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Exploring Educational Inequalities in Romania

Ana-Maria ZAMFIR[1]
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Abstract

In the recent period, social inequalities have become a research topic of great interest for many scientists in the world. The participation of individuals to education is an important determinant for their access to subsequent opportunities, especially labor market opportunities. Moreover, an important number of studies show that education is one of the most influential factors that explain the amount of resources available to individuals in all their life cycles. In this context, reducing school dropout and increasing the share of individuals graduating from higher education represent national objectives for Romania. This article aims to analyze factors that explain differences in participation to education. A special attention will be given to urban-rural gaps in educational attainment. While taking into account main theoretical developments in the field of educational inequalities, empirical data are analyzed in order to provide a clearer picture on the factors that influence the access of individuals to higher education in Romania. Results are useful for policy makers and managers in the education field for better designing policies and study programs that are inclusive and provide better life chances to all individuals.

Keywords:

Education, inequalities, tertiary studies, vulnerabilities.

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1. Introduction

Education is beneficial for individuals, companies and societies. It supports social and economic development while ensuring better life prospects for individuals. Another important benefit of education refers to the reduction of social disparities among populations. Therefore, not only the quantity of education is important, but also the equity in education (Ibourk and Amaghouss, 2012). A balanced distribution of the access to education among various groups fosters social mobility and prevents the reproduction of inequalities on long run. Recent evidences show that educational inequalities are closely linked with income inequalities (Blau and Kahn, 2005).

Various definitions and indicators have been used for studying educational inequalities. One interesting approach is that educational inequalities represent the part of the variance in educational achievements that is explained on the base of predetermined factors / circumstances (such as gender, area of residence, social origin, ethnicity, etc.) (Ferreira, 2011). It means that specific methodological approaches need to be employed in order to analyze disparities in educational outcomes. The idea is to find a way to link gaps in educational achievements with predetermined characteristics of individuals. Such an approach highlights the existence of inequalities in educational opportunities that affect educational achievements.

Two major approaches have been employed in order to analyze educational inequalities. First, researchers have studied indicators related with educational attainment: level of education or number of years of schooling. Second, many studies have analyzed distribution of individual performances in comparable tests such as PISA tests and PIAAC program. On the other hand, Altonji and Mansfield (2010) have studied how family characteristics predict educational outcomes because they primarily predict the quality of schools the children attend to (Altonji and Mansfield, 2010).

This article aims to analyze factors that explain differences in participation to education in Romania. While taking into account main theoretical developments in the field of educational inequalities, empirical data from most recent national census are analyzed in order to provide a clearer picture on the factors that influence the access of individuals to education in Romania.

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2. Theoretical framework

Modernization theory states that during industrialization, meritocracy based social mobility mechanisms have emerged. Moreover, during this period, the expansion of education together with the higher levels of revenues for those with higher professional abilities determined the reduction of inequalities in educational opportunities (Boudon, 1973). From a different theoretical perspective, other scholars have argued that regardless the effects of economic capital on educational opportunities, cultural resources have an important role in shaping and maintaining the mechanisms of social reproduction and participation to education. So, in some cases, the declining effect of the economic background is counterbalanced by the increasing effect of the cultural capital on the access to education (DiMaggio, 1982).

In their theory regarding maximally maintained inequality, Raftery and Hout (1993) demonstrate that the effect of the education expansion on mobility and inequalities become significant when the demand for higher education is satisfied among upper social classes. On the other hand, the theory of effectively maintained inequality argues that upper classes act for maintaining their educational advantage, both quantitative and qualitative (i.e. better schools) (Lucas, 2001).

3. Data and methodology

This article presents an analysis of the official data provided by the Romanian National Institute for Statistics regarding participation of individuals to education. In order to study the stock and distribution of education in Romania, three main indicators are analyzed:

- School enrolment – referring to the share of students in a specific age group in the total number of population in the same age group;
- Educational attainment - referring to the highest level of education completed;
- Educational poverty – referring to individuals of 25+ years old who didn't achieve at least upper secondary education (European Commission, 2014).

The above mentioned indicators are analyzed in relation with three variables that represent predetermined conditions that can influence the access and participation of individuals to education: gender,

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age and area of residence. The school enrolment is presented for the following age categories: 6-10 years old, 11-14 years old, 15-18 years old and 19-23 years old, corresponding to regular age intervals for different educational stages/levels. The other two indicators are calculated on the base of results of the most recent Romanian Census for population and households (2011). For their analysis, we constructed three age categories: 25-34 years old (comprising individuals born in 1977-1986 period who reached the typical age of entering into higher education in the period of its expansion); 35-44 years old (comprising individuals born in 1976-1967 who reached the typical age of entering into higher education in a period close to the transition from communist to capitalist system); 45+ years old (comprising individuals born before 1966 who reached the typical age of entering into higher education in the communist period).

