Overview of Second Chance Schools in the Province of Malaga (Spain): A case Study

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Abstract

The rate of early school leavers (ESL) in Andalusia is relatively high, reaching 21.8% in 2020. This will shape the employability of specific population sectors and, to some extent, other exclusionary dynamics. Second Chance Schools (SCS) are proposed as an educational alternative for those who have dropped out of school early.

In this paper, we will analyze the profile of SCS users in the Malaga province and their motivations and expectations. We found that the majority of the participants in the Second Chance School programs in the province of Malaga are Spanish women aged 16-22 years old and living in Malaga City.

The average drop-out age is 16 years old, and the main reason is demotivation and disinterest (29.5%, followed by family reasons (25.3%). The primary motivation for returning to studies is "self-improvement." The level of satisfaction of the participants is relatively high and has a very positive effect on other areas of life.

Keywords: Early school leaving (ESL); Training; Second Chance Schools (SCS); Young people.

1. Introduction

Spain has Europe's second-highest rate of early school leavers (ESL) (16%). This high rate affects the employability of specific population sectors and, to a certain extent, fosters other exclusion dynamics in the social, economic, and political spheres. The most widely accepted definition of ESL in the international context is the one used by Eurostat in its surveys, where early school leavers are defined as young people aged 18-24 who are not studying at level 3 of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). This level corresponds to upper secondary general education or upper secondary vocational education. As such, ESL is related to not continuing with or dropping out of compulsory education. According to Fernández et al. (2010), ESL is the failure to complete post-compulsory education.

This situation has become a social problem and can lead to economic exclusion (inability to earn an adequate income, job insecurity, difficulty accessing resources), social deprivation (breakdown of social ties, disrupted social behavior, poor health), and political deprivation (lower participation, poor representation, lack of power, etc.) (Marhuenda, 2006, p. 21). Early school leavers are consequently at risk of social exclusion because of the challenges of finding a job when qualifications are increasingly valued, which can lead to high vulnerability and poverty. For this reason, one of the main objectives of Organic Law 3/2020, amending Organic Law 2/2006 on Education (LOMLOE for its Spanish acronym), is to reduce the early school leaving rate to that of the most advanced European countries.

Taking all these elements into account, various measures have been developed to prevent these high ESL rates. These include Second Chance Schools, designed to prevent the social exclusion of specific vulnerable groups affected by the dynamics of exclusion fostered by the formal education system. The educational program in SCS differs from that of the secondary education system regarding teaching methodology, content, and evaluation of the trainees (Bitsakos, 2021). Second Chance Schools were planned and funded by the European Union two decades ago so that member states could offset the consequences of student dropout rates and counter social exclusion (Kiprianos & Mpourgos, 2022).

The comprehensive approach of SCS allows for individualized user training, a key ingredient to achieving educational goals. This individualized approach to non-formal learning can better meet

people's needs. As such, SCS is a powerful tool for fostering young people's integration into society and the labor market and preventing social exclusion (Barrientos, 2022). SCS can be a powerful tool for combating high levels of ESL and reversing processes of exclusion, as they: adopt a person-centred approach;

- strengthen personal competences;

- involve professionals from different sectors;

- facilitate training and support the maturation process of the individual.

In Spain in 2016, several Spanish associations founded the Spanish Association of Second Chance Schools (Spanish: Asociación Española de Escuelas de Segunda Oportunidad) (Villardón Gallego et al., 2020). The Spanish Association of Second Chance Schools aims to provide specific, practical solutions for young people in Spain who are no longer in the education system and are unemployed through a nationally recognized model of Second Chance Schools. These schools have close links with the business sector and the recognition and support of public institutions.

Similar programs can be found in different European countries. In Denmark, SCS consists of the Danish Production Schools (DPS) that are, to a limited extent, independent and exist parallel to primary, secondary, and technical schools. In the Netherlands, an adult education structure similar to SCS is adult general secondary education (VAVO). VAVO is intended for adults who wish to obtain a full or partial qualification in pre-vocational secondary education, senior general secondary education, or pre- university education (Bitsakos, 2016). In Finland, the Folk High Schools provide second chance opportunities for early school leavers, educational institutions for adults where studies only sometimes lead to a qualification (European Commission, 2001).

