

# Profile of Romanian pre-university teachers, a social media approach

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*Abstract: Teachers have an extremely important role in society. Through their work, they influence all sides of the human beings' character, since the earliest stages in life, throughout adolescence and beyond. It is generally accepted that without a proper educational system a society won't manage to achieve that extra step on the socio-economic development ladder. In consequence, through our present paper we are trying to address to the first link in the educational chain and determine, using an inside-out approach, who are the ones who choose to educate, what personal problems they encounter, emphasize positive and negative aspects of their profession and maybe establish some connections between their condition and the system's general state.*

*Keywords: Romanian educational system, profile, pre-university teachers*

*JEL Classification: I14; I21; Z13*

## Introduction

Due to the unprecedented speed of information's propagation we are witnessing nowadays a rapid change in pace in all fields and because things are happening quicker, humans, in their quality of implementers of theories, are also forced to be able to respond in a timely manner to the new flux of information, so the best use of new discoveries is achieved in practice. Adaptability has been for a long time a much needed skill, but it seems that today is needed more than ever and knows a migration from the slow, primordial physical state to a rapid, evolved mental one.

These considerations are valid for all fields and regardless of the breakthroughs in theory, without a proper implementation in the real world, we are destined to

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achieve, something that you already can encounter pretty often in our contemporary society - *form without substance*.

Unfortunately our main field of study, the Romanian educational system, has not been immune to this drift. Countless reforms in the past 20 years have tried to change the system in order to make it competitive in an international context, but in the end all of them failed. The problem could come from the decision makers that elaborate the plans or from teachers who implement them, but we tend to believe that it comes from a mix of the two. In the end it doesn't have any relevance who is to be blamed and matters only the fact that the national educational system doesn't deliver what it's supposed to and the students, among others future teachers, suffer from this general state of confusion.

The profession of teaching should be considered a fundamental one in any society, not only because it's a component of an area integrated into the primordial administration system, but also because is one that has a direct impact on humans, potential future policy makers, thus having a great responsibility in shaping our future.

Thus, we consider that in order to achieve better results in education, we need a different approach in understanding the system and that's why we propose an inside-out approach.

By analyzing teacher's life we could gain an inside view. This would help us to understand who are the ones who choose to teach future generations, what their expectations are, personal and professional problems, etc. Also, the educational institutions that are preparing teachers would benefit in our opinion of this profiling, in order to better organize their enrolment process, identify their target audience, offer better support, etc.

### **Objectives & research in the field**

The present research is part of a bigger one, aimed at determining the quality of life of Romanian teachers from pre-university level.

Given the diversity of domains that are covered by a research of this type and the generous data generated, we've thought that it would be opportune to extract a comprehensive professional/personal profile of the Romanian pre-university teacher, user of Facebook.

Our step was fueled on one hand by the need to know who we are working with, thus to familiarize ourselves and the ones interested in this research with the subjects and on the other hand by the utility of its finality, because we think that a profile can ease and better aim at the decisions that have to be made by the policy makers in the field of education and can come in support to the institutions that are preparing future teachers in order to better organize their enrolment/tuition processes.

After a thorough literature review on the subject we found that numerous studies have been carried out on different levels. Smaller ones narrow it down to a certain particular aspect of this socio-professional category and we can encounter studies that have tried to profile teachers based on their field of study (Brewer, 1999), (Haisan, 2013) or point of view of certain groups (McKenna, 2000), (Albuquerque, 2014), (Veldhuis, Heuvel-Panhuizen, 2014), (Yildirim, Doğan, 2010). Bigger studies are aimed at profiling teachers from all teaching levels at national level (Feistritz, 2011), (Neophytou, 2012), (Alkharusi et al, 2014). The one written by Feistritz appeared to us to be the most eloquent in line with the approach that we had in mind for this study and has in consequence been used as a starting point.

## **Methods & materials**

In order to collect the necessary data for our main research, quality of life of Romanian pre-university teachers, we've designed a questionnaire, based on the one used by European Quality of Life Surveys. Ours was much easier with only 11 pages in comparison to 60+ pages, mainly because, based on our previous experience, it had to be clear, easy to complete and shouldn't take more than 10 minutes of our respondent's time. On the first page we explained who we are, what and why we do the research and some other standard details referring to the protection of personal data. The main questionnaire was divided into 2 subparts: personal data, with 12 questions and quality of life indicators, which had another 12 subparts with 5 questions each, totaling 72 questions. The 12 domains of the quality of life are: health, job, income, education, family, social involvement, house, environment, transport infrastructure, personal safety, free time and life satisfaction.

