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Educational Needs of Spanish Youths at Risk of Social Exclusion: Future Challenges before School Failure

Ana Fernández-García¹ - Fátima Poza-Vilches²

José Luis García Llamas³

¹ *Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) - Department of Research Methods and Diagnosis in Education (MIDE II - OEDIP) (Spain)*

² *Universidad de Granada - Department of Research Methods and Diagnosis in Education (Spain)*

³ *Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) - Department of Research Methods and Diagnosis in Education (MIDE I) (Spain)*

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anafernandez@edu.uned.es

fatimapoza@ugr.es

jlgarcia@edu.uned.es

BISOGNI EDUCATIVI DEI GIOVANI SPAGNOLI A RISCHIO DI ESCLUSIONE SOCIALE: SFIDE PROSSIME PER EVITARE L'INSUCCESSO SCOLASTICO

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the strengths, needs and future challenges posed by the current training and education of youths at risk of social exclusion, focusing on those youths who are at risk of dropping out of school and have problems accessing the labour market. Its objectives are: to characterize, from a professional perspective, the education and training needs of young people who find themselves in situations of exclusion; identify strengths in current education and training activities available to young people, and; establish a resource bank for possible future challenges raised by professionals in this field to improve the current situation. For this, we conducted an exploratory pilot research study that involved 34 experienced professional experts that was focused on describing the current situation in Spain in the field of education and training of youths at risk of dropping

out of school or exclusion. This study concludes that the creation and consolidation of coordinated networks between the public administration, the private sector and social entities is a challenge that must be addressed within this field. Likewise, developing sustainable and inclusive training activities for young people involves creating more flexible, individualized and personalized training itineraries that address not only basic training but also transversal competences.

Keywords: Challenges; Education-training; Needs; Social exclusion risk; Young people.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to uncover the needs, strengths and challenges posed by the current education system for youths who are at risk of social exclusion, those who are at risk of dropping out of school or those that have prematurely left their studies without completing compulsory units. To this end, we have examined, – in collaboration with 34 professionals who work with the most vulnerable youths –, the education and training needs of this group, in the hope that this results in an ability to offer them a quality education.

The early withdrawal from study by many young people is a particularly serious problem in Spain. The Labour Force Survey in the field of education-training lists this group as those aged 18-24 years old who have not passed the second stage of secondary education. Their highest educational level is 0-2 of the CNED-2014 (Compulsory Secondary Education – CSE), and they are not enrolled in any educational or training activities (formal and non-formal) (INE, 2017).

For a significant part of those members of new generations who lack adequate education-training, this situation can have serious implications on the future status of their labour, economic and social development and inclusion. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics (Spain) (INE, 2017), this is a worrying situation, with early school leaver figures from 2016 in the field of education-training positioning Spain amongst the top-ranking EU countries for male dropouts (almost doubling figures for EU-28, 12.3%, and surpassed only by Malta, 23.4%).

However, prematurely leaving school has an even greater and more negative consequence when students fail to successfully complete compulsory education, and therefore, we face a school failure issue. In this sense, those young people who decide to leave school prematurely «are in a situa-

tion of vulnerability (school failure) that hinders their active participation in not only education, but also socio-economic development and increases their risk of social, laboured and educational exclusion» (Olmos & Mas, 2013, p. 78; Strand *et al.*, 2017). Young people become «a vulnerable group with difficulties to access, reincorporate and maintain permanence in educational and work contexts» (Olmos, 2014, p. 533), thus finding themselves in a position of extreme risk.

2. SCHOOL FAILURE RISKS

Several authors have studied those elements that are most relevant when characterising a student's educational failure. In line with Choi de Mendizábal and Calero (2013) or Gonzalez-Rodríguez, Vieira and Vidal (2019), we must take into account gender, the repetition of a course and the lack of early childhood education (previous and separate levels), the socio-professional category, economic activity, parental birth place, educational resources of the home and the way the home functions (family setting) as well as the characteristics of the families of the students enrolled at the institution (the school setting) (King, Gonzales, & Reinke, 2018; Levi-Belz *et al.*, 2019). For their part, Márquez and Gualda (2014) present three elements as essential to determining the educational failure of students: detachment, disconnection and underperformance.

Detachment from school is linked to those youths who have an unstable identity that causes them anxiety and insecurity. These young people do not enjoy school and find very few formal activities to be a source of joy. They find school to be a hindrance and spend a lot of time thinking about how to fend for themselves, studying without motivation. It is characterized by a decreasing motivation for learning (Hung, 2014) and underperformance. On other hand, we understand the disconnection from school to be a state where young people have stopped following the educational curriculum and they are at risk of leaving school early.

