school year, socio-economic segregation and early guidance, based on academic selection (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice / Cedefop, 2014). The extent to which a number

of teachers` educational practices and attitudes can influence this phenomenon is less highlighted. It is true that both repetition of a school year and school segregation can be associated with teachers` discriminatory attitudes and, above all, with teachers' discriminatory practices, which make the school an unfriendly and hostile environment.

In fact, the phenomenon of repetition of a school years can be explained by the teachers` indifferent attitudes towards students, towards learning process, by the lack of support that they must give to each student, but even more so to those at ESL / ELET risk. Also, another explanatory factor, relevant especially from the perspective of reporting to students with learning difficulties, is the low attention that teachers pay to the process of development of the „learning to learn" competence, a fundamental competence for the management and efficiency of school learning (Drăghicescu et al, 2015), for ensuring school success and, subsequently, indispensable for continuing lifelong learning.

Regarding discrimination, in Romanian schools, there are still teachers whose prejudices, stereotypes, especially those related to ethnic minorities, are objectified in behavioral practices that produce "differences" in teacher-student interactions, with obvious effects on relationships developed among students, on school performance, on the attitude towards learning, towards school, in general (Drăghicescu, Stăncescu, Suduc, 2020, p. 20). And when it comes to minority groups, in particular, discrimination becomes one of the factors that accentuate the risk of ESL or even "push" students to make the decision to leave school.

In the area of factors associated with the school environment, the literature in the field also signals aspects such as: the indifference or carelessness teachers` attitude, "disinterest in everything that is not curriculum or assessment", lack of support provided by teacher; low teachers`expectations; poor students` relationships with teachers, mentors, support counselors; lack of or little support in making the decision on a particular educational / professional path; non-inclusive, oversized classes; poor behavioral management; lack of concern for the student`s well-being, for the comfort of learning; exclusion from school; bullying; loneliness etc. (Brown et al., 2021; Haugan et al., 2019; Van Praag et al., 2019; Nairz-Wirth & Gitschthaler, 2019; Morentin & Ballesteros, 2018).

Certainly, it is not easy to identify the weight of school factors in understanding the causes that determine this phenomenon, especially when we refer to the teachers` attitudes and behaviors.

The school, teachers in general, as well as those who manage educational institutions are aware that there are several variables related to ESL / ELET, outside the school environment (Gonzalez Rodriguez et al, 2018, p. 195). However, this does not mean abandoning reflective, observative practices, meant to highlight those aspects of the educational process that are less successful or even dysfunctional, discriminatory, which can sometimes lead students, especially those at risk of ESL, to drop out school early.

Being aware of the major role of education in building a sustainable future for each individual and for each nation, and addressing the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU Council states that education and training systems must be sufficiently flexible and Member States can mobilize to find solutions to continue the educational process, in different ways and forms, so that all learners, regardless of their socio-economic background or learning needs, not to drop out the study and to continue their educational path (European Council, 2021, p. 3).

In this regard, the EU's programmatic documents, which guide the development of national policies and strategies, recommend a number of directions for action focusing on ESL / ELET:

- a national data collection system that ensures awareness of the proportion of the phenomenon, but also monitoring absenteeism and evaluating the effectiveness of policies on ESL / ELET;

- policies to increase the flexibility and permeability of education pathways, with a role in facilitating the transition between different routes / paths of education and training;

- language support for students with a mother tongue different than the language of instruction, students more exposed to the risk of ESL;

- the integration of ESL / ELET in initial and continuous teachers` training programs, so that teachers to be equipped for the necessary support, especially for students who are part of vulnerable groups or show signs of disengagement from school;

- consistent education and career guidance services, including by integrating them into the national curriculum so that all students in the school to be the beneficiaries;

- support for early school leavers to reintegrate into the education and training system (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2021, pp. 18-19).

All these actions must materialize, at school level, by implementing measures that require a collaborative approach, being based on the involvement of the whole school community, with an emphasis on:

- autonomy and accountability when governance, curricula and working methods are at the forefront;

- effective mechanisms for ensuring the quality of education;

- building effective partnerships, both at school level and between schools and other interested institutions;

- promoting a culture of support at the level of the student-teacher-parent triad;

- identification of relevant indicators for school disengagement;

- providing systematic support, through mentoring, counseling, psychological support, especially for those at risk of ESL;

- enriching the offer of extracurricular activities with an impact on the learners` participation, motivation and sense of belonging (European Council, 2015, p. 39).