Initially we wanted to distribute the questionnaire in printed form, but after negative responses from the county's School Inspectorates, due to the impossibility of fulfilling some bureaucratic procedures, we've decided to try a different approach. So, the questionnaire was uploaded to a specialized paid survey provider and the link distributed to the respondents from the data base of our previous research, to targeted educational institutions and persons that moderated educational portals. The feedback was so low that we had to find a new way to reach our targeted community. The paid survey service was dropped in favor of the free and easier to use and distribute Google Forms service and after a thorough check upon communities of teachers a Facebook account was created. This step facilitated an instant access to over 20000+ teachers from all over the country which were teaching at all pre-university levels. The feedback was immediate and positive obtaining, while it was active between 22.01.2015 and 31.03.2015, after eliminating invalid answers, 229 responses.

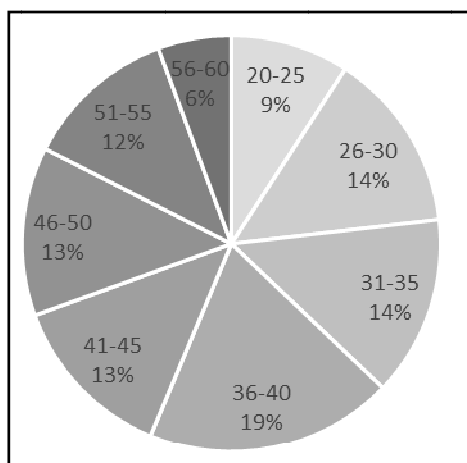
Using as a guide a study made in 2011 in the USA and based on previous experience, we've divided data into 4 groups: 1. identity data; 2. educational background and profession; 3. family, health and financial data; 4. society and human relations. Onward we assigned to each one of the four categories the indicators from the questionnaire that were direct references and continued by analyzing and discussing the data with the purpose of identifying the general features of our socio-professional category.

## Results

### Identity data

We've started by analyzing the age of our respondents and as we can see from the figure below the age intervals have an almost uniform distribution, with a little increase over the 36-40 years interval. This fact, besides confirming attractiveness of this profession to all ages, reveals another aspect that should be satisfactory, namely Internet usage in relation to age.

*Figure 1. Respondents' age distribution*



By gender, 90% of our subjects are females and the result is in line with the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, according to which most of Romanian teachers from pre-university education system are females (INSSE, 2015) although the ratio registered by us is a little higher which could mean that

females spend more time than men on the internet or are more willing to participate in studies.

More than half of our respondents, 63%, are married and the divorce rate of almost 10% is below the national value and in line with the findings, for this socio-professional category, from our previous study (Haisan, 2013). The number of children in the married couples, is almost equally divided between 1 and 2, with a light increase in favor of the first category, but we don't think that we can speculate on an alignment with the findings of the researchers from the Romanian Quality of Life Institute which stipulate that families with only one children became a characteristic for the ex-communist countries (Popescu, 2010), until we further analyze the age of our respondents, a topic which isn't part of the present research.

Regarding their religious affiliation, the large majority declared they are orthodox followed by atheists, romano-catholics and pentecostals, each accounting for 2%, the remaining 10% being shared almost equally by other 8 different minorities.

Most of them are Romanians, 4 are Hungarians and 1 is Roma, this indicator being the highest in our entire research for the unconfirmed indicator, which could signal a discrimination problem.