Given this, these authors declare «the importance of more thoroughly knowing how these dynamics behave, especially [in societies] with a level of competence and demand like ours, [where] disengagement and failures in the education system lead to an increase in those factors relating to the risk of exclusion and social marginalization» (Márquez & Gualda, 2014, p. 58). They also add other relevant factors to take into account such as the expectations of young people, their socio-family environment and an educational organization that defends and advocates for educational inclusion

(Márquez & Gualda, 2014; Brown, Cook, & Santos, 2019; Corchuelo *et al.*, 2019; Gonzalez-Rodríguez, Vieira, & Vidal, 2019).

Faced with the situation of school failure, it is argued that «a return to training and education is a privileged instrument to help young people to advance along this long and complex process of adolescence, to do it in a way that opens up opportunities, helps them, and others, build a freer, more-creative future with greater social justice» (Adame & Salvá, 2010, p. 206); it may be though that it is these very contexts themselves that have impacted on or have caused this problem of vulnerability (Olmos, 2014; Brown, Cook, & Santos, 2019).

Therefore, it is necessary that institutions do not offer the same educational models to those youths that have other needs so that they do not amplify their own shortcomings or difficulties, but rather place students as protagonists of their training, whilst admitting that the school and its institutions have failed in its function of welcoming all its members, operating equitably and promoting inclusion. These factors are shared by different authors, such as Brown, Cook and Santos (2019) and Choi de Mendizábal and Calero (2013, p. 563), when they highlight the importance of «early intervention, the individualization of student treatment and the maintenance of equity» as the backbone of the recommended policies that must be present in each educational institution.

Given this, it becomes relevant to build education and training programs for young people that find themselves immersed in school failure, and, as a result, have serious difficulties in achieving social integration (Mascareño, 2019). These programs must enable them to continue their studies to access employment and find «their place» in society.

On an international level, and taking into account the measures proposed by the OECD (2011, cited in Pascual & Fernández, 2013), recommendations include «the need to avoid school segregation, repeating any given academic year, postponing selective programs, strengthening leadership in schools with low performance rates, stimulating favourable learning environments, retaining and supporting high-quality teachers and fostering the relationship between schools, parents and communities» (p. 152).

3. EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT

There are many proposals that have been drawn up in order to achieve quality education for all. These are known as «second chance» programs and aim to aid those students who wish to leave school, offering quality

training appropriate to their needs (Abayasekara & Gunasekara, 2019). In the Spanish context, social guarantee programs emerged in 2002 as an educational measure for those students who wanted to leave school. In 2006, the Initial Professional Qualification Programs (IPQP) replaced the previous program aiming to ensure that students could achieve any necessary professional skills. This program was revamped in 2013 in a new political attempt to improve the training of those most vulnerable young people (Fernández-García, Poza-Vilches, & García, 2019), culminating in what is known as Basic Vocational Training (BVT).

In this sense, several authors, including Adame and Salvá (2010, p. 207), claim that «the success of lifelong learning policies and, therefore, the construction of a knowledgeable Europe, one with a high degree of social cohesion, depends, to a large extent, on the construction of a high quality, second chance education system». To this point, as an example, Olmos and Mas (2013) refer to training and guidance programs for work as activities linked to second chance programs that provide access to the labour market or form part of the education system.

A current lack of stability at work is modifying the important role of social relationships and the networks created, especially for young people (Walter & Mpho, 2019). «There are no longer solid life scenarios, but mobility transitions, which allow us to respond to growing demands for flexibility. For this reason, there is a need for robust institutions that dedicate themselves to working toward the social insertion of these young people so that quality social interventions can be achieved» (Pérez *et al.*, 2016, p. 53).

Without a doubt, a society with a greater number of well-trained and prepared people, and with reductions in the number of school dropouts, will be better able to face times of crisis. This entails a change in the current educational model, supporting improvements in compulsory units of secondary education and, as a result, reductions in school absenteeism figures. School absenteeism is a key factor in the process of youth educational disconnection and one which ultimately leads to early educational abandonment (MECD, 2013; Sheehan & Shi, 2019).

Likewise, consideration of the family and community contexts may prove very relevant in preventing school dropouts and dealing with the training and social inclusion of young people who have no interest in finishing their studies. Motivation and an understanding of young people's home life contexts are elements that improve their attitude and performance, as well as help to prevent demotivation and early school dropout figures (Grau *et al.*, 2011; Sansale, DeLoach, & Kurt, 2019).

