

Reasons and social consequences of low achievement

Difficulties derived from the social and economic background of students are very often the reasons behind a low achievement and the thing that a student could not fulfil school's minimum expectations. Skills that were not acquired during the primary school can hardly be obtained later on and have a negative effect on the whole life perspective of the individual. The lack of key competencies leads to school failures which turn the person to be unmotivated and eventually to drop out of school.

The lowest achieving student population appears on vocational school all over Europe as this type of school has the lowest prestige. On this level there is an accumulation of problems: without certain knowledge and skills students are not able to learn as much as they should to fulfil the labour market expectations. Their willingness to learn is getting lower and they end up as frustrated and disappointed persons having behaviour issues as well confronting school regulations. Lowest achievers stay in the system many times without getting the proper help they need. They just stay until a while without the chance of catching up with the others. It is also common to have sort of locations where students with the same difficulties are concentrated. This has a negative effect on everyone's achievement proved by European studies. Furthermore in these locations minorities are many times overrepresented which strengthens their social exclusion. On system level it means that social inequalities are not even reproduced but strengthened while all the teachers and professionals have a failed career.

On the level of society this system reproduces social inequalities and the population that has to face school failures and most probably a life in unemployment. The lifelong perspectives of the most vulnerable children are almost decided at the time they were just born. This process contributes to a loss of the country's economy and strengthens social tension. Low achievement is many times a special symptom which could be compensated with a wide cooperation of different actors and teachers only.

Naturally there are cases when the student has all the required circumstances for a high achievement but he or she doesn't do so. This case is many times more successful though, as the family itself has more assets to pass on all basic competencies that the student can build on and find a solution for his or her life after all. The poorest and lowest educated population is lack of this asset, so that they are not able to base the core competencies and the student has to survive without any proper help throughout its life. Which basically means he or she has no real chance.

Further literature in English:

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/CEDEFOP (2014): *Tackling Early Leaving from Education and Training in Europe: Strategies, Policies and Measures*. Eurydice and CEDEFOP Report. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/175EN.pdf
p.140.

Early selection and early childhood education and care – supports and obstacles

According to the EU statistics, systems with a high level of segregation have a lower sum-achievement than those without.

“Separating students into different educational tracks or pathways on the basis of their achievement (early tracking) is another common practice in many European countries. This usually results in students being guided towards either academic or vocational programmes, which ultimately lead to different educational and career prospects.

Those in favour of tracking suggest that students learn better in homogeneous classrooms that follow a curriculum and instruction appropriate to their abilities. However, research shows that separating students too early has a strong negative impact on those placed in tracks that do not correspond to their potential and/or aspirations(...). It appears to increase differences and inequalities in student achievement. (...)

Too early selection when personality is not adult enough.

(...)

Data gathered in international student achievement surveys (PISA and PIRLS) clearly show the benefits of ECEC attendance. In the participating European countries, students who attended ECEC in their childhood, on average, outperform those who did not by 35 points, which corresponds to nearly one full year of formal schooling. Evidence from PIRLS 2011 indicates that children who have spent longer periods in ECEC are better prepared to enter and succeed in primary education. For most of the European countries participating in PIRLS 2011, the data shows that the more time a child spends in ECEC, the better their reading results.” (Eurydice-CEDEFOP, 2014, 45-47.)

Further literature in English:

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/CEDEFOP (2014): *Tackling Early Leaving from Education and Training in Europe: Strategies, Policies and Measures*. Eurydice and CEDEFOP Report. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/175EN.pdf p. 45.-47.

Involvement of different groups

According to European data again, there is a difference between girls and boys: girls perform usually better in reading, while boys are more successful in Maths and Nature Sciences. Gender however is only one factor among many more. The most determinant above all other is the socio-economic status of the person.

Further literature in English:

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/CEDEFOP (2014): *Tackling Early Leaving from Education and Training in Europe: Strategies, Policies and Measures*. Eurydice and CEDEFOP Report. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/175EN.pdf p. 42.

What is the meaning of a sudden drop in achievement?

When a student's achievement suddenly drops it means something else than the lack of key competencies and struggles with learning. In this case, not low achievement itself but the sudden negative change is the distress signal that should be considered by the teacher. This unexpected turn can arise from a tension between the teacher and the student or out of school events that have a negative effect on the student. The later has to be specifically considered as it can mean that the student is involved in a gang or some drug user or other deviant activity. It is also possible that the former high performer faces family conflicts which require some intervention outside the family.

European systems mostly follow up low achievement but have no specific protocol for the sudden deterioration. One can find some examples for the opposite though. In Slovenia for instance, 3 bad marks can be seen as a distress signal. In Sweden teachers call parents immediately in case of a downturn in one or two subjects. Estonia has a specific protocol for this case: they see sudden decline as a distress signal and the school is obliged to apply support system to improve the student's performance.

Further literature in English:

European Commission (2013a): *Early warning systems in Europe: practice, methods and lessons*. Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving (TWG on ESL), Brussels. http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/europe-warning-systems_en.pdf p. 7.

tags: distress signals, analysing behaviour, developing trusting relationship, deteriorating achievements

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