

The Girls' Preparandia of Gherla. The first years (1915-1919)

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Abstract. The Great War affected all areas of social life, including the education process organized by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The lack of teaching staff in the Romanian denominational schools of Transylvania determined the bishops to send numerous requests to the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction, with the purpose of obtaining exemption from military service for the teaching staff, a procedure which rarely received a favorable answer. This was the context in which the ecclesiastical and political authorities raised the possibility of a considerable substitution of the male with female teaching staff. The Girls' School of Gherla opened on September 5, 1915, and it was the second Greek-Catholic preparandia for girls. As in the case of the Institute of Lugoj (opened in 1914), the one in Gherla was dedicated to Romanian girls regardless of their confessions. It is important to note that after investigating the context and causes that led to the opening of the first pedagogical confessional schools for girls (normal schools/teaching institutes) in Romanian Transylvanian society, we can conclude that the First World War has, indeed, triggered fundamental change in gender relationships, including in education. For the Romanian girls of Transylvania, this opened the perspective of their professional training for becoming elementary school teachers. This was accomplished after setting up specialized institutions in this field, and the Girls' Preparandia of Gherla is one of them.

Keywords: Great War, Transylvania, Gherla, preparandia for girls, gender relationships, emancipation.

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Women's education, namely their intellectual and professional training, did not receive appropriate attention in Transylvanian Romanian society until the second half of the 19th century. Of course, this attitude was based on the view people had about gender education. Neither decision-makers, nor broad public opinion agreed that women should follow an educational path which would help them acquire a career that could eventually offer them a level of economic and social independence. The concept that dominated the centuries of collective mentality was that the material existence of women was entirely the responsibility of the head of the family, the man (father, husband), while the woman was to remain in the social status of a housewife, with all the relevant powers.¹ In the upscale society of the era, whether we consider families with noble origins, bourgeois, or families of intellectuals (here we include the families of priests and teachers), girls were given some education, but only to the extent that they could reach a decent level of general knowledge that gave them the status of cultivated women.

For Romanian families in Transylvania, the situation was even more difficult because, given the political context, the chances of accessing education in the national language had been reduced.² As a result, until the First World War, in Transylvania there were just a few schools dedicated to girls' education (beside elementary schools). In general, after finishing their studies at the confessional elementary schools, the majority of Romanian girls,³ who wanted to complete their intellectual training, had to attend secondary schools in Hungarian or German, because there were just a few

¹ *Unirea. Foaie bisericască-politică*, Blaj, year XXVI, no. 78 (1916): 1.

² http://bjastrasibiu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/121_Sc_de_fete.pdf, accessed on September 24, 2019.

³ We would like to say here that we are considering in our analysis only the female segment that came from the Romanian elite, the daughters of officials, lawyers, grand owners, intellectuals, priests, teachers etc.

Romanian secondary level institutions dedicated to the education of girls, and it was only in the last quarter of the 19th century that these types of schools were established. Among these were the ASTRA Sibiu Civil School for Girls (1883), the Girls' School of the Society of the Romanian Women of Braşov (1885), the Arad Civil School for Girls (1890), the Greek Catholic School for Girls in Beiuş (1896).

After the first global conflagration, there were important changes in the composition of teaching staffs, with more and more women being recruited. The Great War affected all areas of social life, including the education process in all countries ruled by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Following repeated mobilization, as a result of the need of manpower on the battlefield, many teachers were enrolling, which resulted in a large deficit of teaching staff. This situation had an impact on the whole Empire, but its consequences were more acute for confessional education in Transylvania.⁴ It should be noted that Romanian confessional education was facing this problem even before the war, given the anti-nationality law issued in Budapest, to which was added the precarious material situation of the rural communities, who managed to support their confessional schools and teachers with great difficulty.⁵ Moreover, teacher recruitment was performed in disproportionate manner, with most of the enrolling being registered among Romanians, while Hungarians and Saxons were spared.⁶ For example,

⁴ *Unirea*, year XXVI, no. 77 (1916): 1.

⁵ Liviu Maior, *Doi ani mai deoreme. Ardeleni, bucovineni și basarabeni în război (1914-1916)*, (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2016), 151-152.