Faced with this situation, the professionals working and intervening in the lives of these youths – especially those who are vulnerable –, are a

key element in understanding a students' needs in terms of training, specifically in making progress on addressing the proposed challenges of their social and labour integration in the not-too-distant future. Therefore, as claimed by Grau *et al.* (2011, pp. 73-74), the training of capable professionals (skills, abilities, aptitudes, etc.) who are able to provide support to this group becomes essential. They go on to stress that «teacher training is undoubtedly essential to motivate, attend to and involve students. Creating interest, training, coping with education and society, acknowledging diversity and, therefore, establishing an enriching learning environment becomes a source of learning for all. Continuous and updated training that will improve practice, along with a positive attitude and aptitude, both personal and professional». Other authors place important weight and a crucial role on the education and training of teaching staff when determining that this formation is critical to the success (or failure) of students (Pérez, 2017). In the same way, and taking into account the high rates of school failure in Spain and in other countries, reversing these numbers involves the need to design programs for both new teacher training and continuous (lifelong) training adapted to the students' reality and current problems (Pérez, 2017; Shabi, 2019).

For this reason, and in light of the situation described, training becomes vitally important, since it stands out as fundamental to enabling youths at risk of exclusion to improve their skills in order to achieve employment on equal terms with other citizens. It is essential to start with the needs and demands of those professionals working in this field to outline future challenges and alleviate this situation, which is the goal of this paper.

4. METHOD

4.1. Objectives

The objectives set out in this body of research are:

- (a) Characterize the training needs of youths at risk of exclusion from the perspective of professionals.
- (b) Identify strengths of current educational activities for young people.
- (c) Establish any future challenges that the professionals in this field consider relevant to improving the current state of affairs.

4.2. *Population and sample*

The study's sample is composed of 34 social agents who are experts in intervention and with whom we have had some involvement in previous studies. With regard to the selection criteria of the experts, knowledge and/or theoretical/practical links in intervention in the field of the training of the most vulnerable youths (at risk of social exclusion), their motivation and availability to participate in this technique and the ease of contact and speed of response are assessed. Regarding the geographical area, experts from all over the Spanish territory have been selected. The number of participants is as follows: guest experts: 48; experts who participated: 34. The sample of respondents corresponds to eight nationally autonomous regions: «Autonomous region of Madrid» (10); «Region of País Vasco» (8); «Autonomous region of Castilla y Leon» (6); «Autonomous region of Andalucía» (6), and; «Region of Galicia», «Region of Murcia» and «Region of Asturias» each with one (1) respondent respectively.

The sample's sociodemographic characteristics are:

- The representation in relation to gender is distributed as follows: (20) women and (14) men. Regarding age groups, (11) respondents were aged between 46 and 50 years old; there are (7) respondents aged 41 to 45 years old; (5) respondents aged between 51 and 55 years old; and 4 respondents aged 26 to 30 and between 31 and 35 years respectively. Only (2) people fell into the age group between 36 and 40 years old.
- The educational level is diverse, (14) participants hold a university degree; (10) hold a master's degree; (4) have completed an undergraduate degree and only one (3) holds a PhD or has (Vocational Training) of II Degree, respectively.

In relation to their professional development, (13) experts work for Social Organizations, (12) twelve have vocational links to the State Administration (such as public local organizations, educational institutions of both intermediate and higher education or juvenile institutions). For (6) participants, their work is carried out within private entities (specialized training centres for young people). Finally, (3) of the professionals divide their employment between both private and public entities, including volunteering.

The respondents are a group with extensive professional expertise endorsed by their number of years of experience: (12) participants have over 21 years' experience; (9) nine participants have experience ranging from 6 to 10 years; (6) six participants ranging from 16 to 20 years and (5) experts ranging from 11 to 15.

Focusing on their professional background, this is linked to various work areas with young people, especially vulnerable youths, such as immi-

gration, disability, advice and guidance in primary and/or secondary education levels, professional training and universities, prevention of addiction (alcohol, drugs, etc.).

4.3. *Instrument*

Our research can be identified as exploratory. This study tries to create descriptions, focusing attention on the «what is» of the studied phenomenon, going beyond the mere collection of data. It is an exploratory study that aims to investigate the problem in the context of reference without offering definitive solutions. The research topic is explored across various depths (Bisquerra, 2009; Shields & Rangarajan, 2013), with the purpose of generating processes of self-reflection for the improvement of the professional practice of the participants in the study (Gün, 2010; Putney & Broughton, 2010; Kilgour *et al.*, 2015; Poza-Vilches *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, we started with an exploratory pilot research study focused on describing, through the experience and professionalism of 34 experts, the current situation in Spain of the most vulnerable youths (those at risk of dropping out of school) in the context of education and training.