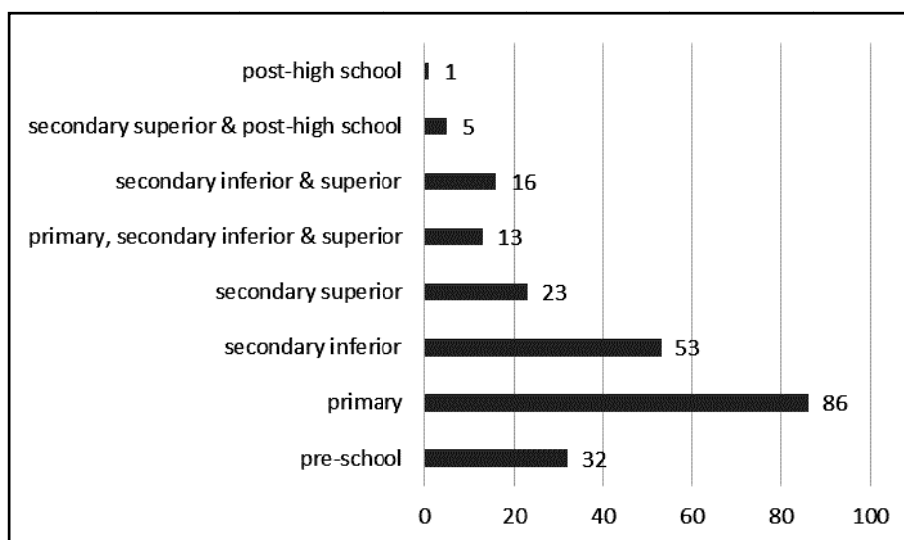
Regarding the county of birth, only Caras-Severin, Ialomita and Mehedinti don't have representatives and 85% of our respondents were born in an urban area. 66% of them work in an urban area, the counties that don't have any representatives being Caras-Severin, Dolj, Giurgiu, Harghita and Mehedinti. The counties with more than 10 respondents are Bacau, Brasov, Mures, Bucuresti, Cluj, Galati and Iasi and those with more than 5 but less than 10 are Dambovita, Prahova, Sibiu, Buzau, Arges, Timis, Tulcea, Suceava, Constanta and Teleorman. Most of these counties have a town which is a national or regional university center, so we could speculate on a connection between this fact and the internet usage by the teachers.

We conclude by presenting the teaching fields of our subjects and the educational level at which they teach.

The results of these two indicators were directly influenced by the type of the Facebook groups targeted and represent our concern regarding representativeness at a general national level. The number of users in each group is reflected in the number of responses received as follows: first group named "pre-school and primary teaching" had 14000+ members and we've received 32 answers from pre-school teachers and 88 answers from primary teachers; second group named "teachers" had 7000+ members and we've received 81 answers from a

wide variety of teaching fields and the third group named “community of Romanian mathematical teachers” had 1700+ members and we’ve received 29 answers.

*Figure 2. Levels of education at which our respondents teach*



### **Educational background and profession**

The second group of indicators comprises references to the educational background and profession of our respondents and due to the nature of their job it was rather difficult to treat them individually.

A relatively high value, 38%, declare that they have a second job, confirming in part the suspicion according to which teachers provide private training in order to supplement their income. In support of this statement comes the fact that more than 70% of them declared that they work more than 20 hours a week, given that the normal teaching load/week is currently set to 18 hours. 66% of our respondents declared that their work load is very good and good in accordance with their family or social commitments outside the job.

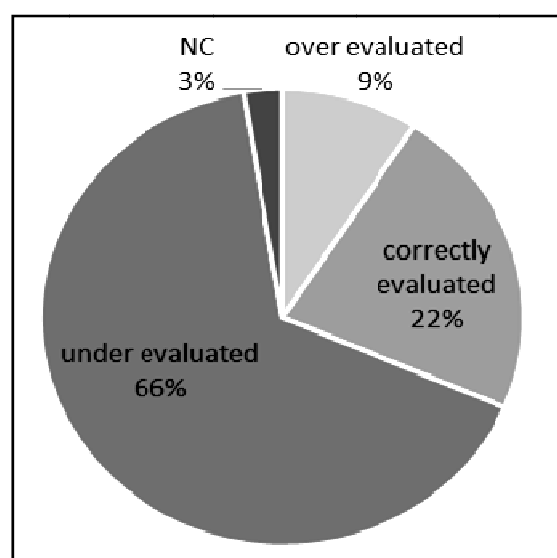
Regarding the indicator referring to the probability of finding a new job with a similar work load and remuneration in case of dismissal, 15% declared it is very probably, 32% pretty probably, 26% neither probably, nor improbable, 12%

somewhat improbable and 13% very improbable. The rest of 2% didn't respond to this question.

Most of our subjects, 66%, feel that their field of study is under-evaluated in the national educational system while 22% of them consider it to be correctly evaluated and 9% over-evaluated.

Interesting enough is the fact that most of the ones who declared their field of study was over-evaluated teach mathematics, while more than half of the ones who declared that their field of study was under-evaluated work in pre-school and primary levels. Although these results could be well influenced by the composition of our group of study, we think it could represent a good direction to follow for a deeper analysis, indicating that teachers from lower teaching levels feel they are not appreciated.