⁶ Cluj County Branch of the National Archives /infra CJCBA/, Fund *Greek-Catholic Diocese of Cluj-Gherla*, doc. 6777/1914, f. 1. Elementary school teacher Emil Pocola from Romanian Bocşa, making himself an exponent of the wishes of Romanian confessional elementary school teachers, sent to the Gherla Council on August 4, 1914, a letter from which we restate the following illustrative passage in the sense of what was said in the text: "When we see how state teachers joined the auxiliary forces, based on Paragraph 2, Chapter III of Service instruction no. 44, and that even when the existence and future of the homeland require general mobilization, they are exempt from the obligation of attending military service, we, the confessional elementary school teachers, who are just as faithful to our homeland as state

we note that 357 Romanian teachers at Orthodox confessional schools⁷ had been drafted since the very first months of the war, which means that in a relatively short time, around half of the Romanian teachers and elementary school teachers were enrolled and sent to the battle field.⁸ Preliminary research on the issue concerning the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Gherla reveals that in the first year of war, about 150 confessional teachers were enrolled out of a total of about 430 active teachers at the beginning of the school year 1914/1915.⁹

The shortage of teaching staff¹⁰, as well as the absence of qualified staff able to be placed as substitutes in the Romanian confessional schools of Transylvania, determined the bishoprics to repeatedly apply to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction for obtaining exemption from military service for teachers. Such petitions were rarely endorsed. This was the context in which ecclesiastical and political authorities raised the possibility of a considerable substitution of the male with female teaching staff. This involved those representatives of the Romanian female segment who had enjoyed some educational training, as they were coming from the families of the elite, i.e. intellectuals, priests, teachers, notaries, etc.

elementary school teachers are, would like to acquire the shield and favor of the laws in force.” (reference to Law no. 857/1913).

⁷ Ioan Mateiu, *Școala noastră și războiul*, (Sibiu: Tiparul Tipografiei Arhidiecezane, 1915), 22.

⁸ Liviu Maior, *Doi ani mai devreme*, 145, 153. See also Eugenia Bârlea, *Perspectiva lumii rurale asupra primului război mondial*, (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2004), 126.

⁹ See *Șematismul veneratului cler al diecezei greco-catolice române de Gherla pe anul 1914, de la înființarea Episcopiei anul 61*, (Gherla: Tipografia diecezană, 1914), passim. According to him, there were 511 confessional schools in the diocese, but not all posts were occupied. CJCBA, Fund *Greek-Catholic Diocese of Cluj-Gherla*, doc. 7192/1914, 8205/1914, 8207/1914, 8348/1914, 8407/1914, 8462/1914; Miscellaneous, dos. 21/1915.

¹⁰ “The lack of public elementary school teachers has been felt for a long time. That of the past is topped today with the elementary school teachers who died for the homeland on all the battlefields, the crowd that returns and is inept for the previously performed service; this is the synopsis of the current situation.” See the article “About the lack of teachers” in *Unirea*, year XXVI, no. 77 (1916): 1.

The idea of filling the vacant positions by hiring female teachers was also agreed by the Budapest Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction.¹¹ Concerned by the new daily realities which increasingly affected the safety of the material existence of women, it agreed to reform the girls' schools in the eastern part of the Dualist Monarchy.¹² It became more and more obvious that solutions had to be sought and found to provide women with the opportunity to support themselves, because as a result of the ruthless war, there was a worrying increase in the number of widows and orphans.¹³ These were generally the circumstances in which the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction approved through Order no. 47070 of May 18, 1914 the establishment of a Greek-Catholic school for Romanian girls in Lugoj, called *Preparandia*.¹⁴ The new school opened its doors on September 1 without being really noticed, due to the war under way.