An open-ended questionnaire was drawn up to extract qualitative information regarding training. It consists of seven questions that have alluded to the defined independent variables, and three that have collected information on each of the dependent variables. The following study variables were addressed:

- (a) Descriptive or independent variables: gender, age, academic level, region where respondent is undertaking employment, career path, current situation and position.
- (b) Dependent/studied variables: training needs, strengths and future challenges. Training needs refer to those educational aspects in the training of young people that is relevant to introduce so that they do not leave school. Strengths refer to those aspects that respondents working with young people consider as favouring a student's permanence and achievement of success in studies. Future challenges are those aspects that require the entire educational system to change to avoid early school leaving for these young people, and improve professional practice and training interventions.

The study was undertaken using a qualitative methodological design based on an open questionnaire, drafted with the intention to gather information in a reflexive manner, favouring improvement processes of the intervention itself over its practice (McDonald *et al.*, 2007; Gün, 2010;

Putney & Broughton, 2010; Kilgour *et al.*, 2015; Poza-Vilches *et al.*, 2018; Poza-Vilches *et al.*, 2019) all related to the problem of the education and training of youths who are at risk of exclusion.

The initial questionnaire proposal was submitted for feedback and assessment by a series of judges and/or experts in the field under study. This information was collected from three university professors, three social educators with knowledge of the subject and three professionals from the field of socio-educational intervention. Given that the assessments were positive, only some nuances and clarifications were incorporated into the formulation of the items.

The questions included in the survey are:

- (a) In order of importance, list some of the current «needs» that you detect in terms of training for youth at risk of dropping out.
- (b) «Strengths» of the current youth training interventions you know about.
- (c) In order of priority, what actions and strategic lines would you propose as «future challenges» to improve your professional practice and training intervention for young people to avoid dropping out of school?

4.4. Data collection and analysis procedure

The data collection process has consisted of emailing questionnaires to the selected subjects.

The protocol followed to analyse information collected has consisted of an analysis of the qualitative content gathered. Authors such as Merriam and Grenier (2019), Tracy (2019) and López-Noguero (2002) identify this procedure as ideal for descriptive research studies because it helps to delimit the basic components of a phenomenon from the given content, with a focus on the rigorous process of measurement. Using this technique, we have allocated a value to the ideas expressed by the professionals, focusing on their perceptions and opinions, and to the descriptions given of each variable studied. This has resulted in a trend map linked to professional practice in this field that has facilitated the identification of possible common and/or effective intervention patterns, as well as the characterization of good practices for the future.

To treat this information, we have based our analysis on the four quality criteria that need to be considered in an analysis of qualitative information (credibility, applicability, consistency and neutrality) (Guba & Lincoln, 1991; Poza-Vilches *et al.*, 2019): (i) Credibility: during the analysis process, conversations were held with participants to corroborate the inter-

pretations made based on their answers; (ii) Applicability or transferability: the study has been carried out with 34 experts and professionals in the field of the education and training of youths at risk of dropping out of school or exclusion in a Spanish context, but instruments and results obtained can be applied in other contexts with similar characteristics; (iii) Consistency: we believe that similar results would be obtained if the study was to be replicated and involve other experts looking at different contexts within Spain or even contexts outside the Spanish territory because the analysis has been carried out in a meticulous way; (iv) Neutrality: the detailed description of the research process outlined in this article shows that it has been a neutral and non-biased process.

Content analysis has been developed through the Atlas.Ti computer package, following the process outlined below:

- (a) Preparation of information: collection and transcription of all texts in RTF format. Use of the qualitative analysis computer program (Atlas.Ti) with the purpose of analysing the texts in the successive coding phases.
- (b) Numbering of narrations based on the numbering of paragraphs, as well as the first reading of the texts, which was used as the foundation of a meaningful interpretation of the information collected. We categorized it after the second reading, selecting the text fragments according to the axes described in the different categories. A comparison of the data obtained, together with the annotations drawn up after a first reading, made it easier for us to modify the categorical axes processually and inductively.
- (c) Coding of information: derived using two coding models: fast, with textual selections that represented only one category (for example, needs in curricular education and training, state policies of educational actions ...; picking up those common ideas in the responses of each interviewee), and; manual coding, when several categories are placed in the same paragraph that need to be marked, leaving text outside the selection. All study researchers in this article have agreed on the established categories, participating in coordination meetings and consensual approval.
- (d) Interpretation of information: a first report has been prepared with the exposure of meta categories and sub-dimensions linked to the different analysis variables. From this point on, the information has been dumped and the results report written. After completing this process, the dimensions and subdimensions that have guided the analysis of the information and interpretation of results have been detailed in *Figure 1*.