*Figure 3. Perceived evaluation of their teaching field*



We continue with the indicator referring to how they perceive the quality of national educational system in which they work. Only 1% thinks the system is one of a very good quality, 26% of good quality, 54% of poor quality and 17% of very poor quality. The rest of 2% didn't answer to this question. The findings of the present research are in accordance with the ones from our previous studies

and show that most of them think it's a low and very low quality one. We should point out that we consider this finding to be one of the problems why the educational system in Romania is actually a low quality one. The educational system should be considered a very large group and like any other group it is formed of individuals which contribute to the defining lines of that group, so as long as each individual will wait to be changed instead of trying himself to change, in order to be a better contributor, the system, as a whole, will suffer. It seems that this problem is a reminiscence of communism when people weren't encouraged to take action and used to seek comfort in complaining about it at an informal personal level, while waiting to be told what to do by accepting indisputable decisions coming from superior authorities.

The majority of responses regarding the sufficiency of funds allocated from the state budget to education is divided between insufficient, 57%, and less than sufficient, 35%, while only 7% consider them to be neither sufficient, nor insufficient and 1% sufficient.

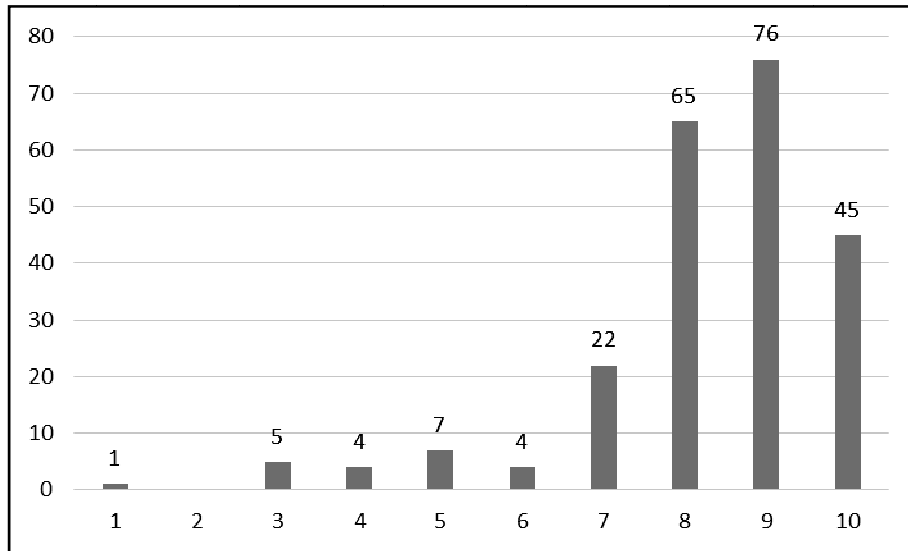
The last educational cycles graduated by our respondents are as follows: 39 persons finished high school, 148 have one bachelor degree, 1 has a second bachelor degree, 42 have master degrees and 5 doctoral studies. Most of the persons that declared they've graduated only high school work at the pre-school or primary levels and since teaching at this levels didn't require until recently holding a bachelor degree we tend to believe them, but we've noticed a few persons declared they teach at higher educational levels, which require a bachelor degree, so we tend to believe that the question was misunderstood by some of them.

An encouraging aspect is that 64% of our respondents declared that they've thought of following courses in order to complete/diversify their education. While some of the 147 that responded affirmatively to this question didn't indicate the level which they would like to follow, 118 did. 18% of them would like to follow different specialization courses, 25% a bachelor or a second bachelor degree, 45% master studies and 12% doctoral studies. An interesting aspect related to the will of following doctoral studies is that some of them would enroll at this level, as they've declared, in order to obtain an equivalence with the 1<sup>st</sup> teaching degree.

We complete this group of indicators by presenting the satisfaction of our subjects with their education so far. As we can see in the above figure most of them are found at the 7, 8, 9 and 10 levels of satisfaction, which means that they have a good and very good opinion about their education and only a few of them are found in the other categories.



Figure 4. Respondents' satisfaction about their education



### Family, health and financial data

The third group refers to the family, health, housing and income indicators. Family support is considered to be of high importance by our subjects and it is in accordance with the findings of researchers from the Romanian Institute for Research of Quality of Life, according to which family for Romanians represents the main support center (Marginean *et al.*, 2010). 75% of our respondents consider that family gives them a very high and high satisfaction. 19% stated the satisfaction with family life is neither high, nor low, more than half of these respondents being unmarried, thus only a low percentage doesn't take satisfaction from their family life. These statements are backed up by the importance of the family indicator, according to which, for 90% of them family is very important and for 10% important. Most of our subjects, 90%, receive support from family members no matter the situation.

