

**TEACHERS' TRAINING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE  
ENVIRONMENT IN THE CLASSROOM**

**Galya Kozhuharova**

Trakiya University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria galia\_koj@yahoo.com

**Veneta Uzunova**

Trakiya University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria venetakirova@yahoo.com

**Vera Todorova**

Trakiya University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria igousg@gmail.com

**Daniela Ivanova**

Trakiya University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria dannytk@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Early school leaving (ESL) is a negative social phenomenon with a significant degree of relevance for all European countries. It is no surprise then that the topic is covered in all national and European policies and strategies for the development of education till 2020 and beyond. This is one of the reasons why we focused our research on the current situation in Bulgaria and tried to provide meaningful ways to improve it.

The main sources of the research are data from EUROSTAT, inquiries of teachers for the reasons/issues of ESL and the difficulties it leads to when it comes to the personal and professional development of young people. The lack of education and complete socialization puts them at direct risks of social isolation, marginalization and leaves them out of opportunities, leads to a never-ending identity search, place in society and means of survival. Last but definitely not least important is the relation of such unfavorable sociological phenomenon such as ESL with the likelihood of getting involved in criminal activities.

Using the analysis of the collected data from inquiry conducted as a part of an ERASMUS+ KA3 project – EMPAQT /EMPAQT - 564547-EPP-1-2015-1-BG-EPPKA3-PI-FORWARD/ the main factors contributing to the decrease of ESL were outlined. The data in the recent years even shows a slow increase in ESL, which means that the current methods and strategies are no longer useful. Reducing the ESL with another two percentages to the targeted level and stable retention at this level will require new measures in addition to those, which already have become part of the routine at schools. This is why we look at prevention of ESL by changing the organization of the educational process and the development of an inclusive environment in the classroom through teachers' training.

The current publication also introduces the work of the Department for Information and In-Service Teachers' Training (DIITT) (at Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria) in the area of teachers' training. DIITT has organized and conducted training for the development of an inclusive environment in the classroom. The modules were prepared on the basis of an inquiry amongst teachers and students in Bulgaria, providing information on their views of the current problems and the status of Bulgarian education. The trainings are included in the National program for Teachers' Training for 2016. Some of the modules are currently approved in modules of a training program in EMPAQT project – with participants from Malta, Italy, Romania, Turkey and Bulgaria. As the project continues its work through 2017-2018 the results of the piloted classrooms where trained teachers will practice will be shared in an academic conference in 2018 in Istanbul, Turkey. The EMPAQT project is selected to contribute to the development of a common policy in education in all European countries.

**Keywords:** teachers' training, inclusive education, early school leaving (ESL).

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

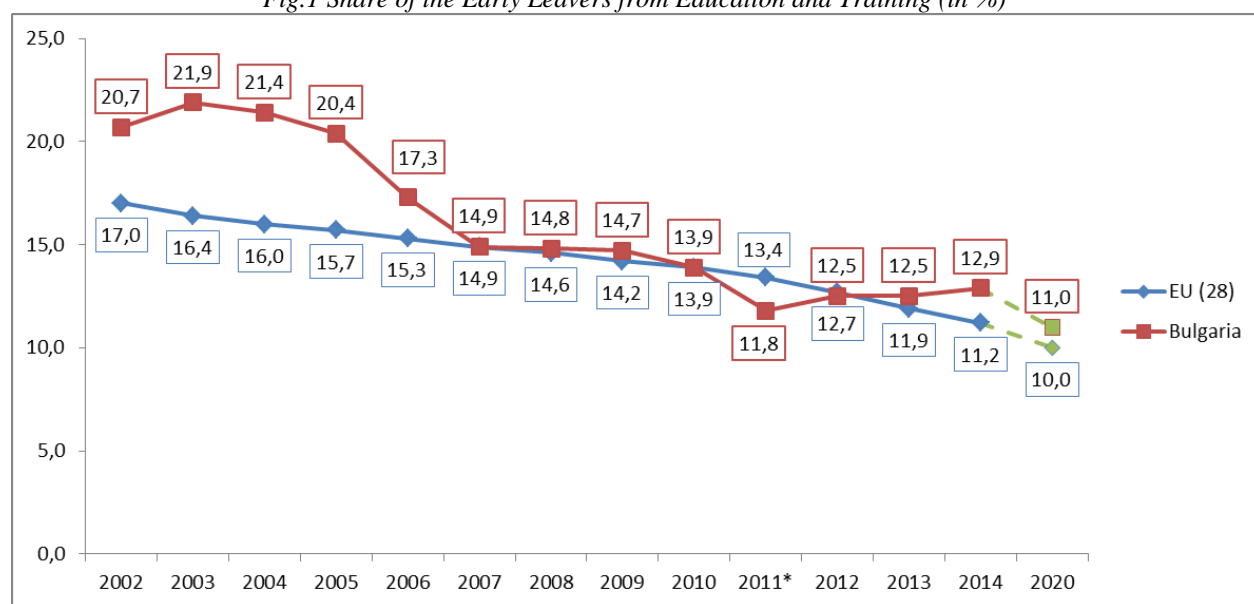
Early school leaving (ESL) is a negative social phenomenon spreading across all European countries. ESL is included in all national and European policies and strategies for the development of education till 2020 and beyond. Regardless of the reasons causing it, ESL leads to many negative outcomes for the individual him/herself and for the society in general. It is well known that children who leave school prematurely have more difficulties as young adults in finding and keeping a well-paid job due to the lack of skills and literacy which most of the employers seek in an employee and if they happen to find and keep a job, most of the time it is a low paying position which offers no options for growth and personal and professional development. The classroom in general is a very special place where children develop different skills and competencies and where their emotional and social needs are met. Without the opportunity to actively participate in such process the children cannot fully develop their potential. Nowadays it is no secret that the contemporary timely, systematic and long enough access to education is a key