Bishop Vasile Hossu personally inquired with the political authorities in Budapest, for the purpose of obtaining approval for the establishment of a Greek-Catholic *preparandia for girls* living in the north-eastern part of Transylvania. In February 1915, the hierarch of Gherla received the approval of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction to open the second Greek Catholic *preparandia for girls*. In addition, he was promised that the salaries of the teaching staff would be supported by the state, in the same way as the salaries that had been already provided to the teachers of the *Preparandia for Boys* (also in Gherla). The Episcopal Letter (circular) of May 25, 1915 announced that the ministerial approval for the establishment of the

¹¹ *Unirea*, year XXVI, no. 77 (1916): 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, year XXVI, no. 78 (1916): 1.

¹³ *Ibid.* "The following saying should cease to exist: Girls should learn something and get married. And if they don't get married? And if married they are left with 6 to 8 orphans? [...] The time when one could say that every upper class family girl has to marry, and every woman is assured in her existence only by the existence of the man has passed."

¹⁴ *Preparandia* or *Normal School* (for boys or for girls) was at that time a pedagogical institute where young people were trained to become teachers.

Preparandia for Girls in Gherla was obtained, explaining in detail the need for such an institution.¹⁵ It results from the episcopal message that the hierarchy had clearly understood the needs of the times. The aim of establishing the girls' school was not only to "fill the gap felt in our public schools as a result of the lack of teachers", but also to give the girls, whose supporters had been taken away (fathers, brothers, husbands), the chance to become professionally ready to embrace a career, in order to be able to sustain and afford a normal life in the future. The Bishop's words reveal a modern approach, a vision entirely based upon the reality of those times.¹⁶ In addition, as in the case of the Institute of Lugoj, the one in Gherla was created for Romanian girls regardless of their confessions, because the goal of both Romanian confessions was to preserve the national character of education. The Gherla Girls' School opened on September 5, 1915,¹⁷ operating at first in the Bishop's dwelling, where the hierarchy restricted his own living space to the benefit of the new school institution. Just like in Lugoj, the School was built and envisioned as a boarding school for the girls attending classes. Subsequently, the Ministry in charge granted financial aid for raising a new building, to pay the salaries of the teaching staff, and to purchase school supplies.¹⁸

Already at the time of its opening, the staff of the *Normal School for Girls* consisted of competent teachers, with solid studies pursued at the University of Budapest, in order to fully comply with the legal requirements in force at the time. In the 1915/1916 school year, the teaching staff, even if

¹⁵ CJCBA, Fund *Greek-Catholic Diocese of Cluj-Gherla*, doc. 3026/1915, f. 1.

¹⁶ In fact, along with this project, Bishop Vasile Hossu, with the same desire to contribute to the cultural and material emancipation of the Romanian people, supported the need to build a girls' middle school in Blaj, where at that time only a children's school was operating. See *Unirea*, year XXVI, no. 78 (1916): 1.

¹⁷ *Unirea*, year XXV, no. 89 (1915): 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

its number decreased, included the following members: Livia Coroian,¹⁹ who was in charge with the interim management of the institute during this difficult period (organizing the teaching staff and compiling the necessary basic logistics material), Aurelia Suciu,²⁰ Ioan Beran, music teacher, and Grigore Strâmbu, religion teacher.²¹

Livia Coroianu (1892-1971) was born in Gherla, and she completed her primary and secondary education in Gherla and Sibiu. She pursued higher education in Satu Mare, and attended the University of Budapest (1914), taking her degree in history and geography. Since 1914 she taught at the *Normal School for Girls* in Lugoj. In 1915 she was asked by Bishop Vasile Hossu to take care of the organization of the *Normal School for Girls* in Gherla. She can therefore be considered as the founder and principal of this school institution. In 1921 she married lawyer Emil Deciu and resigned her headmaster position. She continued to teach geography at the same school.

In the 1915/1916 school year, Livia Coroianu taught Romanian, Hungarian, history, and geography, while Aurelia Suciu taught mathematics, natural sciences, somatology, economy, drawing, calligraphy, German, manual work, and gymnastics.

In the second school year (1916-1917), the teaching staff increased by 2 new members, who took over some of the subjects taught by the above mentioned two teachers: Maria Pop taught Hungarian, history, economics, and manual work, and Ioan Șanta was assigned with the mission of teaching design and calligraphy. In fact, design and calligraphy were disciplines of great importance in a school in which future teachers were trained. During the same school year, as a result of the fact that the Institute was also attended

¹⁹ http://www.bjc.ro/wiki/index.php/Deciu%2C_Livia, accessed on October 17, 2019.