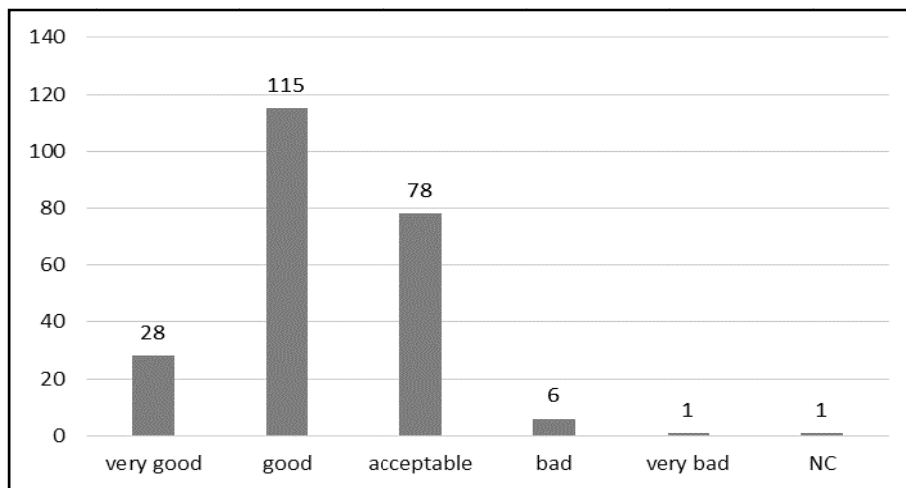
Family exclusion doesn't represent an issue, 95% of our subjects reporting that they don't feel excluded from family life and only 3% do. The household tasks are well distributed among its family members, 55% stating that the work they do is equivalent to the one done by the others, while 28% do more and 15% less. As it was expected, most of those who declared that they do more are females and an important number of those who do less are males.

For half of them, the health state is good, for 12% a very good state of health and a somehow concerning 34% for the acceptable option.

Although health is a very subjective topic, we tend to believe that the acceptable response didn't register a relatively high value for nothing, because 14% of our respondents declared that their state of health limits day to day activities. The national health system is perceived by 63% as being one of a poor quality, by 19% as one of very poor quality and only by 16% as being a good one. The remaining 2% represent unconfirmed answers.

Access to health services was limited for 122 persons by the lack of time, for 98 persons by the cost, for 93 persons by the waiting time to enter the surgery although an appointment was done, for 68 persons by delays during appointments and for 36 persons by the distance to the medical center.

*Figure 5. Respondents' state of health*



The next question regarding their health referred to their state of mind in the last two weeks and was a multiple choice one as the above one. We will present them in a descending order depending on the number of responses received. 77 persons declared that they felt tensioned, 62 calm & relaxed, 52 active & full of energy, 44 happy & optimistic, 29 down casted and 18 lonely.

Housing represents an important factor in everyone's life, offering a place to feel safe and conduct your daily routines unbothered. 55% of our respondents

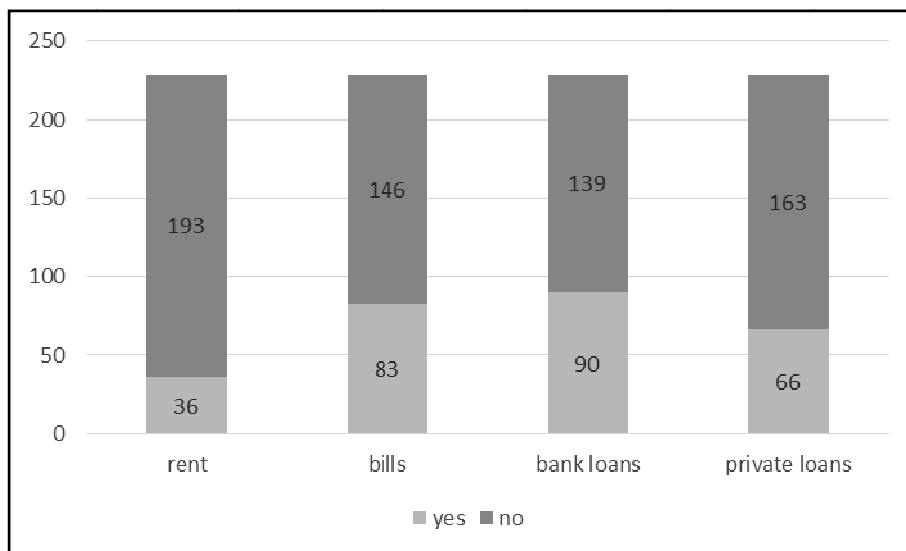
declared that they own their living space without having a mortgage or any loan. This high percentage of property is in line with the findings of our previous studies and with the ones from the Romanian Institute for Research of Quality of Life according to which the high level of property without any type of loan in Romania is probably due to the privatization of the social apartments in the 90's (Precupetu, 2006). 18% own their apartment but have a mortgage, 9% live in a rented place, 13% don't own their place and live rent free, 1% benefits from social housing and 4% did not respond to this question.