Despite the development of these initiatives, studies have yet to be carried out on their reach or impact on society (Barrientos, 2022). Paniagua's report (2022) provides nine systematic reviews in the international context regarding active employment policies that include educational aspects framed in second chance measures aimed at vulnerable young people. The results show a need for more rigorous evaluations of interventions, including training or return to education.

The E2O[1] in Spain has been the subject of several studies that have defined the profile of young people and their contribution to personal reconstruction, educational re-engagement, and labor market insertion (Corchuelo et al., 2016; González et al., 2019; Gutiérrez and Prieto, 2020; and Martínez et al. (2021). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the profile of the users of the Second Chance Schools in Malaga (Spain), along with their motivations and expectations. This study will also examine the resources and associations that implement these initiatives to highlight the potential of Second Chance Schools to prevent social exclusion. The study of the profile, motivations, and expectations of users could give us some highlights that could orient the design and results of future programs.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted using a mixed quantitative and qualitative research methodology. An online questionnaire was administered to 95 participants in the programmes through the organisations running these initiatives. Also, discussion groups were held with the specialists and professionals working with the participants. These two approaches allowed us to carry out a more in-depth analysis and draw more detailed conclusions.

Between December 2021 and February 2022, we drafted an online questionnaire with open and closed questions. The table below shows the distribution of surveys by programme and organisation. Nearly sixty percent (58.9%) of the respondents are from the Arrabal and ACP projects, followed by the Pérez de Guzmán Secondary School (15.8%), the DOSTA Association (9.5%), and Don Bosco (3.2%). Data were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

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[1] E20 is the name of Second Chance Schools in Spain.

Table 1. Percentage of surveys by programme and organisation.

	%
ACP	28.4
Arrabal	30.5
Pérez de Guzmán Secondary School	15.8
DOSTA	9.5
Don Bosco	3.2
Other	12.6
	100

Two discussion groups were held with specialists from the participating organizations' SCS teams. The first discussion group was held on 4 March 2022, and the second on 9 May 2022.

Table 2. Participants in Discussion Group 1

Group 1 (4 March 2022)
ACP Social Worker
Employment Specialist - Arrabal
SCS Specialist - Arrabal
UMA Researcher
UMA Researcher

Table 3. Participants in Discussion Group 2

Group 2 (9 May 2022)
ACP Social Worker
ACP Social Educator
Employment Specialist - Arrabal
SCS Specialist - Arrabal
President DOSTA Association
UMA Researcher
UMA Researcher

Both sessions were recorded and later transcribed for subsequent analysis. The analysis of the sessions was carried out according to thematic areas. The main areas of analysis were as follows:

- profile and development of the participants in the programme;

- motivations and expectations of the participants in the programme;

- strengths and weaknesses of Second Chance Schools;

- suggestions for improvement.

3. Results

In this section, we describe the results of both the questionnaires and the discussion groups. We first compared the information regarding the profiles of the program participants. Secondly, we analyzed the information relating to the training methods and individualized attention, which, according to our participants, are critical to the success of these programs. In this context, we highlighted the importance of the personal relationship between the user and the program specialist and how this relationship influences student motivation. We then explored in depth the motivations and expectations of the participants, comparing the information obtained from the quantitative analysis with the opinions of the specialists in the discussion groups. We conclude this section by analyzing the participants' responses regarding their level of well-being.

3.1. Socio-demographic profile

It should be noted that although the ESL rate is higher for males than for females, our study shows that females make up the majority of the participants in these programmes. Two out of three participants are female. 36.64% of the participants are male and 63.16% are female.

Table 4. Participants according to gender (%).

