

Social Adjustment And School Integration Of Remigrant Students-A Study For Romania

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Abstract: *The issue of remigration is a relatively new and dynamic phenomenon. If migration was considered to be a major problem in Romania, especially after the 1990s, the return to the native country led to the emergence of a new challenge, the reintegration into society of the returned families .*

One of the most important aspects, with serious consequences in some situations, is the adaptation of the re-migrant children to the requirements of the Romanian society and school. In order to identify the problems of integrating the re-migrant children, we initiated a quantitative study on a sample of 90 pupils, their parents and the teachers of the class they are in. The main research method was the questionnaire survey. The data were quantitatively and qualitatively interpreted in order to establish some directions of intervention on these children. Respondents included in the study provided valuable answers to the research undertaken so that the consequences of re-migration could be established for children aged 6 to 11 years. As a result, there have been established advantages and limitations of the study, but also future research directions in order to remedy the identified problems and to carry out a socio-educational program developed at national level.

Keywords : *primary school students, readaptation issues, remigration; socio-educational program; well-being.*

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I. Introduction

"The remigration term supposes the migrant's returning to his/her home country after a temporary migration. The consequences of this phenomenon are visible in multiple fields: education, psychology of development, family psycho-sociology, social work and protection etc." (Catalano, 2014) [1].

Beginning with the year 2015, Romania faced remigration due to the fact that this remigrants were not able to adapt to the country where they had been emigrated, so they decided to return back home.

Fortunately, in the last 4 years a representative percent of remigrant people is represented by compact families, parents and children, so the families are not broken. This happens because some of them took their children to the host country, or in some cases, mothers gave birth to their children then raised and educated them there. Nowadays, there are increasingly more Romanians having left abroad to work who decide to return to Romania, mainly motivated by the educational system down here, which, in their opinion is 'more responsible and discipline-based'(a subject from our study).

The remigrant pupil is the one who moved away with his/her parents to another country with the aim to eliminate the phenomenon of the 'living parents orphan children' raised, educated and taken care of by them, the child who afterwards came back to Romania because of both his parents' remigration, mainly caused by their social and/or cultural maladjustment and financial problems. We deem the pupil come back to Romania with his/her parents, even if not born here and gone through institutional experiences in other educational systems to also fall into the remigrant pupil category (Catalano, 2014) [1].

In the year 1974, Cerase identifies a typology of remigration forms: return determined by inadaptation, return based on conservatorism, return due to retired and return of innovation. He sustains that the last one is no doubt the most dynamic category of returnees (Cerase, 1974) [2]. Regarding Romania's casuistry, according to the studies, it was found that the remigration is determined by the desire to return to the native country (family reunion), the appearance of financial imbalances and the desire of the parents to study their own children in Romania. It is precisely for these reasons that remigration has become an ample phenomenon, approached from a sociological, cultural, psychological, religious and economic point of view.

The causes of remigration are important prerequisites for the act itself, because on the basis of these, the research directions of the problem can be established as well as possible intervention strategies in order to diminish the negative effects of the process.

Most times, the remigrants have a good financial condition, proving financial stability, but this is not enough since it is necessary for the person to be able to adapt to the new demands and socio-cultural

changes characteristic of the country of remigration. Re-adaptation is dependent, to a large extent, on the experiences of those with whom they share, so optimistic approach and positive reinforcement must be permanent. At the same time, it also depends on the expectations of the person in question from society. Also, the acupuncture phenomenon (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936) [3], present when adopting the culture of the host country, causes them to encounter difficulties in returning to the old culture. For adaptation, we consider one of the ways to act in this sense is resilience which refers to the individual's ability to resist stress and maintain mental well-being. Rutter (1987, 1993) [4] describes resilience based on issues relating to the attitude of the person concerned to the problem in which he or she is. Thus, this attitude is necessary to be a positive one, based on effective strategies of action, supported by good self-knowledge and developed in accordance with it. The resilient person will be more able to cope with the stressful factors caused by social integration if supported by others in the process. That is why the sharing of the successes and the failures of the close ones becomes important in the realistic approach to this problem.