precondition for the development of local communities, countries and of Europe in all areas of economy and life in general. The scope of the challenge for young people to develop as complete, educated and constantly seeking development persons in the context of policies of intelligent growth demands a clear focus on proper teachers' training as a main priority. The work of the teachers brings the policies to the real educational setting and ensure the access to quality education for all children in a safe and supporting environment. Their professional efficiency in the area of prevention of ESL is based on the opportunity to acquire new professional skills and competencies following close the decision making and the completing measures on the classroom level.

## 2. NUMBERS OF DROP-OUT RATES IN BULGARIA

According to Eurostat data, the share of those who drop-out education in Bulgaria decreases substantially for a period of 13 years from 20,7% in 2002 to 12,9% in 2014. Since 2007 Bulgaria has evened with the average level for the European Union and now moves near it. The national goal for the early school leaving (ESL) is to reach 11%<sup>64</sup> until 2020.

*Fig.1 Share of the Early Leavers from Education and Training (in %)*



\*The data for 2011 are revised. There is a break of the dynamic order.

During the last three years (2012–2014) there is a noticeable retention of the ESL level. At the same time, there is an interruption of the positive trend of fast and annual decrease of ESL, registered in the period 2001-2011.

Behind the average data for the country, there is a big difference between the regions. Southwestern region, where the capital Sofia is located, shows data for ESL over three times lower than the average for the country. Expectedly, there is a connection between the very high indicators for ESL and the low economic growth and the high unemployment in the Northwestern and the Southeastern regions.

It is necessary to mention also that the ESL is not a problem for each school. However, where the problem exists, it is with a high percentage and it is stable in time.

## 3. IMPLEMENTED MEASURES TO DECREASE ESL DURING 2001–2011:

Introduction of free textbooks for the students in I–VII grade (since 2008);

- Introduction (since 2010/2011 academic year) and progressive expansion of a whole-day organization of the school education from I-st to VII-th grade;

<sup>64</sup> This goal is fixed in the national program for reforms (2012–2020 r.) as well as in the “Strategic framework of the National development program for Bulgaria: Bulgaria 2020”.