4. Stock and distribution of education in Romania

For observing quantity of education in a given society, researchers have studied the school enrolment ratios [1]. The values of the enrolment ratio by age in Romania highlight two important transitions in education: entering into upper secondary education and entering into tertiary education or post upper secondary education. While gender does not influence the probability to continue education in the upper secondary system, the participation to higher education is strongly shaped by it. The transition to higher education for men is less likely as against women (Fig. 1).

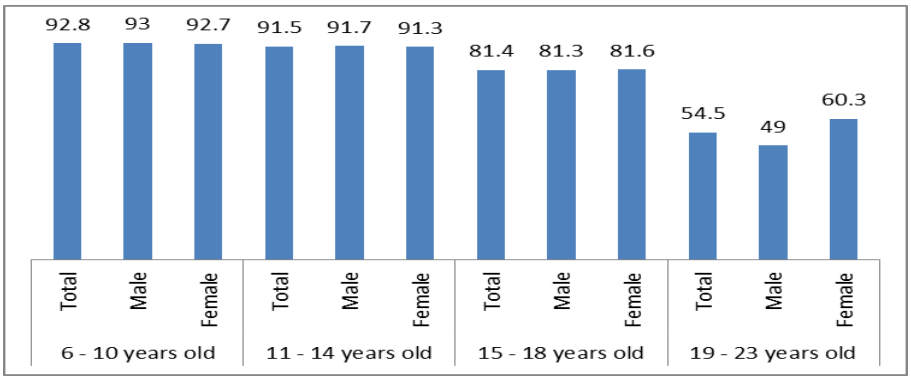

Figure 1. Enrollment ratio in education of school age population, 2013

Source: National Institute for Statistics, http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/

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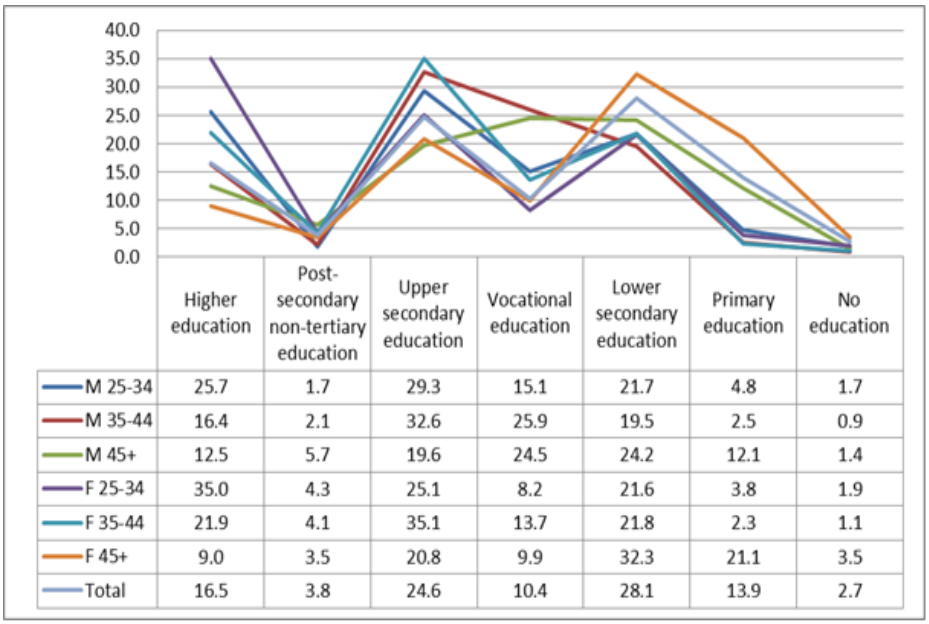
The influence of gender on school careers is also highlighted by data on educational attainment. However, the relation between gender and education has changed during time as younger generations display higher shares of women completing higher education as against men. For individuals of 45+ years old, the school attainment of men is higher. In the same time, older men display a lower share of individuals with no education (1.4%) than women do (3.5%). Comparing the shares of those completing higher education for the age groups 25-34 and 35-44 years old, one could see that the gap between women and men is rising (Fig. 2).