The most common problems regarding their place of living are related to the lack of interior space or dampness of roofs and walls.

The number of rooms of our subjects' leaving places is as it follows: 7 and 8 rooms, each with one case, 3 rooms, 83 cases, 2 rooms, 75 cases, 4 rooms, 36 cases, 5 rooms, 18 cases and 1 room, 15 cases. Most of them are satisfied with their place of living, 153 respondents giving an evaluation between 7 and 10, where 1 stands for very unsatisfied and 10 stands for very satisfied.

We proceed further with our analysis by presenting the income of our respondents. 13% have an income, including primary teaching occupation and any secondary incomes, between 0-1001RON, 44% between 1001-1500RON, 23% between 1501-2000RON, 13% between 2001-2500RON and 7% over 2500RON.

*Figure 6. Difficulties encountered by respondents to meet financial obligations*



The persons included in this study declared that they manage to cover life expenditures in relation with monthly family income in the following manner with ease 4% pretty easy, 10% with a somewhat difficulty, 41% with difficulty, 28% and very difficult, 16%.

Most of our respondents, 73%, feel that the financial retribution for their profession is unsatisfactory and consider that the current financial situation of their family compared to the one existing 12 months ago is the same, 63%. The most frequent difficulties in the last 12 months regarding financial obligations are presented in the figure above.

### **Society and human relations**

The last group of indicators refers to the way our subjects perceive environment, transport infrastructure, social involvement, personal safety, free time and life satisfaction.

The most frequent problems regarding the immediate vicinity of their house refer to the mess and garbage in the streets, with 99 affirmative responses, the quality of tap water, with 81 affirmative responses, noise, with 80 affirmative responses and air quality, with 72 affirmative responses. Moderate problems, 49 responses, are reported in relation to traffic jams and low ones relation to criminality, violence and vandalism, 18 affirmative response.

The type of services and leisure facilities that cause an access problem due to the distance from our respondent's home are cinema, theater and cultural centers, 134 affirmative answers, and recreational areas, 96 affirmative responses. Access to postal services, stores, banks and public transport cause moderate problems, and low problems are caused by access to schools, 13 affirmative responses.

Most of our respondents, 45%, consider that the area where their home is situated is regarded locally as a normal one, while a good evaluation is offered by 30% and a very good one by 21%. The state of our subjects' homes is good, only 7% stating that the building where they live is in an advanced state of degradation.

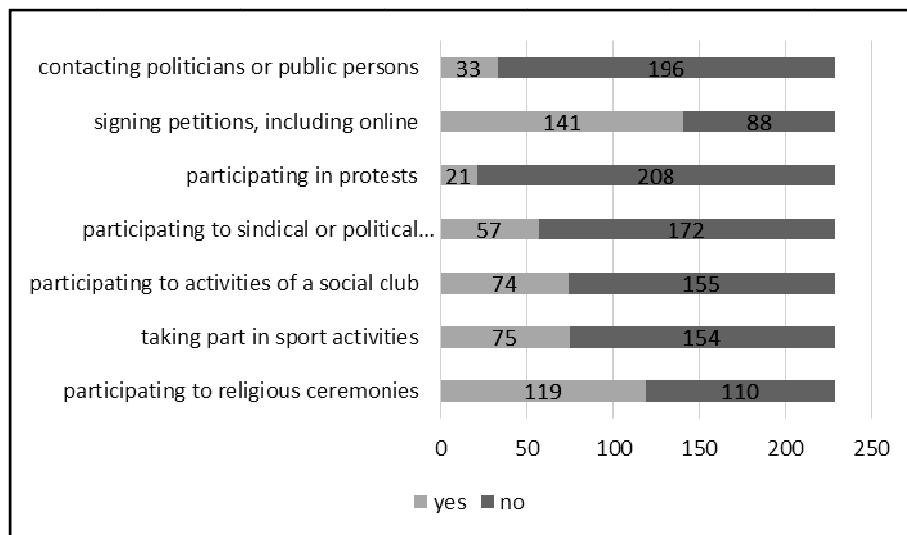
In general, the questioned group is satisfied and very satisfied with the area where they live, rating it 7, 8, 9 and 10, where 1 means very unsatisfied and 10 very satisfied.