Another problem remigrant people are facing is that they feel marginalized, even discriminated against, and fail to adapt to the changes in society as foreigners in their own country. As far as retired adults are concerned, the situation is not considered to be as stringent as in the case of children, where marginalization and labeling pose problems with important repercussions in the development of their personality.

At the level of Romania, unfortunately, there is no constant concern with the elaboration and application in the school units of intervention strategies on the remigrant children, so that they are supported for quick adaptation. We remind, however, that the phenomenon of remigration has been approached in some studies of a larger or smaller scale in our country. Between 2008-2012, there was an *Analysis of the Remigration of Romanian Children* by a group of researchers, namely Catalin Luca, Liliana Foca, Alexandru-Stelian Gulei, and Silviu Daniel Brebulet [5]. He worked out statistical data on the number of remanded children in Spain and Italy in the counties of Vrancea, Vaslui, Buzău, Dolj, Arad and Cluj. They asked for the equivalence of their studies from January 2008 to May 2012. The data obtained and their analysis constituted an important starting point in our study because it addressed this issue at an extended level. Regarding our concerns on this subject, focused on Bistrita-Nasaud County, one of the counties with the largest percentage of remigrant population in the country, we specify that they started in 2008. During the 2006-2008 period, there was carried out an educational intervention program for children with parents abroad, in a doctoral thesis. In 2014, the issue of remigrant children was analyzed, with a high flow of such people at that time, and during the years 2016 and 2017, the teachers and parents views on this issue were tested.

As a result of studying the critical literature, we have identified a number of determinant causes of adaptation problems:

- Because of the changes in the curriculum, in the teaching-learning practice (different from that of the parents of remigrant children), adaptation becomes more difficult.
- Another reason would also be the difficult acceptance of the remigrant child in the student group because of inappropriate attitudes sometimes regarding his / her status.
- Also, at first, children can feel the family stress caused by the lack of a parent's job or the uncertainty of it for a longer period of time. In this respect, bullying-type problems can arise, predominantly in the case of newcomers in a collective. This leads to serious socio-emotional and psychological problems.
- Factors that cause learning difficulties for children may be the phenomenon of acculturation or bilingualism. With regard to bilingualism, it is necessary to emphasize that in the families where children come from, the mother tongue is not literary (most of the times).

Regarding reintegration, studies state that the most acute problems are found in adolescents, rather than in pre-school or lower-school children (King, 1977) [6]. However, because of the high number of low school-age retired students, they are the target group of the study we initiated. It is obvious that the solutions that can be considered in order to diminish the problems of adaptation refer to specialized programs supported by groups made up of teachers and school counselors.

II. Aims And Expectations

The purpose of the study was to identify the main problems of school and social adaptation that remigrant children encounter. In order to identify them as accurately as possible, we considered it appropriate to question pupils, parents and teachers, for the mutual validation of responses, but also to identify possible different points of view.

The specific objectives of the study were organized according to the target groups concerned. Thus, with regard to the parents of the remigrant children, the following issues were envisaged:

- to produce statistics on the reasons for returning to the country by specifying them, as well as data on the way of life and the status of the children's parents in the host country;

- to draw attention to the differences in the way in which families who have spent a longer time in European countries and those who have spent less time (due to the richer influences of the first category) have adjusted;
 - identification of the adjustment problems they encountered;
 - noticing the issues that have satisfied them, respectively dissatisfied them regarding their return to the country;
 - to clarify the difficulties the child has experienced in the process of adaptation, as well as the positive aspects related to it;
 - listing some of the ways in which such families can be supported in the integration.
- The questionnaire applied to the students aimed at:
- identifying the child's way to adapt to the requirements of the school;
 - reporting on positive and negative aspects of integration;
 - analyzing how different people have supported them in school adaptation;
 - to specify ways in which the school can support them;
 - to make a comparison between the host country and the native country from the point of view of the well-being of life.