	Higher education	Post-secondary non-tertiary education	Upper secondary education	Vocational education	Lower secondary education	Primary education	No education
M 25-34	25.7	1.7	29.3	15.1	21.7	4.8	1.7
M 35-44	16.4	2.1	32.6	25.9	19.5	2.5	0.9
M 45+	12.5	5.7	19.6	24.5	24.2	12.1	1.4
F 25-34	35.0	4.3	25.1	8.2	21.6	3.8	1.9
F 35-44	21.9	4.1	35.1	13.7	21.8	2.3	1.1
F 45+	9.0	3.5	20.8	9.9	32.3	21.1	3.5
Total	16.5	3.8	24.6	10.4	28.1	13.9	2.7

Figure 2. Educational attainment for individuals of 25+years old by gender, age and education (%)
Source: authors' calculation on data from National Institute for Statistics 2011 Census, http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/

Values of the educational poverty rate by gender and age confirm that for individuals of 45+ years old, male participation to education is much higher as against women. As the cultural model and social and

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economic conditions have changed, younger generations display closer levels of the educational poverty rate for men and women (Fig. 3).

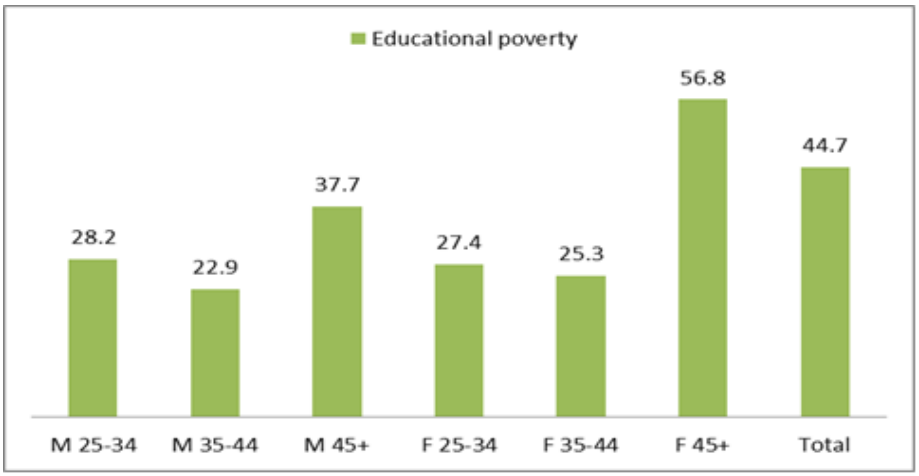

Figure 3. Educational poverty rate by gender and age (%)
Source: authors' calculation on data from National Institute for Statistics 2011 Census, http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/

Educational attainment by area of residence highlights the major influence of this "pre-determined factor" on the access to education and on the probability of continuing education. The gap between rural and urban areas is underlined by higher shares of individuals from rural areas reaching at most lower secondary education and higher shares of individuals from urban areas with higher education. The major difference between urban and rural areas regarding the rate of individuals with higher education is fueled, among others, by the significant migration flows of young people leaving from rural localities to universities from the cities and deciding to remain in the host localities for better job and life prospects. Also, data show an increase in the share of individuals completing at most lower secondary education or primary education for the youngest generation as against 35-44 years old (Fig. 4).

Educational poverty rate by area of residence and age indicates that the negative evolution registered by the youngest age category (25-34 years old) is very modest in urban areas and much more important in rural ones. Thus, the urban educational poverty rate increased from 12.6% among those aging 35-44 years old to 13.9% for 25-34 years old.

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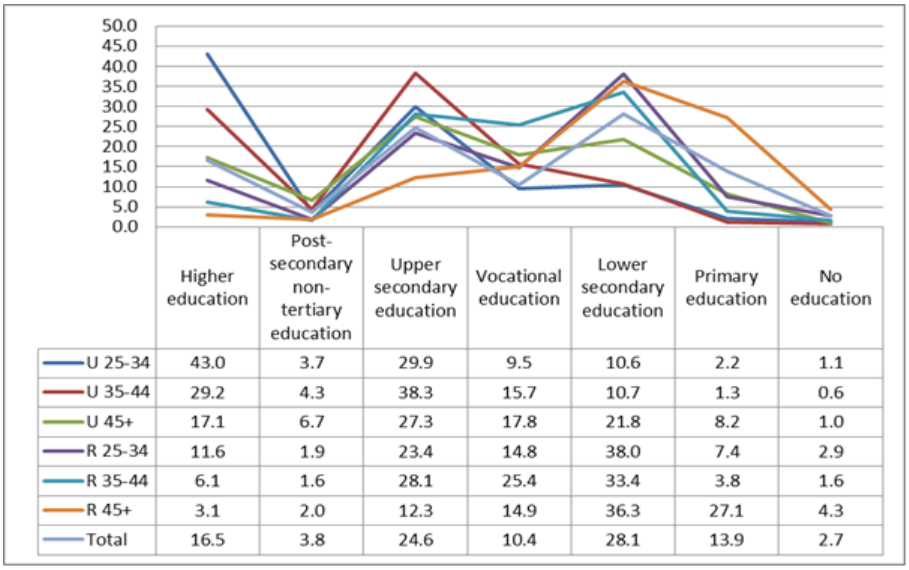
On the hand, in rural areas, the educational poverty rate increased from 38.8% for 35-44 years old to 48.3% for 25-34 years old. In fact, values of this indicator by age groups show that the educational rural-urban gap is on the rise (Fig. 5).