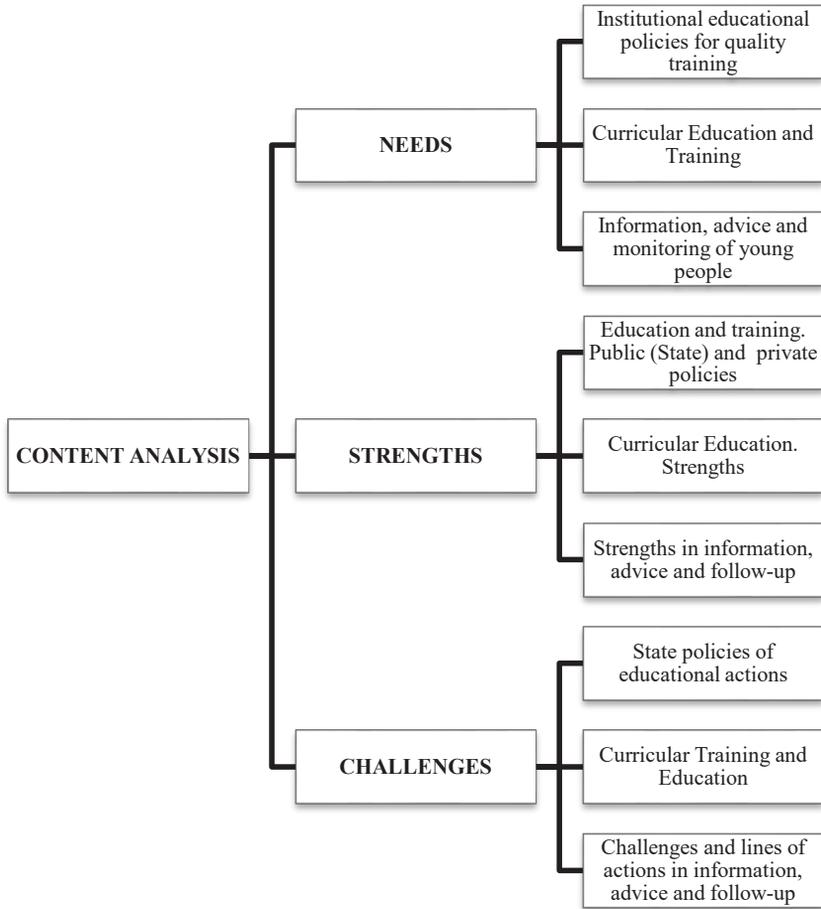


Figure 1. – Content analysis. Dimensions and sub-dimensions.

5. RESULTS

The results obtained are linked to the dependent variables addressed in the questionnaire: (a) needs discovered in relation to curricular training; (b) strengths found in training; (c) future action lines and challenges.

5.1. Needs

In relation to the first category, all the information collected relating to the needs detected in training, which includes the subcategories and primary codes obtained for each of them, is shown schematically (see *Tab. 1*).

Concerning the educational policies for youth training, social agents have highlighted that it is necessary to generate cooperation networks across all organizations (both public and private) with social initiatives, to plan education and training for social and work skills that will provide them with skills and prepare them for access to the labour market. Expressed verbatim, «It is essential to establish cooperative relationships between the different professionals at the training institutions, since these individuals have different personal and social circumstances and, in many cases, cooperation and socio-educational interventions carried out jointly with other professionals is very necessary» (I 12)¹.

It is the view of these professionals that it is pertinent to prioritize the provision of both human and financial resources in order to ensure youths are well prepared on both a social and scientific level. There should also be advice given to young people about their educational trajectories, thus strengthening their motivation. They must also inform them about the educational services and opportunities that exist at national and local levels in order to guarantee quality competence training.

In relation to the needs detected in their curricular training, professionals are looking for general planning in basic education across the entire territory, where the development of social skills and civic attitudes in young people is particularly important. They can acquire the basic educational, human and civic requirements that will enable them to feel valid and useful within the context in which they live. Therefore, they consider it relevant to equalize access, competences, education and prior knowledge.

They also believe that there is a need for the planning of educational programs that are flexible and attractive, both in their objectives and in providing curricular content appropriate to their profiles and developed through participatory and collaborative methodologies, where social skills and civic attitudes are addressed to prevent failures and early school leavers. They also stress that it is necessary to work on literacy and basic elementary calculus, and on communication techniques and skills, in order to learn to handle different codes and registers of both written and oral language.

¹ The letter «I» means «interviewee», and the number corresponds to the subject that has responded of the 34 participants in the investigation.

Table 1. – Identified needs in respect of the education field.