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference  
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE  
25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

---

- Free breakfasts and lunches (partially introduced); free transportation to school for students in compulsory school age from places where there are no schools;
- The introduction in 2007 and 2008 of delegated budgets for the schools<sup>65</sup> – the school officials received strong motivation to seek out, enroll and retain each student who can be recorded at their school as the school budget depends from the number of students signed up;
- The improvement of the national electronic informational system for the number of students at school made more difficult the fictitious enrollment of students only by documents and pushed schools to actually ensuring the presence of the student at school. Since the academic year 2012/2013 a web-based register for the movement of children and students has been introduced at schools. This register prevents simultaneous presence of a child or a student in two different kindergartens or schools' lists.
- Increased control on the schools to present to the Municipality directorates for "Social support" data about the students' absences (not more than 5 academic hours per month). In case more absences occur, the child benefits paid to the parents will be ceased;
- In 2010 was introduced a mandatory preschool preparation for 5-years old children and funds are provided for free transportation of those children who live in places where there are no kindergartens or preparatory classes at school;
- Independent, part-time and evening courses provide opportunities for adult education;
- National Program "With care to each student" provides since 2006 funds to schools on a project basis for additional classes for students with low academic performance in education and at the National external assessment tests. Currently, the program is opened also for kindergartens and allows forming groups for additional training in Bulgarian language of children with different mother tongue.

Data in the recent years shows a slowdown in the process of lowering the ESL, suggesting that the implemented measures have exhausted their potential. Reducing the ESL with another two percentages to the targeted level and stable retention at this level will require new measures in addition to those, which already have become part of the routine at schools. At this time we realize that the problem is no longer only in the physical presence of students in schools but is more about what they learn while they are in schools and how efficient is their presence, do they receive a contemporary literacy competences they need in life. Those are some of the reasons why our research was directed at trying to find out the real needs of teachers and their attitudes toward looking for opportunities for increasing their competence to work efficiently and to interact with students who are at risk of ESL in a way which would develop a meaningful educational process. With that in mind we believe that the best solution of such situation is the emphatic and supportive teacher who is the key figure for quality education for students. The outcomes of the practice and the following results from the research are at the base of the international project EMPAQT.

The EMPAQT project pioneers an innovative training program for teachers engaged in school education, which is aimed to contribute to introducing inclusive pedagogies in European schools as an approach for tackling ESL. The expected impact from the project implementation will be: raised motivation for learning, basic career orientation and reduced risk from premature drop-out from school for the students, and improved professional qualification for the teachers.

The overall aim of the project EMPAQT is to contribute to creation of school environments that foster equity and inclusion, where disadvantaged learners receive support they need to succeed and feel respected and valued. To achieve this aim the project endeavors to set up a teachers' training program, tailored to build up educators' skills for supporting students' personal development, for identifying and redressing concrete difficulties experienced by students at risk of ESL and of social exclusion.

The policy approach chosen by the EMPAQT partners is people-focused. On one hand, the project addresses the needs of the teachers as professionals to obtain pedagogical support, which will enhance their skills for creating of positive and supporting learning environment and for increasing students' resilience against difficulties. The project outputs allow teachers to master skills for coaching and for providing early career orientation to students as

---

<sup>65</sup>Schools receive funding for their activities on the basis of annual fee per student, which includes all basic expenses (e.g.: teachers' salaries, maintenance of the school building, heating, optional courses, salaries of non-teaching staff, etc.). Operational management of the funds is transferred to the school principals.

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference  
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE  
25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

---

part of the measures for building youngsters' positive attitude towards education and professional realization. On the other hand, the project addresses the young people in disadvantaged situation who need support and coaching for constructing positive self-concept, setting realistic personal goals and for building strategies for achieving well-being through education and professional realization. As the project continues its work through 2017-2018 the results of the piloted classrooms where trained teachers will practice will be shared in an academic conference in 2018 in Istanbul, Turkey. The EMPAQT project is selected to contribute to the development of a common policy in education in all European countries.

#### 4. INQUIRIES

During the first year of the EMPAQT project inquiries were conducted among students and teachers in Bulgaria (as well as all partner countries). Following we present the most important findings from the questionnaires in Bulgaria.

##### Teachers' inquiries

A total of 147 teachers participated in the questionnaires and most of them – 125 (85%) are women. Almost all age groups were represented as follows 6 % between 20-29 years old, 15% are 30-39years old, 45% are in the ages of 40-49 years old, and 34% are over the age of 50. The area of expertise for those who participated varies.

The largest group of participants 52% states that they have worked at their current school for more than 11 years. When we add this fact to the fact that most of those teachers work in small villages, and have worked for a long time (over 40 years of teaching) this could definitely provide us with a possible answer to the reasons of why it is so difficult to implement changes in the classrooms, apply innovative methods of education as well as provide the necessary environment for the children with special needs by using technologically advanced applications. The teachers participate in different activities for the continuing/improvement of their qualification, and 61 of them (42%) state that they have participated in group or one-on-one research activities on a topic related to their specialty and professional skills, 88 teachers (60%) took part in networks for further professional development and 45 (31%) participated in different programs/projects for mentorships and/or coaching with other colleagues.