	Higher education	Post-secondary non-tertiary education	Upper secondary education	Vocational education	Lower secondary education	Primary education	No education
U 25-34	43.0	3.7	29.9	9.5	10.6	2.2	1.1
U 35-44	29.2	4.3	38.3	15.7	10.7	1.3	0.6
U 45+	17.1	6.7	27.3	17.8	21.8	8.2	1.0
R 25-34	11.6	1.9	23.4	14.8	38.0	7.4	2.9
R 35-44	6.1	1.6	28.1	25.4	33.4	3.8	1.6
R 45+	3.1	2.0	12.3	14.9	36.3	27.1	4.3
Total	16.5	3.8	24.6	10.4	28.1	13.9	2.7

Figure 4. Educational attainment for individuals of 25+years old by area of residence, age and education (%)
Source: authors' calculation on data from National Institute for Statistics 2011 Census, http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/

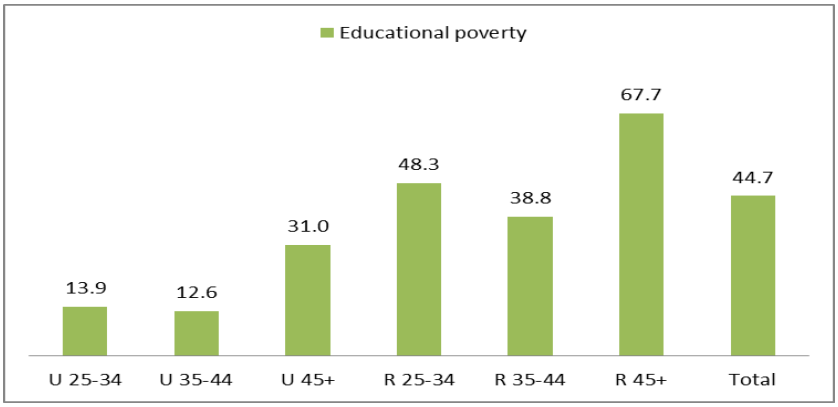


Figure 5. Educational poverty rate by area of residence and age (%)

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Source: authors' calculation on data from National Institute for Statistics 2011 Census, http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/

5. Conclusions

This article aims to explore and highlight educational inequalities in Romania. The topic of this article is highly relevant taking into account that European agenda encourages member states to foster equity in their education systems while enhancing quality and fairness. Therefore, education system and policy should enable all individuals to benefit from education in a way that would ensure them the possibility to acquire skills needed for employment and inclusion. We build our analysis on official statistics regarding participation to education and school attainment. In order to see how the post-communist reforms and changes have influenced educational inequalities we constructed three age groups for our analysis: 25-34 years old, 35-44 years old and 45+ years old. These categories correspond to specific periods related to changes in the cultural, economic and social system, including the education system and to modifications in the patterns of participating to education. Furthermore, selected indicators have been analyzed in relation with age, gender and area of residence.

Our results show as general trend that historical, economic and political context shaped the educational inequalities in Romania in great extent. These evidences support the modernization theory. However, poor performances registered by individuals aging 25-34 years old from rural areas (who reached the typical age of entering in higher education in a period of education expansion) regarding educational attainment and educational poverty represent strong arguments in the favor of maximally maintained inequality and effective maintained inequality theories. Thus, although the recent reforms in the economic, social and educational systems increased participation of individuals to education/higher education, this positive evolution is present more in urban areas and less in rural areas. According with the provisions of the maximally maintained inequality theory, participation to education of rural individuals will improve in a significant manner after the demand for education coming from urban areas will be satisfied.

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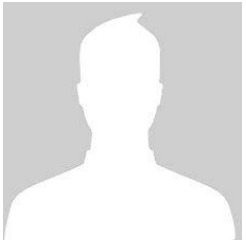

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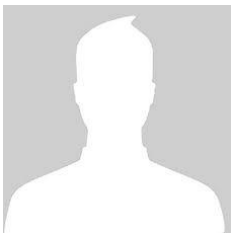

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