By questioning teachers who have remigrant children in classes, they wanted to identify the main issues they are facing, as well as actual ways to support them.

Through the proposed objectives, we have tried to diagnose this issue and propose actual strategies for diminishing the problems of integrating these students.

III. Methods

The research methods used were survey based on questionnaire, interview, focus group and case study.

The questionnaire was applied to three target groups: 90 pupils, one of their parents, the teachers in the class in which they are enrolled. The persons who applied the questionnaire were represented by methodologists from different regions of Bistrita-Nasaud County, who were trained for this purpose, so that the spread throughout the county provides objective, comprehensive and relevant data for the study. Thus, the designated persons distributed the pupils' questionnaires, informing them about their purpose, then invited the parents of the children to the school to discuss and complete the form addressed to them. There were no difficulties or weaknesses in the administration and completion of the questionnaires.

The student questionnaire requested personal data regarding: **age, sex, host country, time spent there, place of birth, nationality, current residence**. We considered all this data important to have an exhaustive position on these issues. We chose to collect information about the place of birth because it is necessary to refer to the attitude of the children towards their native place compared to the country of remigration.

The parents' questionnaire supposedly provided information on: age, gender, nationality, current occupation, current residence: R / U, country / countries of emigration, time spent outside the country, and date of return. In addition to personal data, we wanted to find out what the current occupation of parents is to identify their socio-economic status, their attitudes towards education, and their involvement in achieving it. Time spent outside the country is also an important informational resource because it is inversely proportional to the adaptive capacity of family members to what society offers.

As far as the personal data of the teachers is concerned, the questionnaire only requested the domicile, the educational institution and the professional experience. In the last situation, we considered it important to collect such data to find out if there are differences in approaching this issue according to the status of the teacher: the debutant teacher with the didactic degree II or the didactic degree I.

After applying the questionnaires, a focus group was formed based on a debate on the topics covered by the questionnaire, but insisting on some detailed information.

IV. Population

The population involved in the study was made up of remigrant people living on the territory of Bistrita-Nasaud county, because, according to statistical data, in this county, the remigrant population is represented by 1178 individuals (2008-2011).

V. Variables And Measurements

The premise started from in our research refers to a series of issues identified in the studies on this subject, undertaken up to the present day (Catalano, 2014, 2015, 2016), but also the professional and personal experiences in which we were involved.

Thus, the following can be listed:

- problems of social re-adaptation and reintegration, which only part of the remigrant children admit;
- modifications in the child's emotionality and feelings;

- modifications in the behavioral sides of the personality;
- somatic and psychosomatic disorders (Catalano, 2015, 2016) [7].

The variables that could influence our study refer to the degree of responsibility of parents and teachers towards the answers given, and in terms of students, we think that their answers can be influenced by their emotional state.

VI. Ethical Considerations

The study was carried out as a result of volunteer activities conducted by partner teachers, who, after participating in a training regarding the way the study was conducted and the purpose of its work, applied the questionnaires of the investigated subjects.

VII. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using quantitative data collection methods. After the questionnaires were handled, the answers provided by the subjects were collected, analyzed and interpreted, qualitative interpretation being made.

a. Questionnaire addressed to parents

Personal information provided by respondents provided the following data:

- 90% of the respondents were mothers (of which 60% were households);
- countries where they emigrated: Italy, Spain, Greece, Ireland, USA, France (one case for each country);
- time spent outside the country: 7-17 years.

According to existing statistics by 2012, the countries mentioned by respondents to our study are those that appear at national level. Of these, 45% of respondents were emigrants to Italy, 35% to Spain, 10.2% to Greece, 5% to Ireland, 2.9% to France, and 1.9% to US.