Regarding public transportation, 62% of our subjects consider it as not being of good quality and the commuters, using their preferred means of transport, do not

need more than half an hour, 66%, and between 30 to 60 minutes, 24%. 59% declared that they own a car, the condition of local roads being evaluated as very good by 4%, good by 18%, normal by 31%, bad by 29% and very bad by 18% and the traffic in their hometown as very good by 3%, good by 12%, normal by 44%, bad by 28%, very bad by 12% and 1% didn't respond to the question.

Social involvement refers to the actions taken by the individual, outside his own individual space, that could lead to a change in close or distant social environment. Also, it includes the way it relates within the society and how he perceives it.

*Figure 7. Social actions taken in the last 12 months*



Being active online can have different meanings, all of our subjects have Facebook accounts that means that they primarily are interested in socializing. In the last two of years Facebook became more than that and we've noticed, if used properly, it can become an engine for campaigns or social change. The information is readily available and the ones interested in the same subject are brought closer at a faster pace making the change of things easier. We are not advocating for Facebook, but as we can see from the above figure it can lead to a higher involvement of humans in the change of our society, the present research being a testimonial to its capabilities. We've observed that our subjects are very active online because besides the Facebook account they also have

other accounts that targeted Pinterest, Flickr, Instagram for pictures, YouTube for videos or LinkedIn for professional networking.

The highest confidence of our subjects in public institutions refers the juridical system, followed by press and police. The lowest confidence is in the Romanian Parliament.

Most of our subjects, 68%, contact their close relatives at least daily and 29% at least once a week, which again confirms the importance of family and the need for support. Trust in people is an indicator that takes on unexpected values with strong oscillations. Our respondents were asked to evaluate their trust in humans using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 meant you can never be too cautious about it and 10 most people can be trusted. The levels with the highest number of responses were 5, 7 and 8 and had close numbers of respondents, 45, 54 and 43. The rest of the responses were distributed almost equally between levels 2, 3, 4, 6 and 9. This means that mixed opinions are felt by our subjects regarding trust in humans with strong possibilities towards mistrust that can affect human relations.

Being active online comes at a price, as it seems that our subjects are more exposed to scams, 43 of them being victims of online or telephonic scams. The teacher statute also comes with disadvantages, because 57 declared that they were victims of public threats and 44 of abusive language, most of them probably coming from students. 12 persons reported that they were victims of sexual offenses and 15 of theft of cars or from cars.

Most of them, 69%, consider they can travel safely after dusk in their neighborhood, a little more than half considering that the work done by the police in their town is neither satisfactory, nor unsatisfactory.

In the last 12 months 48% of our respondents had to bribe someone in order to benefit by a service which normally they were entitled to and most of them feel good about their personal safety.

Leisure time is an important indicator in one's life because it allows to take a break from daily activities, 65% of our subjects stating that leisure time is very important in their lives. Although we saw that most of them work for less than 40 hours a week and it's a well known and accepted fact that teachers benefit from a lot of spare time, most of our subjects consider their leisure time insufficient, 42%, or neither sufficient, nor insufficient, 36%.