Gender	%
Male	36.64
Female	63.16

Nonetheless, although the participants in our study were predominantly female, most of the participants in the programmes were male, as can be seen from the analysis of the discussion groups. This may be due to the over-representation of women in some of the participating organisations (DOSTA/ACP) where, according to the specialists in these organisations, most of the programme participants are women. The same is not true of the other participating organisations.

It should also be pointed out that the intrinsic motivation of females is a factor that may contribute to this gender imbalance. Females are more intrinsically motivated than males, valuing education for its own sake and not just as a means to find employment (cited in Rodríguez and Blanco, 2015). For this reason, women are more likely to return to education than men. However, more research is needed on these gender imbalances.

In terms of age, most of our participants were found to be between 16 and 22 years old. While there were people in almost all age groups between 16 and 57, the table below shows that most of the participants were in the 16-22-year-old age group.

Table 5. Age of participants (%)

Age	%
15-18	30.2
19-24	27.1
25-30	14.6
31-35	3.1
36-40	6,3
41-45	3,1
45-50	7,3
+ 50	8,3
	100

Again, in terms of age, the specialists who participated in the discussion groups indicated that the SCS model has an age range of 16-30 years, which explains why most of the people who completed the questionnaire were in this age group.

The Second Chance School model is registered with the national network and the age limit is 30.

Group I. Specialist 2

Nevertheless, according to the specialists participating in the discussion groups, people of all ages can participate in the programmes as age is not an excluding factor.

Spanish citizens make up most of the programme participants (85.3%), while Moroccan citizens make up the majority of foreign users (5.3%).

Table 6. Participants according to nationality (%)

Country	%
Spain	85.3
Morocco	5.3
Other	9.4

Immigrants appear to be under-represented in these types of programmes. It may be that their precarious situation and job insecurity prevent them from having access to these policies and programmes. Among foreigners, minors of Moroccan nationality stand out. These minors have been—or are currently—under the care of the child protection system. With regard to the Moroccan participants, specialists from the organisations point out that they have to adapt the materials to the users' level of Spanish:

We also have immigrants who are in protection centres and of course, as you said, we have to adapt the material slightly to suit each of them, because, as you mentioned, many of them don't speak Spanish at all, and it's difficult for them to understand, so there's no choice but to adapt to their needs.

Group I. Specialist 3

3.2. Training aspects

Regarding how long participants have been involved in SCS training, 41.1% have been studying for one year, while 30.5% have been studying for less than one year. This means almost three out of four participants are in their first year of SCS training.

Table 7. Time spent on programs (%)

Time spent on programs	%
Less than 1 year	30.5
1 year	41.1
2 years	13.7
3 years	11.6
4 years	1.1
4- 5 years	2.1
	100

In terms of training modality, face-to-face training is chosen most, with 61.1% of the total, followed by blended (face-to-face and online) (34.7%). Only 4.2% of the participants chose the online modality. The organisations' specialists stress that the key factors behind the success of the programmes are the flexible training formats (online/face-to-face) and individualised attention.

Table 8. Training modality

Training modality	%
Blended: face-to-face and online	34.7%
Online	4.2%
Face-to-face	61.1%
	100

The importance of a personal relationship with the tutor must also be emphasised. The role of the tutor is central to the programme and without the link between tutor and student, no progress can be

made with the formal aspects of the programmes. Regarding the face-to-face modality, personal and physical contact is understood as essential in developing these programmes.

This person is key to helping the young people to progress, to feel happy at school and to ensure that any problems are resolved. We contact them if we have any concerns. Some of them find it a bit more challenging, but overall, they always take part.

Group 1. Specialist 3.

In this sense this modality of schooling contributes to the configuration of a new dominant teacher identity, distant from that forged during the emergence of modern secondary schooling. Three elements feature this identity: the ethics of care, the personalization of teaching and the conception of teaching as a collective endeavour (Meo and Tarabini, 2020).