Teachers` reflective practices, moments of sharing within the community of teachers or even of some reflective practice groups; additional support provided, in particular, to students in the final grades; promoting a pedagogical approach based on differentiation and cooperative learning; psychological and vocational guidance services; teachers` tutorial actions, all these represent also a series of models of good practices, with an impact on the ESL / ELET phenomenon (Araújo et al., 2020).

We cannot achieve profound changes in education, with lasting effects, including in the area of ESL management, without reflective teachers` work. The reflective teachers are teachers aware of the importance of their mission, responsible, willing to learn continually, to cooperate, to share experiences, are teachers who, above all, respect the child, respect their profession (Stăncescu et al., 2019, p. 14).

The action plans designed, the sets of measures associated with them, initiated and implemented at school level, once again hold teachers accountable and require, first and foremost from them, a process of awareness of the seriousness of this phenomenon and the factors that generate it, among which are those associated with the school environment.

In this sense, the initial and continuous training programs for teachers` training must be designed from the perspective of their instrumentation with those types of skills, abilities, competencies, which will allow them to identify and effectively intervene in risky situations that could result. with school disengagement and subsequently in early school leaving.

Moreover, in a previous micro-research, focused on the relevance of continuous education programs, teachers reported training needs that, once met, can help reduce the risk, respectively the ESL / ELET rate in schools in Romania. Among them, we mention: educating children with special educational needs, inclusive school, intercultural education, parental education, conflict management, managing interpersonal relationships, strategies to improve socio-emotional competences, ICT, family/child counselling, managing a class of students or a group of pre-schoolers etc. (Drăghicescu et al, 2018, p. 13).

2. AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

Being aware of teachers` key role in preventing and combating ESL, the need for them to provide adequate support to all students, but especially to those at risk of ESL, as well as those who have left the educational system and can be reintegrated through specific programs, such as "Second chance", in our research we aimed to investigate the perceptions of teachers (from all four partner countries) regarding the phenomenon of ESL (focusing on causes, representations / beliefs, specific teachers` competences necessary for the proper prevention / management of the phenomenon of ESL) and the identification of the most effective strategies for preventing ESL.

3. RESEARCH METHODS
a. Target-group

The study involved 256 teachers from all four partner countries, selected on the basis of stratified sampling, so as to represent various categories: women and men, from rural and urban areas, working in high school and middle school, in different stages of professional development (with experience in teaching between 1 and over 30 years).

Table 1. The distribution of the sample, related to the geneder, the area where they work and the years of experience in teaching (Source: author's own conception)

Gender	Percentage
Female	81%
Male	19%
The area where they work	**Percentage**
Urban	74%
Rural	26%
Years of experience in the teaching activity	**Percentage**
0 – 5 years	13%
6 – 10 years	13%
11 – 15 years	18%
16 – 20 years	21%
21 – 25 years	13%
26 – 30 years	13%
Over 30 years	9%

b. Instruments and procedure

The research of the ESL phenomenon involved two types of approaches: *a quantitative approach*, made by developing and administering a questionnaire addressed to

teachers and *a qualitative approach*, based on the design and development of focus groups with participants selected from teachers.

The dimensions explored in the investigative approach were: communication / interpersonal / pedagogical competences; the main causes of conflictual relationships with students and the resolution strategies used; challenges in daily work with students; representations / beliefs of school managers / teachers / students, which can increase the students` commitment and motivation; ESL causes; educational strategies specific to ESL prevention; teaching methods used to prevent school disengagement.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

One of the sections of the questionnaire asked teachers to appreciate the extent to which some representations / beliefs (listed in a dichotomic manner: positive factors, negative factors) of school managers / teachers / students themselves influence the students` motivation and engagement in the educational process, in the direction of their increase/decrease (evaluation scale: from 1 to 10 → 1 - minimum level of importance, 10 - maximum level of importance). We will present and analyze, in this part of our study, the answers provided, in this section, by the teachers included in the target group.