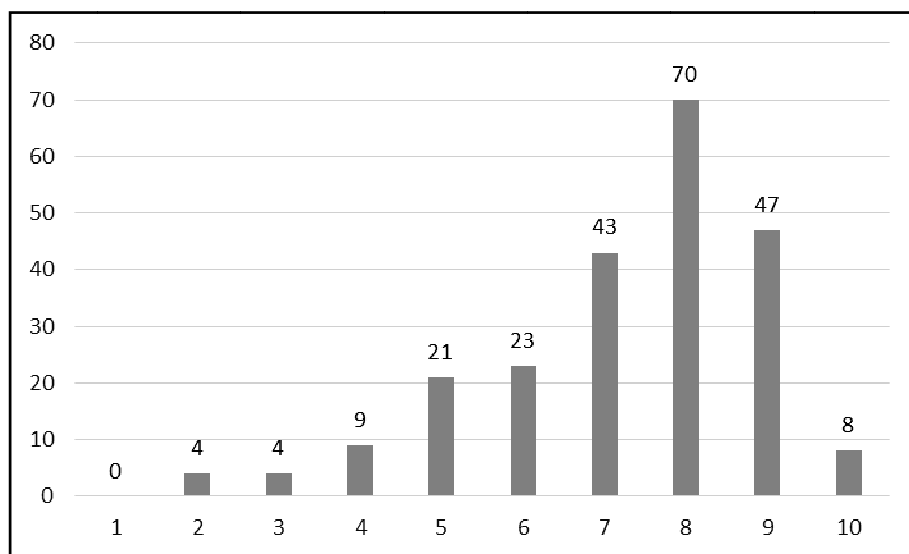
A considerable number of our subjects, 79%, declared that they have a hobby, most of which consisting in reading, physical activities, traveling or handmade.

The most preferred way of spending their leisure time are recreational activities with family, 176 response, entertainment, 171 responses, or watching TV. A small number of respondents stated that they do voluntary work, which is encouraging.

We complete this group of indicators by presenting the answers for the life satisfaction indicator. The general state of our respondents is a mixed one and sometimes contradictory, but in general the national state of optimism reported by national studies is also found in their case. An example could be the following statement: most of them feel free to decide how to live their lives but have rarely time to practice things they really like.

The country in which they live represents an important factor in evaluating life satisfaction because this is the environment where all take place. 53% of our respondents consider that Romania is having a neither good, nor bad trajectory 21% a bad one, 15% a good one and 7% a very bad one, the rest belonging to the unconfirmed category.

*Figure 8. Respondents' level of happiness*



All these denote that a certain discontent is felt and they are trying to convince themselves that everything is OK in order to get by daily, but in reality it isn't. This

supposition could also be backed up by the strong desire to emigrate, 42%. As we found out in our past studies, the preferred countries are the English speaking ones like the UK, the USA, New Zealand or Australia. Also the desperate “anywhere” location reappears, as in our previous findings, including a relatively high number of persons.

Most of our respondents are medium satisfied towards satisfied about their lives and report medium to high levels of happiness. In the figure above we present the detailed results for the happiness indicator where 1 means very unhappy and 10 very happy.

## Conclusions

We tend to believe that we managed to outline a comprehensive profile of the Romanian teacher, user of Facebook, which could be extended with some small exceptions to the one of the Romanian teachers in general.

In the following lines we shortly present the characteristics of our targeted group.

They are mostly orthodox married females, born in an urban area, with an average age of 39 that teach at preschool, primary and secondary inferior and superior levels in urban areas.

Most of them do not have a second job, work more than 20 hours a week and consider that their work load is in accordance with family commitments. The vast majority thinks that their is under-evaluated and that the national educational system is one of poor quality, with insufficient funding from the state budget. Most of them are satisfied and very satisfied with their education so far, more than half of them having a bachelor degree and yet most of them would like to attend courses in order to complete/diversify their education.

Most of them consider that family offers them a high satisfaction, almost all receiving support from family no matter what. For most of them the tasks done within the household are equivalent to the ones of other family members and don't feel excluded. They generally have a good state of health and for most access to medical services is limited by the lack of time and cost. More than half own their place of living without having a mortgage, the most common problems related to the living space being lack of interior space and dampness. The income of most of them range between 1001 and 1500 RON, they manage to cover life expenditures with some difficulty and think the financial retribution of their profession is unsatisfactory. The financial situation of their family compared to the one of 12 months ago is the same.



The most frequent problems regarding the environment of their house represents mess and garbage in the streets, quality of tap water, noise and air quality, as well as access to cultural centers and recreational areas. Most of our respondents are satisfied with their living place which is situated, according to them, in a good neighborhood. Most of them own a car, declare that the roads and traffic in their town are normal and perceive public transportation as one of a poor quality. They are very active online persons and involve themselves in social change. The juridical system, press and police are the most trusted public institutions and trust in humans is low. Most of our subjects keep in touch with their families by contacting them at least once a day and have hobbies. Their general state is contradictory and consider that Romania's trajectory is neither good, nor bad, an important percentage wishing to emigrate. Most of them are satisfied about their lives and report medium to high levels of happiness.

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