3.3. Motivations and expectations

The average dropout age is 16, with a clear gender imbalance. Focusing on the 14-16-year-old age group, 67.2% of girls aged 14-16 drop out of school, and among girls aged 16, the figure is 41.8%. Of boys, 53.3% drop out between the ages of 14 and 16, with a rate of 36.7% for boys aged 16. It can be seen, therefore, that girls tend to drop out of school earlier than boys.

Table 9. Age of early school leavers by gender

Age	Female	Male	Total
12	3.6%	3.3%	3.5%
13	5.5%	3.3%	4.7%
14	12.7%	3.3%	9.4%
15	12.7%	13.3%	12.9%
16	41.8%	36.7%	40.0%
17	12.7%	20.0%	15.3%
18	9.1%	6.7%	8.2%
20	1.8%	13.3%	5.9%

The main reason for leaving school early was lack of motivation and interest, followed by family reasons. Of the respondents, 29.5% said lack of motivation and interest was the main reason, and 25.3% said it was due to family reasons. Learning difficulties accounted for 15.8% of the reasons for dropping out, and work-related reasons for 11.6%.

Table 10. Reasons for leaving studies.

	Female	Male	%
Lack of motivation and interest	26.7%	42.9%	29.5
Learning difficulties	16.7%	14.3%	15.8
Family	28.3%	25.7%	25.3
Work	13.3%	8.6%	11.6
Other	15.0%	8.6%	17.9
Total			100

An analysis of the responses by gender shows that while the main reason for dropping out for boys was 'lack of motivation/interest' (42.9%), the main reason for girls was 'family reasons' (28.3%).

The quantitative analysis shows that a lack of motivation is the main reason for dropping out. Meanwhile, the main reasons for returning to study are to improve their employment prospects, educational attainment, and personal development. The focus groups provide additional information on these issues.

For example, this is what I work on in the training courses, transversal skills, teamwork, responsibility, conflict resolution, adaptability, flexibility, frustration tolerance, emotional control, time management... All the transversal skills, I work with them, and we make them more work oriented.

Group I. Specialist 2.

These key elements have been found in other research as key curricular elements identified are the flexibility of pathways, the emphasis on emphasis on primary and transversal competencies and the approach of continuous and formative, but not punitive, assessment (Tárraga et al, 2022).

A new approach of active listening, confidence, self-confidence... I feel important here. I've been ignored in other places. They would ask me why I didn't study, but here I study because I want to and also because they trust me, and that's so important.

Group 2. Specialist 3.

The average age of return to education is 25.87, with a difference of 10 years between males and females.

Table 11. Age of return to education by gender.

	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Average age	20.43	30.19	25.87

The primary motivation for returning to education for both genders is 'personal development,' with 46.7% of females and 48.6% of males citing this. The second most important reason for females is to improve their employment prospects (25%) and for males, to improve their educational attainment (22.9%), although there is only a 2.1-point difference between the genders.

Table 12. Motivation to return to education.

	Gender		
	Female	**Male**	**Total**
Family	5,0%	5,7%	5.5
Employment	25,0%	20,0%	23.2
Improve educational attainment	20,0%	22,9%	21.1
Other	3,3%	2,9%	3.2
Personal development	46,7%	48,6%	47.4

3.4. Well-being of participants

Finally, we turn to an analysis of the results in terms of the participants' well-being, which was measured using a Likert scale.

Table 13. Participants' levels of well-being

	Strongly agree	**Somewhat agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Somewhat disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**Total**
I am pleased to be studying again at a Second Chance School.	72.6	14.7	5.3	2.1	5.3	100
I think it will be easier to get a job once I have the right training.	66.3	20	4.2	2.1	7.4	100
I feel better about myself because of my increased knowledge.	65.3	17.9	8.4	3.2	5.3	100
I feel more motivated to study thanks to the staff involved in this new academic programme.	61.1	18.9	5.3	6.3	8.4	100
I think my life has improved since I began studying again.	47.4	26.3	17.9	2.1	6.3	100

Of the participants, 72.6% 'strongly agree' with the statement 'I am pleased to be studying again at a Second Chance School,' while 14.7% 'somewhat agree.' Regarding the second item assessed, 'I think it will be easier to get a job once I have the right training,' 66.3% 'strongly agree' with this

statement, and 20% 'somewhat agree'. 65.3% 'strongly agree' with the statement 'I feel better about myself because of my increased knowledge' and 17.9% 'somewhat agree'. 80% of the participants 'somewhat agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement 'I feel more motivated to study thanks to the staff involved in this new academic program.'