The amount of time spent outside the country is high for all people involved in the study. Thus, the difficulty of adapting increases directly in proportion to the number of years spent in the host country.

The answers given by the subjects to the item regarding the reasons for leaving abroad referred to the following aspects: family reunification (the husband went to work and his wife followed him), the desire to improve the standard of living, the lack of a job in Romania or, in the case of a person, the previous participation in the Work and Travel program in the USA.

98% of the respondents were hired in the host country, and part of them said they were supported by various organizations or people who suggested they go to that country. We offer a response from a respondent who has returned from Germany: Yes, they are open to this. There are institutions dealing with the integration of foreigners. From this point of view I can say I was pleased.

Regarding the reasons why they returned to Romania, the following were noted:

- starting / continuing studies in Romania (for families with children) in the highest proportion;
- house / country longing;
- emergence of financial problems in the host country;
- improving material status.

Upon returning to their native country, the problems of adaptation referred to the fact that during the time spent outside the country, they got accustomed to the lifestyle there, being difficult to reintegrate into the Romanian society because of the differences in mentality and existing lifestyle. Also, during the long period of time spent in the host country, the changes in Romania were numerous. The adaptation seemed difficult for all, because of the financial stability they had there, the fact that the representatives of the local institutions in the host country were nice and communicative, the working conditions were better, these being the reasons why they consider certain things they are missing. Much of the respondents said that people's mentality was different. A representative response for the majority of respondents is as follows: Money, obviously. Abroad, you have financial stability, then medical services that are free, based on your health card. There are no emotions that you have a health problem and you have to take out a lot of money out of your pocket.

There were also 4 people who claimed to have adapted easily, due to the fact that during the holidays they often returned to the country.

Regarding the adaptation of children, a high percentage of parents, 77% responded that they encountered difficulties mainly due to the problems of communication in Romanian, the different approach of teaching, and the lack of friends here. Difficulties in expressing, reading and writing in the mother tongue arise from the very rare use of it in the family (there are situations in which the families of the Romanian emigrants used the language of the respective country). Even though most parents felt that teachers were interested in having children quickly adapting to school life and working in addition to the pupils, some of the respondents said they were dissatisfied with this. In the first situation, the ladies were highly appreciated for the time they dedicate to these children, as well as the understanding shown. In the second situation, there were references to discriminatory actions towards them, especially at student-student level (which is not the case in the host

country, according to what they said). One respondent admitted admiringly that in Ireland there are English language teachers for immigrants, each child benefiting from individual activity to learn this language more quickly. Given these reasons, the disappointment children's parents feel when returning home is, to a large extent, supported. However, a percentage of 30% of parents claim that the adaptation was moderate and 3% even claim it was mild, without any problem.

However, in order to reduce the difficulty of children adapting to school, parents feel that close collaboration between teachers and family is needed. It has also been specified that these children should be well received in schools, encouraged, listened to and supported in their actions by all members of the school community.

In conclusion, the respondents who did not return to the Romanian education system in particular showed themselves to be dissatisfied or at least satisfied with it, because it is, in their view, below the country-specific level from which they returned (many changes are taking place, there is no stability, there are financial problems, etc.). There was no one to declare himself /herself very happy about this.

b. Student questionnaire

In this questionnaire we asked students to provide information about their age, time spent outside Romania, birthplace, and current residence. The ages of the children surveyed ranged between 7 and 11 years. 30% of them were born in Romania and 70% in the host country. After a period of between 5 and 10 years spent in that country, they returned to the city or village where they live at the time of the study (40% urban, 60% rural).

The first question of the questionnaire referred to the students' perception of starting schooling in Romania. For 64% of them, this was unpleasant due to their lifestyle habits in the other country, but also to how they were received in the community (with reluctance from children in some situations). The most difficult problem seemed, as in the case of parents, the ability to use oral and written Romanian, the grammar being, in their opinion, the hardest. In most situations, the students specified that they were helped by teachers through individual and additional activities, and in others, private tutoring was what helped them.