When it comes to the personal relations (62% completely agree), respect (76% completely agree) and following instructions, directions, discipline (72% completely agree) we can note the slight change in the idea of what the relationship between teachers and students should consist of. Teachers do not insist on being always agreed with or do not expect to develop good relations with their students. Instead their satisfaction comes from their expectations to work with highly motivated, active and knowledge-seeking students who would then actively contribute to the process of education and would reach the set goals and complete the tasks at hand

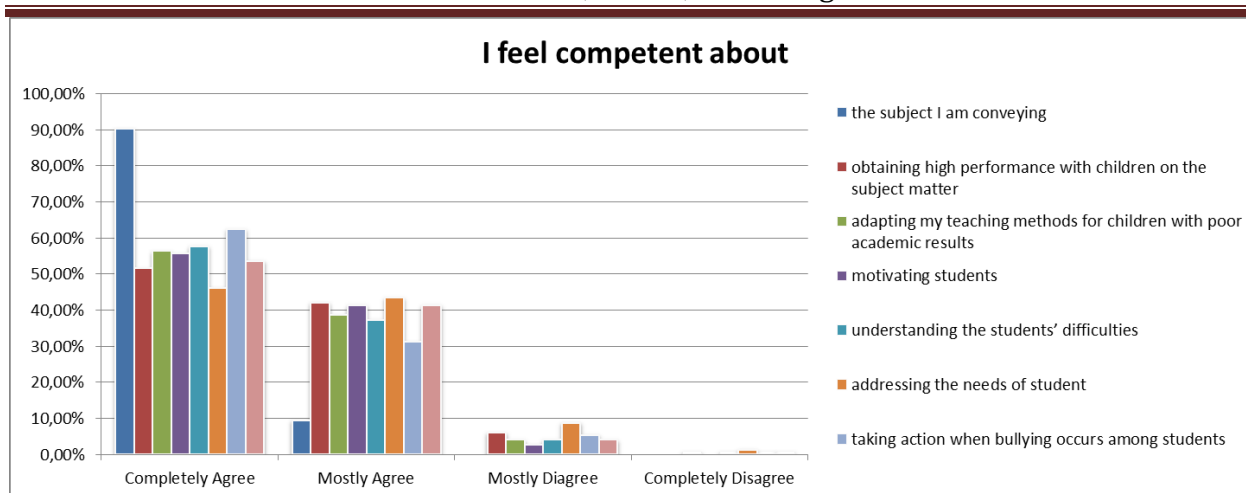
The main challenges for teachers according to 73% of them is the ability to keep students actively engaged in class and for 75% of them to find means to increase their motivation for actively participating in the educational process. It is very reasonable to suggest that if students were already highly motivated they would participate in the classroom activities and that might be the reason why we see such a close results for those two factors.

More than half of the teachers (57%) state that they find it difficult to understand the specifics of students' needs. This is a clear sign for the generational gap between students and more experienced teachers. The older generation of teachers (and people in general) lacks a deeper understanding of the (virtual) reality in which students are growing up and developing today. There is an increasing difference in views, values and basic necessities in the two groups that is irreversible and leads to the dare need for improving teachers' skills in that area. We have to note that the difference in generations itself is not viewed by teachers as a reason for conflicts. But at the same time comes the question of how could a teacher motivate students if they do not identify correctly their necessity and cannot provide the empathy needed for the successful establishment of a positive relations between the two groups.

Active participation consists of different teaching methods such as team work, work in small groups, which unfortunately seems to be a challenge for 61% of the teachers. It is disturbing that the challenge though is not when it comes to such activities in class but when it comes to teachers working with their colleagues to assist each other with a particular student. Their lack of ability to model such behavior undermines the importance of cooperation and shows a deeper need for reforms in the pedagogical means and methods used in schools.

Almost half of the teachers (48%) find it difficult to deal with discipline issues and disrespectful behavior in the classroom. They need to be trained into more practical techniques which provide classrooms of inclusion not exclusion, stimulate the desire to cooperate and contribute rather than disturb and seek attention in a disrespectful ways. The classroom must reflect the democratic values which we are trying to live by in our democratic country.