²⁰ Aurelia Suciu (1882-1975) studied mathematics and physics in Budapest.

²¹ CJCBA, Fund *Gherla Preparandia for Girls*, f. 3-4.

by Orthodox girls, the subject of Orthodox religion was entrusted to Augustin Cupșa.²²

New names appear at the teaching staff's conference in the 1917/1918 school year in addition to the known teachers: Virginia Pop (she taught gymnastics in all 3 courses/years of study, while being an interim teacher at the Application School; during the previous year, she had worked as a governess at the Girls' Boarding School), Ioan Partene taught all German classes, and Augustin Pașca taught Orthodox religion. The teaching staff was joined by two governesses, who were in charge of the Girls' Boarding School: Ana Boilă resigned her position due to family problems, and was replaced by Augusta Coroian. In the 1918-1919 school year, the teaching staff was joined by 3 young teachers: Flavia St. Șuluțiu (history of education, Romanian, German, somatology, gymnastics), Eugenia Pop (mathematics, economics, drawing), and Elena Bulbuc (Hungarian, geography, manual work).²³ During this year, Virginia Pop taught drawing and calligraphy.

We can see that although this was a school for girls, the teaching staff was mixed, as its members were hired based on the principle of professional competence. It is true that the class/course responsables (=head teachers) were always women. The Teacher Training Institute for Girls in Gherla was guided by the Rules for the Organization of State Confessional Preparatories.

After the accomplishment of Greater Romania (Great Union on December 1, 1918), Romanian confessional education in Transylvania entered a new stage of development, as major changes and concrete efforts were made for integrating it into the Romanian unitary education system. A first step in this direction was taken at the Congress of Transylvanian Secondary

²² Ibid., f. 23.

²³ Ibid., f. 78v.

School Teachers, held in Sibiu, in January 1919.²⁴ Among the major changes that were decided there, we would like to mention the following ones: the elimination of Hungarian, the replacement of German with French, the replacement of the study of Hungarian history and geography with the study of Romania's history and geography, the elimination of the study of the Hungarian constitution, replaced with that of constitutional law and political economics. These changes are also reflected in the school curricula of the teaching institutions for girls, where the teaching subjects were reconfigured also in terms of the number of hours they were taught. The new changes were brought to the attention of the members of the Gherla School staff at the Methodical Conference in January by Headmaster Livia Coroianu, who was delegated to the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia, and who attended the Congress in Sibiu.²⁵ The Methodical Conference of the teaching staff on March 8 announced the commission which was to establish the new school curriculum for the pedagogical schools for boys and girls in Transylvania, elected at the Assembly on February 23-24, 1919, by the Committee of the Union of Teachers in Transylvania and the Hungarian Regions. The Commission included Eliza Buteanu and Livia Coroianu.²⁶ At the same time, the textbooks to be used for teaching in these institutes were also decided upon.

In the 1919/1920 school year, due to the real need of teachers for the reorganization of Romanian education in Transylvania, Livia Coroianu, whose work during the four years of directorship had been highly appreciated by everyone, left this institution as a result of her appointment as head of the newly established *Normal (pedagogical) School for Girls* in Cluj-

²⁴ Iudita Călușer, *Liceul român unit de fete din Beiuș. 1896-1948*, (Oradea: Editura Logos'94, 2011), 187.

²⁵ CJCBA, *Fund Gherla Preparandia for Girls*, f. 74-75.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 75v.