Table 2. School managers` representations / beliefs that influence students' motivation and involvement in the educational process - positive factors (Source: author's own conception)

Italy	1. good, effective, competent teacher 2. confidence in the student' s potential 3. tolerance, respect for otherness
Lithuania	1.CPD valorization 2. ,,good student" 3. good school and confidence in the student' s potential
Portugal	1. good, effective, competent teacher 2. tolerance, respect for otherness 3 confidence in the student' s potential and equal opportunities
Romania	1. good, effective, competent teacher 2. confidence in the student' s potential 3. equal opportunities

Asked to refer to those *school managers` representations / beliefs,* which can be included in the category of *positive factors*, having a good impact on the students` motivation and involvement in the educational process, teachers integrated in the research sample selected similar answers, associated with "good teacher" profile of competences, who builds a solid relationship with his students, based on trust, respect, tolerance and who ensures equal opportunities to participate in education.

If school managers always act from the perspective of their representation of what a *"good teacher"* means, constantly motivating their coleagues to deliver quality education and giving them the support they needed, the *"good"* attribute could certainly be associated with each student and with the educational institution as a whole, thus considerably reducing the risk of ESL.

Table 3. School managers` representations / beliefs that influence students' motivation and involvement in the educational process - negative factors (Source: author's own conception)

Italy	1. devaluation of the teaching profession
	2. bullying, agression, school violence
	3. lack of confidence in the student' s potential
Lithuania	1. management
	2. devaluation of the teaching profession
	3. lack of confidence in educational system
Portugal	1. management
	2. poor/weak school
	3. lack of confidence in the power of education
Romania	1. management
	2. competion between students/student classes
	3. absenteeism

Regarding the *factors that negatively influence* the students` motivation and involvement in the educational process, the respondents placed *management* first, an approach considered in antithesis to *leadership*, followed by the *devaluation of the teaching profession* at social level, *poor/weak school*, *lack of confidence in educational system, in the power of education and in the student`s potential*, as well as issues such as *bullying, competition between classes and absenteeism.*

We appreciate that, in the respondents` view, the main factors that negatively affect the students` motivation and engagement in learning, which can lead to ESL, integrate systemic and organizational aspects, confirming, to some extent, that managers do not always have the qualities and skills needed to practice an effective leadership. It would allow them to coagulate the efforts of all members of the school community to achieve a common goal: each child participates in education to fulfill their potential, to build a healthy and sustainable identity.

Table 4. Teachers` representations / beliefs that influence students' motivation and involvement in the educational process - positive factors (Source: author's own conception)

Italy	1. good, effective, competent teacher
	2. student-centered educational process
	3. positive feedback
Lithuania	1.school success
	2. confidence in the student' s potential
	3. CPD valorization and „good student"
Portugal	1. good, effective, competent teacher
	2. confidence in the student' s potential
	3.tolerance, respect for otherness
Romania	1. good, effective, competent teacher
	2. authentic, efficient, sustainable learning
	3. participation to the educational process

Regarding teachers` representations / beliefs, on *dimension A (positive factors)*, on the first rank are placed similar aspects, concentrated in the area of the paradigm of the *student-centered learning process*.

We can observe that, from the respondents' point of view, the most valued teachers` representations / beliefs are those related to their own competences, those aimed at the ability to design and carry out an educational process according to the students` needs and interests, based on positive reinforcements necessary for developing an adequate self-esteem, with

beneficial effects on the conscious, motivated and active participation in the didactic activities, therefore implicitly on the learning process. Such approaches can be considered as parts of the ESL prevention measures.

Table 5. Teachers` representations / beliefs that influence students' motivation and involvement in the educational process - negative factors (Source: author's own conception)

Italy	1. devaluation of the teaching profession
	2. teacher - knowledge transmitter
	3. lack of confidence in the power of education
Lithuania	1. management
	2. learning - process of assimilation of information
	3. teacher - knowledge transmitter
Portugal	1. management
	2. lack of confidence in the power of education
	3. lack of confidence in educational system
Romania	1. management
	2. competion between students/student classes
	3. valorizing cognitive/academic intelligence

On *dimension B (negative factors),* among the answers that registered the most choices, we identify, in particular, aspects that can be associated with a poor/deficient management of the students` class, but also with a retrograde pedagogical conception, respectively attitudes that do not match to the educator`s status: *teacher` s role of knowledge transmitter, learning perceived as an exclusive process of assimilation of information, lack of confidence in the power of education or lack of confidence in educational system.*

We note that the perception of the teacher mainly as a knowledge transmitter, but also the assumption of the role of manager, are aware as factors that can reduce students' motivation for learning (associated with the occurrence of ESL risk), as opposed to what it might mean, of course, the teacher's assumption of the roles of leader, facilitator, guide, coach, trainer, roles with obvious motivating, stimulating valences for the student.