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference  
**THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE**  
 25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro



The teachers who took a part in the research stated that they perceive themselves as most competent in the areas of their academic subject – 91% of them feel that they are up-to date with the matter and are capable of teaching that to the students. This comes as a no surprise because Bulgarian teachers are generally well prepared academically. The teachers though feel most insecure when it comes to being able to identify students’ emotions (46%) and their needs (46%). Surprisingly enough, although in previous questions teachers noted that they do not feel prepared to motivate their students, here more than 55% of them state that they feel confident in their ability to do so. It could be that they are not comfortable enough to talk about what they lack and admitting to that could make them more vulnerable. When it comes to talking about their competencies, teachers managed to recognize themselves as being competent in all the listed factors with the lowest rate of a positive answer “completely agree” being 46%. We could make a conclusion that Bulgarian teachers are not capable of talking about their own weakness and that makes it difficult to determine their own needs for training.

When asked about the factors that lead to a higher involvement with school teachers seem to clearly point out the supportive families as the most important factor (86% completely agree). Family is the first and most important model for the child. This explains to some extent the belief that teachers have about the support the children receive from their families when it comes to going to school. When a family establishes education as something valuable and desirable their child/children have a better chance at accepting the same believes/values.

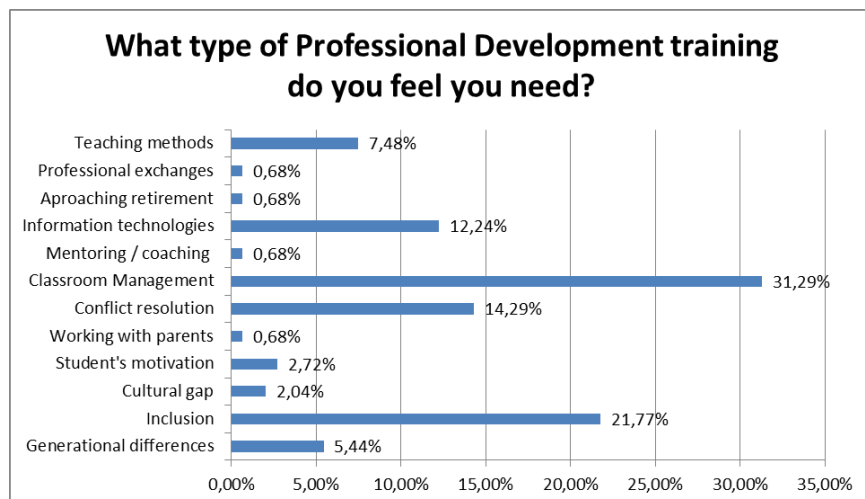
Every school is obliged to issue a strategy for prevention of ESL as a part of their regulatory documentations. Every school and educational system has to provide their teachers with tools and methods to address the problem. The way teachers reflect on those strategies might provide us with feedback on the current situation. Most teachers (61%) believe that the strategy should empathize on strengthening the home-school liaison. Improving school environment is the second factor with 50 % of teachers completely agreeing. The creation of a safety and supportive school environment is a very important preventative factor for overcoming the ESL but it also helps prevent bullying and other forms of aggression and it helps student develop their social and emotional intelligence. The two answers are connected and the way a school environment could be improved has to go through, the successful building of a stronger connection and collaboration between families and schools. The next answer is related to the continuing support of teachers through in-service training as almost half of the participants (50%) completely agree that it could play a major role in dealing with risk factors of ESL. Teachers see the necessity of addressing the psychological needs of each student (43%) as a mean of evaluating each individual situation but 38% of them agree that there needs to be more studies which could provide current information for the actual students’ needs. Almost equal numbers (40%) believe that an adequate strategy for dealing with ESL have to include increasing their salary and providing proper counseling for the students (this could include career counseling which is a major link between education and real life for students).

The least helpful method teachers see in mentoring/coaching and volunteering activities which is recognized only by less than 20% of them as needed. It could be related to the idea how underpaid they are already and being more involved in school outside of their job descriptions could be seen as one more responsibilities rather than a natural continuum of their professional development. Mentoring, coaching and volunteering however is a huge part of building a sustainable community in the schools among professionals.