Napoca. The leadership of the *Pedagogical Institute for Girls* in Gherla was taken over by Aurelia Suciu.²⁷ This was the only important change during this school year. Flora Buzilă, a new teacher, joined the teaching staff that remained unchanged during this school year. In the following we will present the results of an analysis applied to the first student class of Gherla's *Normal School for Girls*, which started their courses in September 1915 and ended them in June 1919. In September 1915, 30 ordinary/internal students (who were full-time students and were living in the boarding house) were registered, while 11 others asked during the year to take exams as private students (students who did not live in the boarding house).²⁸ We would like to point out that during the four years of study there was a certain dynamic in the first student class, some abandoned their studies and other students, usually switching from private students to full-time ones, were accepted instead. Generally, the reasons for which some students withdrew were related to health issues, but also to material difficulties, with families which could no longer cope with the costs of schooling in the difficult context of the war. Of the 30 students registered in the 1915/1916 school year, 20 students continued their studies and graduated in the summer of 1919, while 10 students dropped out of the four years of study, a fairly good percentage (60%) in view of the political situation. The class was supplemented by private students, so that at the beginning of the 1918/1919 school year, which represented the fourth year of study for the first class of preparandists, 31 students were registered. However, a more important fact was that at the end of the school year, all of them passed their exams, which meant that all were graduates.²⁹

Another matter analyzed in this presentation is that of the religious confessions of the students (see Fig. 1). Thus, we would like to note that out

²⁷ Ibid., f. 92r.

²⁸ Ibid., f. 7, 11, 14.

²⁹ Ibid., f. 56-63.

of the 30 students registered in 1915, most of them were of Greek Catholic confession (27), as expected, and only 3 were Orthodox: Victoria Popp from Szentpatterfalva, Sălaj County, Eugenia Lepedean from Bacscalu, Braşov County, and Eugenia Rusu from Abrud, Alba de Jos.³⁰ The confessional report was about the same at the time of the graduation of the first class of students (June 1919) when, as a result of the withdrawals of some of the students registered in 1915 and the acceptance of others on the remaining vacant seats, out of a total of 31 graduates, 29 were Greek Catholic, and only 2 students were Orthodox.³¹

As for the parent's workplace, it can be observed that half of the students registered in 1915 were priest daughters, namely 15 out of 30 (see Fig. 2). The main reason for this is that the priests were the first members of the community to receive the information that was transmitted mainly through the Church; secondly, the clergy had a better and more stable economic situation, even in those difficult times,³² being by far one of the social categories least affected in economic terms, compared to other categories, even in time of war. In addition, the priests were not drafted, except for the military clergy, so they were able to financially support their children in schools even in the turbulent times generated by the war. Then, priest daughters were favored from the start, as most of them were beneficiaries of at least a minimal educational preparation, given that they had attended at least the confessional primary school in the parish. We would like to point out also that many of the 15 priest daughters, namely 9 were from Bistriţa-Năsăud County, which meant that they belonged to the

³⁰ Ibid., f. 37v. Eugenia Rusu from Abrud, of Orthodox confession, appears recorded as student until the end of the 1917/1918 school year, which means she completed the third year of study, but we no longer find her in the fourth year. By her withdrawal, the number of Orthodox students was reduced to two.

³¹ Ibid., f. 56-63.

³² Beside their own wealth, the priests had salaries, and they received also war aid.

Vicariate of Rodna, an area in which the Greek Catholic priesthood was quite prosperous, and where there was already a tradition for education, rarely found in Romanian society (probably comparable only to Braşov and Mărginimea Sibiului). The lowest percentage of school drop-out was recorded also in this category, with only 3 priest daughters not completing their studies (see Fig. 3).

Teacher daughters were also in a rather good position, considering their level of education, and they were, in fact, the second category that offered candidates for the first preparatory student course. Of the students registered in 1915, 7 were daughters of confessional teachers (6), or regular teachers (1). However, during the war, the school situation for teacher daughters evolved differently from those of priest daughters. Out of the 7 teacher daughters, only 3 graduated in 1919 (see Fig. 2). One possible explanation for this could be the financial situation, which was clearly worse for the families of teachers than for those of the priests. This situation could have worsened as a result of the father's enrollment in the military. In addition, there was a need for adding more labor force to the family, because the war had left it without the bread winner. This is an assumption that we want to investigate carefully and responsibly in the future research on this subject. It can also be observed that two orphan girls were among those who failed to complete their studies. One of them had lost both parents and was in the care of an orphans' advisor. The other girl's father had deceased, and she was brought up only by her mother. With regard to the geographical origin or, in other words, the county distribution of the students, we can see that in the first course organized at Gherla, there were students from all over the Transylvanian Principality, namely from 10 counties (see Fig. 4). It is true that just a few students came from the more remote counties, i.e. one or two at the most. Depending on the criterion of regional origin, we can divide this