Table 6. Students` representations / beliefs which influences their motivation and involvement in the educational process - positive factors
(Source: author's own conception)

Italy	1. good, effective, competent teacher
	2. school success
	3. teacher - facilitator, guide, coach, trainer
Lithuania	1. school - friendly environment
	2. valorizing multiple intelligences
	3. teacher - facilitator, guide, coach, trainer
Portugal	1. school - friendly environment
	2. good, effective, competent teacher
	3. tolerance, respect for otherness
Romania	1. good, effective, competent teacher
	2. teacher - facilitator, guide, coach, trainer
	3. suitable/able for school

Focusing on student-specific representations / beliefs, the teachers from target-group choose - on *dimension A (positive factors)* - to put the following aspects in the first places: good, effective, competent teacher, school - friendly environment, teacher seen as a facilitator, guide, coach, trainer etc..

Analyzing the respondents' options, we notice that the main factors that would positively influence students are associated with specific elements of the school environment and organizational climate, but also with the roles that a good teacher must play: guide, facilitator, trainer. These choices demonstrates that the teacher, through his attitude towards students, through the roles assumed and exercised at the classroom level, through the climate he creates, is the most important factor for the students` well-being in the school environment, for their participation and engagement in the process of learning. This aspect can significantly reduce the risk of ESL.

Table 7. Students` representations / beliefs which influences their motivation and involvement in the educational process - negative factors(Source: author's own conception)

Italy	1. lack of confidence in the power of education
	2. lack of confidence in educational system
	3. devaluation of the teaching profession
Lithuania	1. teacher - knowledge transmitter
	2. valorizing cognitive/academic intelligence
	3.school failure
Portugal	1. teacher - knowledge transmitter
	2. valorizing cognitive/academic intelligence
	3. competion between students/student classes
	4. devaluation of the teaching profession
Romania	1. teacher - knowledge transmitter
	2. authority in the classroom management
	3. valorizing cognitive/academic intelligence

Analyzing *the factors that negatively influence* students' motivation and involvement / engagement in the educational process, we find that distorted perception of teacher roles and valorizing, often exclusive, the students' cognitive/academic intelligence can alter students' participation and engagement in learning.

Respondents' options confirm the need for change in education, especially in terms of attitudes, teaching behaviors, specific teachers` competences, as they are "called" to rehabilitate the prestige of the teaching profession and confirm that the teacher is the "heart" of the educationa system, the "heart" of the educational process in general.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of teachers' perceptions integrated in the target group of the A.C.C.E.S.S. Project allowed us to find that, among them, the causes of ESL / ELET associated with the school environment are also aware.

However, there is a general tendency to correlate the ESL / ELET phenomenon, rather with factors related to the family or social environment, in a broad sense. In this sense, as *The National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania* provides, we consider it is necessary to develop and implement coherent policies and measures, focused on ESL / ELET, designed to help teachers become more aware during the initial training, but also during the continuous training, the challenges they will face in order to prevent / combat this phenomenon.

Topics such as: student-centered learning process, student`s well-being, creating a positive learning environment, working methods for children with behavioral problems, working methods with students at risk of ESL / ELET, relationship with children's families / young people who have left school or are at risk of ESL / ELET, integrated intervention and multidisciplinary team work, preventing / combating discrimination, school-family-

community partnership, valuing diversity, etc., should be included in the topics addressed in the initial and continuous teachers` training process.

The EU's 2030 agenda provides, as a strategic priority, the improvement of competences and motivation for the teaching profession, through concrete actions to support initial training, integration and continuing professional development at all levels, in particular to equip teachers with the skills needed to achieve an inclusive education, an education focused on the specific learners` needs, with a role in combating ESL / ELET (European Council, 2021).

In this sense, given that teachers are in the "first line" in the fight against a perfid "virus" - ESL / ELET, they are the ones who decisively influence the efficiency and effectiveness of all policies, programs and strategies designed for the prevention and combating of ESL / ELET, we consider that the priority for Romania, in particular, is the investment in teachers` training and the need to revalue the teaching profession, in accordance with its social importance.

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