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference  
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE  
25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

When asked about the specifics in their own needs for training, 81 % of the teachers gave different and wide range of answers and 12% requested specific modules for management. They all agreed that there is a present need for training that needs to correspond to their professional competence and implementing the strategies for ESL.

As mentioned earlier the teachers participated in the questionnaires mark a wide range of topics for trainings. The predominate need seems to be related to classroom management, conflict resolutions (31%), integration of students and implementing ICT in the classrooms.



Providing training for Bulgarian teachers is highly necessary as seen in the research conducted by the EMPAQT team throughout the country. It is not only necessary to establish the needs, provide the training but make it a sustainable way of keeping the levels of support high enough for them to feel confident, appreciated in their changing positions of managers of learning process rather than the sole source of academic information for a group of young people.

## 5. TEACHERS' TRAINING PROGRAM

Based on the analysis of the collected data during the inquires for the needs of competency enhancement among teachers, the need for reorganization of the educational process and the need for application of a successful methods of classroom management and in full agreement with the European and national policies/strategies for education, we developed our training course „Classroom Management”. The course aims to set the basic pedagogic and psychological aspects of leadership in the classroom as means of developing an attractive and motivating educational environment. The course implies theoretical and practical training for the development of inclusive environment in the classroom, where teachers just like the efficient managers lead the classroom in ways that provide opportunities for each student to participate actively and constructively in the educational process. The training looks into positive models of interaction. There is a special accent placed on training in use of contemporary informational and communicational technologies such as educational software and technical means for efficient classroom management.

The practical part aims to help teachers solve cases and tasks, discuss good pedagogical practices. The main modules of the training program are: „**Pedagogical aspects of classroom management**”/ Theoretical basis of classroom managing, Educational process management, The teacher- as a classroom management, Cognitive models of learning and teaching;/ “**Psychological aspects of classroom management** / Conflict resolution strategies for classroom management, Positive models of interaction/ **ICT for efficient classroom management** / Applications for implementation of ICT in the education, Software for classroom management – *Mythware Classroom Management*/

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference  
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE  
25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

---

## 6. CONCLUSION

An inclusive environment in the classroom is a requirement for the active and equal participation and contribution of all children in the educational process and school activities. This is what leads to the common support for their personal development and creates an efficient mechanism for prevention of ESL.

The training course «Classroom management» assists teachers to create a new positive organizational and psychological atmosphere in the classroom so that they can successfully meet the needs of the contemporary young people for new and innovative forms, methods and approaches for education and interaction. By increasing teachers' qualification in such areas we give direct answers to the needs they have outlined in the inquiries pertaining to the issues they face when working with students – motivation, discipline and responsible engagement in the educational process.

Every teacher contributes to the spirit of the educational system, defines the educational situations, evaluates the educational achievements and participates in the educational process with their entire psychological, professional and moral potential. The teacher is facing the issues of modernization of the education asking him/her to take upon new responsibilities and roles and to develop adequate skills in the dynamic contemporary setting.

The presented training program for development of inclusive environment in the classroom contributes to the increase of students' motivation and cooperation as well as to the efficiency of the educational process itself.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Berk, Laura E. Exploring Lifespan Development (3rd Edition) (Berk, Lifespan Development Series), 2014
- [2] Ivanova, D. A platform for multimedia interactive education Mythware Classroom Management. e-journal "Pedagogical forum", 1/2015. [http://www.dipku-sz.net/sites/default/files/galia\\_koj%40yahoo.com/pedagogicheski\\_forum\\_1\\_2015.pdf](http://www.dipku-sz.net/sites/default/files/galia_koj%40yahoo.com/pedagogicheski_forum_1_2015.pdf)
- [3] Kozhuharova, G. M, D. I. Branekova. Development of information-based environment for increasing of competency in math teachers in implementing IT in the educational process. Journal scientific publication DISCUSSION, number. 5, 2010
- [4] Kirova, V. Social and Emotional Skills – A Requirement for Personal Development at School Age, e-journal Pedagogical forum, 4/2016. <http://www.dipku-sz.net/izdanie/307/socialnite-i-emocionalnite-umeniya-predpostavka-za-plnocenno-lichnostno-razvitie-v>
- [5] Strategic framework of the National development program for Bulgaria: Bulgaria 2020.
- [6]