first class of preparandists into 3 circles. The first one includes the students from the B-N counties (with 9 students) and Solnoc-Dăbâca (with 8 students). These were the counties next to Gherla. Then, in the second circle, the counties of Sălaj, Sătmar, Bihor, and Alba de Jos, with 2-3 students. From Cluj County, although quite close to Gherla, no student was registered. In the third circle we include the more distant counties, such as Braşov, Făgăraş, and Ciuc, with one student each.

In conclusion, we can say that the data contained in this study is to be considered, at this stage, as partial results of a research that is intended to be made at a greater scale, about the teaching staff and students in the Greek Catholic pedagogical institutes for girls in Lugoj and Gherla, during their first two decades. Also, it is important to point out that the investigation of the context and causes that led to the opening of the first pedagogical confessional schools for girls (normal schools/teaching institutes) in Romanian Transylvanian society has revealed the fact that the First World War has, indeed, caused a fundamental change in gender relationships, including in educational areas, but not only. Women's engagement in all areas for supporting the war effort and their multiple roles helped to create a new image about women and set the ground for their emancipation. This meant a sustained and tested empowerment of their intellectual, physical, emotional, and administrative potential.

Whereas before 1914, pedagogical studies were reserved almost exclusively to boys, a fact confirmed by the way in which pedagogical institutes were organized, as they often worked together or in addition to theological seminars, the Great War created new realities. For the Romanian girls in Transylvania, this opened the perspective of their professional training as elementary school teachers, by setting up specialized institutions in this field, and the *Girls' Preparandia of Gherla* was one of them.