SUB-CATEGORIES	PRIMARY CODES
<i>Institutional educational policies for quality training</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of coordination between institutions• Lack of attention paid to disruptive students• Precarity of resources• Increase study aids• Programs that advocate education in competences
<i>Curricular education and training</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster educational measures that prevent dropping out of school early• Offer an education that includes attitudes, social and civic skills• Greater offering of regulated and non-regulated Vocational Training• Adapt training programs to professions• Information-oriented training• Implement training activities in accordance with needs and demands
<i>Information, advice and monitoring of young people</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthen ties on educational issues between educational institutions• Accompanied throughout the youth's insertion process• Provide competent professionals• Effective communication so that the information reaches a greater number of young people

Taking into account this typology of young people, they believe it necessary to provide them, at various educational institutions, with alternative modalities in terms of education and training, including virtual, in situ or a semi-virtual and semi-in situ combination adapted to personal profiles, and insist on educational competences that enable lasting personal development in order to encourage and maintain a life-long learning process.

They also request that theoretical-practical training programs be implemented where professional practice is the axis on which theoretical training gravitates and harmony is achieved between cultural contents of a theoretical nature and those linked to professional practice. Therefore, they ask for individualized educational programs to be implemented, where theoretical learning can be complemented with practical activities, in which priority is given to the aiding of those students who have worse grades and who have yet to start their professional practice, without forgetting other familiar and social aspects that place the vulnerable in a situation

of extreme precariousness. In short, they require basic training not only reduced to the acquisition of cultural content, but an integral approach that is linked to transversal, instrumental and emotional competences, since this approach broadens the perspective in education, endowing it with a global and inclusive nature that favours the development of each individual and their insertion in their everyday context.

5.2. *Strengths*

The second category refers to identifying the strengths that exist in the professional and curricular education of youths with social difficulties. It highlights the subcategories and primary codes and is outlined below (see *Tab. 2*).

The professionals highlight the close collaborative links between public education services and educational institutions in regard to inclusion, by offering a broad range of education and training that will lead them into the world of employment.

They also confirm that there is a strong commitment by the educational institution to carry out training and education through personalized training programs, adapting the objectives, contents, methods or learning paces, to the students' specific interests and preferences. Programs that are designed according to the context, skills and abilities of each apprentice with the mission of reducing school absenteeism in areas of social difficulty, promoting motivation and reinforcing the need to continue education.

Another strength is found in the «relevant work carried out by specific institutions and centres. Both provide educational itineraries with various occupational programs, providing personalized support to young people during the training period, in this way promoting an adequate social and employment integration» (I 5).

Social agents highlight the impetus given to training by the State, companies and other organizations. From the State, they highlight the fact of fostering: «dual training (educational centre-company), and inclusive social guarantee measures. As well as the organizations that work supporting individuals at risk of exclusion» (I 23).

Professionals point out the existing strengths with respect to the wide range of educational offerings, open and flexible in nature, whose objectives are to return young people to the educative system and improve their qualifications, knowledge and capacities. It also promotes education in values and social skills, intersperses theoretical activities with attractive practices found in both labour and social realities.

Table 2. – Current strengths in respect to curricular education and training.

SUB-CATEGORIES	PRIMARY CODES
<i>Education and training. Public (State) and private policies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gain professional certifications that accredit professional competences• Variety of grants (scholarships)• Diversity of activities, educational and online training resources• Collaboration between training institutions and public services
<i>Curricular education. Strengths</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extensive and regulated education and training offerings to enter the labour market• Plurality of methods aimed at a diversity of profiles, concerns and needs• Methodological variety for the acquisition of competences• Articulation of regulated and non-regulated training (educational) activities that facilitate integration and participation
<i>Strengths in information, advice and follow-up</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informative public network in various areas of the cities• Variety of information services: collaborative networks, emails, etc.• Professionals who are qualified and enthusiastic about their mission• Focus on accompanying and following young people along their socio-educational trajectory

They consider it a strength to produce trained and qualified professionals with the aim of guiding young people in their training trajectory. These professionals take on the task of personalizing follow-ups during the realization of the professional programs to aid with reinforcing a youth's self-esteem, involvement in the educational-training processes and assisting them in their needs to achieve educational goals.

5.3. Challenges

The third category refers to the lines and challenges of future actions in order to improve the work and professional practice of this group of youths. Below we include the subcategories and primary codes that we will comment on later (see *Tab. 3*).

Table 3. – Challenges and future lines of actions for curricular training.