Finally, with a lower percentage of agreement, 47.4% 'strongly agree' with the statement 'I think my life has improved since I began studying again' and 26.3% 'somewhat agree.'

The participants rated the factors about their level of psychosocial well-being very positively. The most positive results were their satisfaction at returning to study with the SCS programs. These results show that participation in an SCS improves participants' education and significantly impacts their psychosocial well-being by increasing personal satisfaction and self-confidence.

4. Conclusions

A widespread lack of motivation among students in the education system leads to high levels of ESL. Many demotivated students leave school for personal development that rarely materializes, as their educational level determines their opportunities for social inclusion and economic and employment stability. School failure and ESL are also because society places much of the responsibility for education on schools and teachers when everyone has a responsibility in the education system: teachers, students, parents, institutions, the government, etc. (OECD, 2016). Recognition of this problem has led to initiatives such as the Spanish Association of Second Chance Schools, created in 2016, and the implementation of public policies, specific plans, and actions by public administration bodies and other levels of public authorities.

Our study results show that the program participants' profile is Spanish females aged 16-22. The difference in intrinsic motivation between the genders and the over-representation of women in the organization's programs in our study could explain this. Regarding training, it was found that most participants—seven out of ten—had been in the programs for over a year. Face-to-face training was the most popular choice, followed by blended learning (face-to-face and online). Only 4.2% of the respondents chose online training. The flexibility of the training format (face-to-face/online) and individualized attention are among the program's most essential elements. The importance of the

personal link with the tutor should be emphasized. Personal and physical contact seems essential for maintaining sufficient motivation for developing these programs. One of the cornerstones of the intervention is the role of the tutor. Without this preliminary link, developing the formal elements of the programs would not be possible.

This study has shown that intervention with early school leavers requires psycho-socio-educational actions to address the causes of the young person's withdrawal from the education system. Consequently, implementing preventive measures to address the causes of ESL analyzed in this study would help to reduce further ESL rates, not only to reach the 9% target set by the European Union by 2030 but also to build socially cohesive societies based on education.

The key features of these programs are that they personalize the intervention and use a multifaceted approach to keep students motivated. Teachers' role is a crucial issue that needs further research to understand their work in the current environment from their viewpoint, using self-reflective tools, especially diaries that mirror their everyday life in educational practice (Bolfíková and Pirohová. (2021).

Our participants rated the different areas related to psychosocial well-being very positively. Therefore, the program's success goes beyond the academic/employment aspect, as they also positively impact self-esteem and well-being. In addition, education improves well-being at both a practical and personal level. The results highlight the need for quality education, particularly emphasizing study continuity. The educational level of young people determines their employability. A low level of education can lead to precarious employment and prevent young people from gaining financial and professional stability and accessing the benefits of the welfare society. It is also likely to affect other aspects of their lives, such as their social and family life (Arredondo, 2020).

Despite the efforts of third-sector organizations, these programs receive little visibility, and society needs to be made aware of their existence. Organizations are thus calling for more studies to be encouraged at local, regional, and national levels. Concerning visibility, there was also a consensus that there needs to be more empirical research on this type of initiative at local, regional, and national levels. Nevertheless, we suggest further research that analyzes new protagonists who can provide a different view of the E2O curriculum and bring a different perspective to the E2O curriculum. Furthermore, the importance of studying the specific features of the educational environment at

second chance schools is supported by the effort to create more effective tools used to introduce marginalized groups into the labor market and ensure their socio-economic situation improves.

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