Fig. 1 The confessional ratio

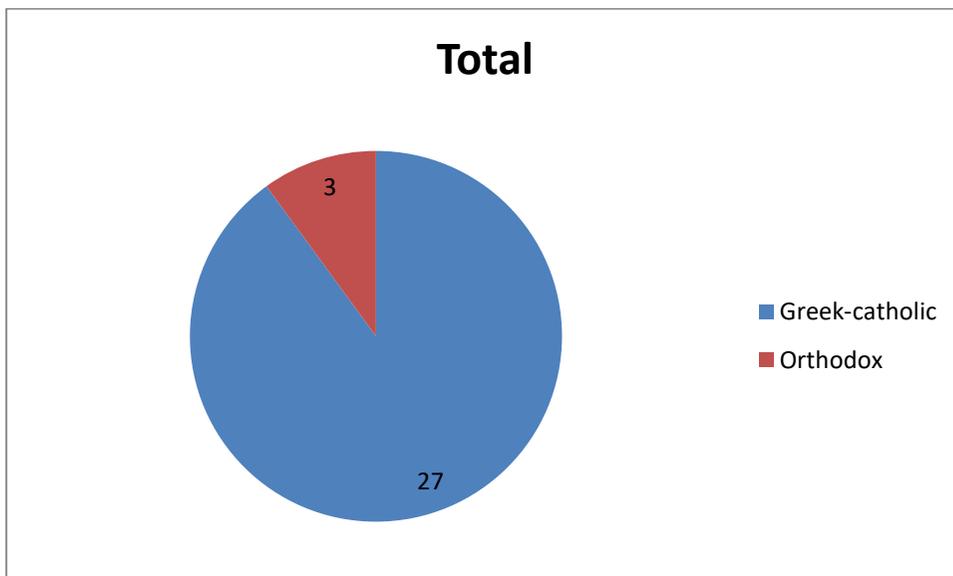


Fig. 2 The work places of the parents

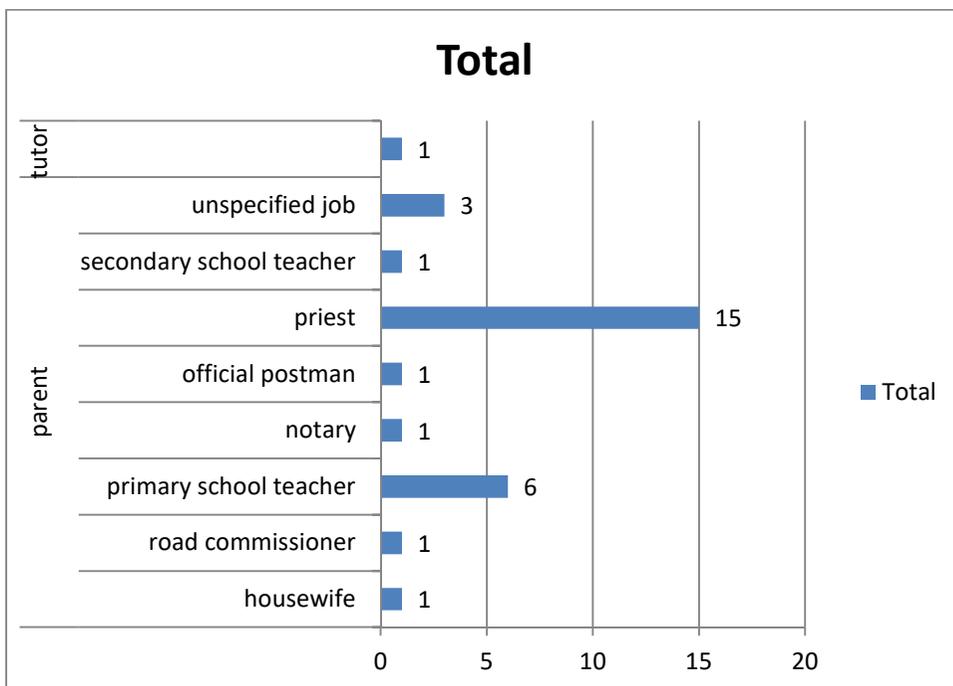


Fig. 3 The correlation between the parent's/tutor's workplace and graduation

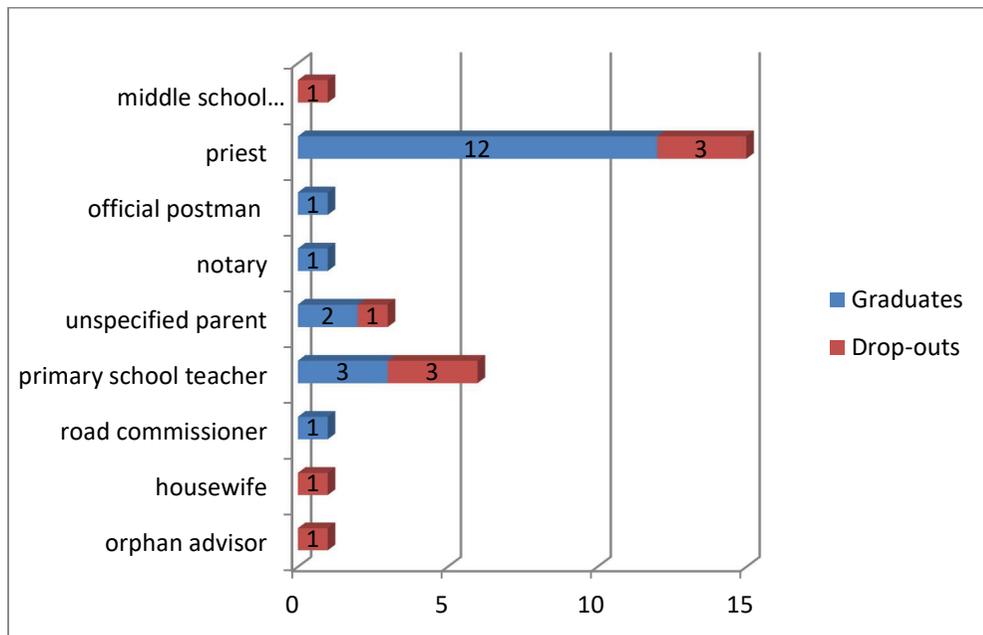


Fig. 4 The total number of students from each county