SUB-CATEGORIES	PRIMARY CODES
<i>State policies of educational actions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support the initiatives proposed and managed by young people themselves • To provide more resources (human and material) • Reinforce collaborative work between public agencies and private sectors
<i>Curricular training and education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan collaborative transversal training programs between educational institutes and businesses • Flexibilize educational and training offerings and connect it with reality • Develop social skills • Propose personalised programs to be implemented • Employ methodological variety: personalized and cooperative
<i>Challenges and lines of actions in information, advice and follow-up</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater diffusion of information • Provide meetings to participate and integrate into training activities • Affirm the figure of the professional companion • Personalized follow-ups • Encourage motivation, interest and self-esteem of users

These challenges include: social agents emphasize the significance of give a larger economic resources to provide human and material resources to socio-educational institutions in order to ensure better educational quality and broadly cover the educational and personal needs that characterize the most vulnerable youths, which should include, among others, scholarships to study and travel, to reconcile family life, study and work, etc.

Another challenge and line of activity would be aiding in the implementation of educational and training initiatives requested by the students themselves, in close cooperation with the educational institutions, as is expressed in the following quote: «Favour the implementation of actions planned and regulated by students, for their publicising, dissemination, exploration of spaces, planning and management» (I 7).

Likewise, greater cooperation would be desirable, where public and private entities participate in aspects related to the training and education

of the most vulnerable youths. Encourage the articulation of non-regulated training activities developed within their environments, promoting participation for better integration.

The agents believe it is convenient to have competent bodies from which to plan and implement training and educational activities linked to the labour market, getting young people involved. Likewise, as expressed in the quote below, the following is also relevant: «To expand the network of companies that work with educational institutions to train and qualify these young people for their work positions, proposing projects that help these students so that they can obtain their GCSE (Graduate in Compulsory Secondary Education) certificate» (I 25).

The social agents emphasize, as lines for improvement, that it is necessary to encourage interest and willingness to strengthen cultural links through actions that encourage reading and the improvement of both instrumental and personal skills, in order to help mould autonomous and independent youths.

They see the promotion of basic (theoretical and practical) training programs focused on the labour market as a priority, programs which reinforce and motivate young people so that, at the very least, they can obtain their GCSE and learn a trade in a work environment by acquiring professional competences to do so. To this end, they advise: «Encourage training and employment programs so that students learn tasks in a real environment and, in this way, acquire the basic skills for their personal and professional development» (I 14). Where they are provided with «the basic tools (social, cultural, linguistic, etc.) with the aim of consolidating cultural knowledge» (I 1). Moreover, at an individual level «to meet the educational needs of each individual and give them reinforcement so that they can use these to solve any problems of daily life» (I 14).

It is pertinent to work together with employers to design the profiles of job placement workshops. When these young people are retained in their roles at one of these companies, it becomes very enriching for the development of their educational, labour and cultural skills.

Another challenge refers to the introduction of more personalized training programs that are eminently more practical and, whenever possible, remunerated, which would motivate and encourage them to continue studying and to remain in the occupation undertaken. Therefore, social agents propose the challenge of incentivising the role of professional accompaniment. In other words, a trained, responsible and ethical «mentor» who, in the exercise of their duties, accompanies them throughout their educational trajectory in order to avoid early school leavers. As stated in the quote below: «It is necessary to endow those who hold the position of

mentor with training and strategies in order to enable these professionals to work properly, enabling them to introduce action and intervention initiatives promoted by the young people themselves, to strengthen the links between the programs and the educational activities, achieving greater complementarity between the training itineraries and the optimization of resources» (I 6) (see Fig. 2).

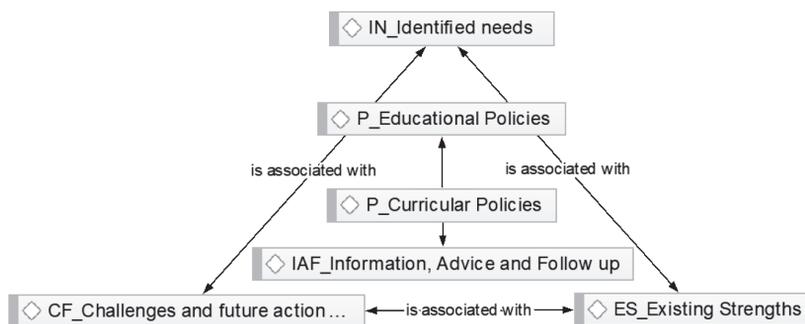


Figure 2. – Net needs-strengths and challenges.