As far as aspects that please children in school are concerned, the relationships they have with the teachers, colleagues, plastic arts classes, sports, or English classes (because they speak English and their colleagues appreciate them for this). At the same time, there have been reported situations where classmates have shown a negative attitude towards them, caused by envy, misunderstanding and non-acceptance. One of the children even noted that they would like to be understood and appreciated by others, and that they would play more often with him. 10 children said that they would like to have more practical activities at school and have more time to play. These are considered by children and reasons why they miss the country they left, where they had friends and a different lifestyle. One of the children claimed to return to the host country (Germany) because I like their lifestyle, the way they think, you feel safe, it's a country with civilized people, and another because I left a lot of friend there. There are also weather and climate related issues in Spain or Greece (coveted for the sun and the heat there). Much of the respondents would like to return to the host country after finishing their studies.

c. Teacher questionnaire

From the personal data category, teachers were asked to note the institution they are working in and their seniority in education in order to report any differences in approaching this issue. Thus, 24 teachers work in the rural area, and 16 in the urban area, the age in education being between 5 and 25 years.

According to their responses, it was reported that remigrant pupils are adapting with difficulty to the specific requirements of the education system due to difficulties in expressing Romanian, so problems arise from: the understanding of the meaning of the message transmitted, the gaps in the elements the basic of the main conventional languages (writing, reading, mathematical calculus). Another problem is the inability of children to use handwriting because they are not used in some countries, as well as diacritical marks. One of the respondents, however, noticed that children from Latin countries are quicker to use the Romanian language at both written and oral level.

Teachers believe that the problems arise from the low use of Romanian language in interfamily communication, as well as the phenomenon of semi-vocabulary, the situation of the child being between two schools and two languages respectively. These students, as professors say, are considered to be interesting to others because of the experiences they have experienced.

Even if there are these difficulties, the relevant teachers claim that they can be overcome by effective strategies for individualizing and differentiating the content transmitted, either during or after the school curriculum. Also, 98% of the questioned teachers consider it useful to run an intervention program for these students, organized and supported by specialists in Education Sciences and by class teachers.

VIII. Results

Regarding the answers given by the parents questioned to the questions asked, we consider it necessary to formulate a series of conclusions. What is obvious is that most of the people surveyed chose to leave their home country due to poor material status. Once it was noticed that through work it can be improved, emigrants decided to stay for quite some time in the host country and there to complete / rebuild their family. It is interesting to note that some of them chose the country for purely financial reasons, but after a while they felt attached to it, so returning to their native country was considered difficult. There are also opposite cases, which claim that the country's urge to give up residence in the host country, especially since they have begun to feel uncomfortable (some even raised the appearance of Syrian emigrants).

In some cases, it was argued that there were no institutions to support them for integration into society, although they are associations of Romanians living in those areas. According to discussions in the focus groups, but also with representatives of these associations in Spain and Greece, we learned that these associations carry out cultural-artistic activities or Romanian language courses for children but do not necessarily focus on adaptation issues to the new society. Language problems can also be caused by the fact that not all Romanian children have attended these courses, otherwise the difficulties of speaking in Romanian are of lesser magnitude. Another reason for this difficulty is that these associations usually operate in areas where the number of Romanian emigrants is higher and there are no qualified personnel (primary and pre-primary teachers). However, organized activities must be appreciated by members of the Romanian community because of their interest in supporting and promoting the Romanian national language and culture, and the involvement of emigrants is as high as possible.

Another aspect considered to be unexpected is that even if they decided to return to their native country to educate children here, most of the respondents said they were dissatisfied with the Romanian education system. We believe that this issue has arisen because of the tendency to compare the two education systems, their expectations of the existing offer, and the problems that arose with the return.

Again, we believe that introducing a socio-educational intervention program involving the family members of the retired child would diminish this *adjustment shock*.