The figure above shows how the needs, strengths and future challenges analysed are associated. For its achievement, it is necessary to support educational policies that improve curricular training, improving information and advice among all those involved and following up to positively check the established changes and/or proceed to their improvement.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained support three clearly differentiated focuses of action in the intervention within the field of training-education for young people:

- (a) The creation and consolidation of coordination networks between public administrations, the private sector and social entities must be a challenge taken up in this field. Although it currently exists at certain levels, it is necessary to underscore this measure. As a strength, it is essential to continue to guarantee the important role that NGO and social entities develop in a disinterested way, proposing occupational training actions for these young people. On the other hand, it is very important to involve entrepreneurs and managers from the private

sector in the development of educational and training programs since they are the ones that will propitiate the possible work opportunities for this group at risk (Shabi, 2019). «It would be about improving and systematizing these relationships, so that resources can be optimized, particularly in a context of reduced funding» (study on training and social exclusion, CIDEC, 2012, p. 158), and that the «creation of these networks reinforce the knowledge of companies regarding the insertion work developed by social entities» (study on training and social exclusion, CIDEC, 2012, p. 161). The objective is to develop network structures that are sustainable and inclusive and that allow a real internal change in the organization of the training system adapted to the reality of those youths most at risk.

- (b) For this coordination to exist, and to develop training programs aimed at young people that are effective and efficient, there is no doubt that what is required is to provide greater economic and human resources for these types of initiatives. In this sense, Medrano (2012) highlights that training and funding sources must go hand in hand to mark the successful development of innovative ideas managed by entrepreneurial activities carried out and managed by young people (Shabi, 2019). There are experienced and highly qualified professionals (an aspect that is specifically stated as a strength in this study), but these alone are not enough. Supporting improvements for the educational (and training) inclusion of young people implies greater financial, structural and organizational coverage by the public administration and is a challenge that these administrations should not forget. Creating spaces and supporting institutions that work for the social inclusion of youths is essential to achieving an effective and quality social intervention (Pérez *et al.*, 2016; Evstratova, Vetrova, & Kabanova, 2019).
- (c) Developing sustainable and inclusive training activities for young people implies creating more flexible, individualized and tailor-made training programs that involve training in not only basic, but also transversal competences that provide these young people with tools and resources for their inclusion in the labour market as well as for their socio-educational integration. From this perspective, training becomes a process of the certification of their skills and can even be endorsed with a mentoring process that favours the exploitation and strengthening of the personal and work skills of young people (Artcer & Kharkovskaya, 2016). «The new market models, the competency-based curriculum, the empowerment of information technologies, recruitment and selection processes through new methodologies based on mentoring techniques make it necessary to transfer these innovations to the

socio-labour training-education available to young people that will shape the productive sector of the next decades; and most especially with young people with low professional qualifications or in situations where they have left school early, have professional disorientation and social vulnerability» (Federation of Pinaridi Social Platforms, 2015).

Ultimately, this study aims to make visible those problems that social agents with ties to youth educational-training programs face in their professional reality and that, nowadays, are a handicap to advances in sustainable and integral educational and training structures that make the inclusion of young people, and therefore, the improvement of their life in qualitative terms, possible.

As limitations of the study, we should indicate the limited number of participants and their representativeness with respect to the entire national territory but, we think these shortcomings are balanced with the study's strengths, which are none other than the generation of a process of reflection on the practice of these professionals and of the confrontation of opinions and perceptions that have brought to light the good practices that are found within this field and the willingness of these said participants to assume new challenges in their professional development. From this basis, we consider that, as future lines of study, we can establish the analysis of said practices and the definition of a system of indicators that validate quality professional and social intervention, linked to work in the area of education and training with young people at risk of exclusion.

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RIASSUNTO

Questo articolo intende delineare punti di forza, bisogni e sfide future poste dall'attuale sistema di formazione e istruzione dei giovani a rischio di esclusione sociale, concentrandosi su quei giovani che sono a rischio di abbandono scolastico e hanno problemi di accesso al mercato del lavoro. Gli obiettivi riguardano: caratterizzare, dal punto di vista professionale, le esigenze di istruzione e formazione dei giovani che si trovano in situazioni di esclusione; identificare i punti di forza nelle attuali attività di istruzione e formazione disponibili per i giovani; istituire una banca di risorse per possibili sfide

future sostenute da professionisti. A tali fini, abbiamo condotto uno studio esplorativo pilota che ha coinvolto 34 professionisti esperti i quali hanno descritto la situazione attuale in Spagna nel campo dell'istruzione e della formazione dei giovani a rischio di abbandono scolastico o di esclusione. Questa indagine ha portato alla conclusione che la creazione e il consolidamento di reti coordinate tra pubblica amministrazione, settore privato ed enti sociali sia una sfida importante da affrontare. Lo sviluppo di attività di formazione sostenibili e inclusive per i giovani implica, peraltro, la creazione di itinerari di formazione più flessibili, individualizzati e personalizzati che si rivolgano non solo alla formazione di base ma anche allo sviluppo di competenze trasversali.

Parole chiave: Bisogni formativi; Giovani; Istruzione-formazione; Rischio di esclusione sociale; Sfide.

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