Another issue that has led us to become aware of the strengths of this study was the positive attitude of parents who have expressed their satisfaction that they have noticed our interest in the problems they face.

As far as student responses are concerned, we conclude that:

- children experience difficulties due to insufficient knowledge of the Romanian language and sometimes the inappropriate attitude of some classmates;
- there is a tendency to reject them because of communication problems in Romanian, but in some cases, the reaction is quite different - colleagues have an interest in these children;
- in the first period after the return, all children want to return to the host country because they had many friends there and the family was financially stable.

As a result of the meta-analysis of the answers provided, based on specific aspects of paraverbal communication, we noticed the children's wish to have followed the school in the host country. This desire is motivated by the fact that these children were born there, made friends in those places, the parents offered them a stable material situation, and the quality of life was superior to what they have at this time.

So, if at the beginning of our study we thought there were orphaned children with parents alive, we think that in this situation we can propose another phrase, namely children between two countries, being children who fail to figure out which of the countries in which they lived is the one who pleases him and can ensure a balanced life. Certainly, if these children would return to their native country after finishing their studies, they would not be able to adjust to 100% there, because Romania would be the country that would be in their hearts, or vice versa: if will live and work in Romania, their wish would be to stay in the other country.

Regarding the opinions of the teachers of these pupils, they identified the identification of adaptation problems caused by the insufficient knowledge of the Romanian language, but also the different style of approaching some mathematical problems. Much of the teaching staff claimed that they were very involved in these activities (during classroom classes, through differentiated and individualized activities, or after school, through direct activity at the individual level). To increase the school performance of these students, teachers claim that additional work and close collaboration with the family is needed.

A real support for the teacher's knowledge of the child's level of education is the reports made by the teachers / teachers / school managers from where he comes from. They describe in detail their abilities regarding reading, writing, mathematical computation and other subjects studied. A child characterization is also being developed, insisting on the positive features of the character and on the educational path from the beginning of the schooling until the interruption of the studies.

As far as the data provided by the teachers is concerned, we have noticed that the knowledge, skills or abilities that children have in other disciplines (geography, history, civic education) or issues that reflect their

behavior. This is explained by the importance of these two disciplines: Romanian language and literature, and mathematics.

IX. Conclusions

We organized the conclusions in strong and weakness points because we wanted to highlight both of them. In the first place, we consider that our study has some strong points, of which we mention:

- obtaining important data on the causes and ways of overcoming the problems of adaptation of the remigrant child;
- a positive impact of the study among parents, teachers and pupils due to their interest and the problems they face;
- identifying the needs that remigrants have in the return country.

The objectives pursued have been achieved and that action and research directions that can be achieved would be the design of a socio-educational program at both a collective and an individual level, which would contribute to the easy adaptation of the remigrant children to the requirements of the schools in Romania. Individual case studies can also be carried out using the research tool entitled Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) developed by R. Goodman in 1997 to investigate the difficulties and strengths in child development. It can be applied to the student, the parents and the class teacher. The tool was used in a study on Remigration of Romanian Children, conducted by the Social Alternatives organization, carried out in Romania in 2012. Its effectiveness is proven through its behavioral screening on four dimensions relevant to our study: emotional difficulties, behavioral difficulties, hyperactivity / attention deficit, and relationship difficulties.

Also, based on the results obtained, there may be a socio-educational intervention program to be carried out in each school facing this problem, as the particular cases of the investigated children also suggest problems of a socio-emotional nature other than cognitive and comprehensive.

Another strong point would be the objectivity of the respondents, especially parents and teachers. This can be noticed by the fact that every question in the questionnaire has specified the concrete problems they are facing, the answers being quite categorical and blunt. We believe that this objectivity is also due to the anonymity of the questionnaire.

The weaknesses of this study refer to the limited sample of investigated subjects, but this can be extended by including case studies at national level through collaboration with county school inspectorates and the Ministry of National Education.

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