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THE EFFECTS OF THE CHANGE IN THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION GENERATED BY THE SARS-COV-2 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT. *The pandemic that broke out in Romania at the beginning of 2020 generated polemics and reconfiguration of the education system, a reality assumed differently by the actors involved: students, parents, teachers. This article wants to answer the question "What were the effects of the change in the school organization generated by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic?".*

KEYWORDS: *change, SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, educational environment, student, teaching staff.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *O15, M15*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID pandemic caught the state system completely unprepared. The private one reacted and adapted more quickly to the new challenges to move to online education. The more cumbersome state system with high inertia to change initially preferred to stop classes and then asked teachers to hold them online. From this moment on, chaos ensued: each teacher did what he could. Without national protocols and solutions, some teachers struggled to hold classes online,

others sent out work sheets, but many enjoyed an unexpected vacation (Haddon, L., Livingstone, S. 2014).

The pandemic crossed the boundary of two school years and the third school year continued to interrupt learning, demand change in education, remain a challenge for students and teachers and why not for decision makers and parents alike. We were faced with an educational paradigm shift and, at the same time, with enormous financial challenges due to an accumulation of competing crises, such as health, climate, environmental, jobs, energy, transport and the list keep going (Martinez, J.A., Broemmel, A.D. 2021).

The pandemic did not generate new challenges in the Romanian educational system but amplified them, in the sense that inequalities in education deepened, the number of children and young people out of school increased, the relevance to a constantly changing labor market decreased, like the budget allocated to education.

The closure of schools caused by the COVID-19 crisis has put pressure on the education system and estimated a decline in learning, an increase in dropout and early school leaving, especially among the most vulnerable among students, but also a rate of functional illiteracy ten percent higher.

THE EFFECTS OF CHANGE IN THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION GENERATED BY THE PANDEMIC

The closure of schools, the suspension of classes and the interruption of medium-term activities have generated a major problem that society has had to face, namely online schooling. A number of major issues were highlighted.

To begin with there were no protocols. Teachers were able to choose whether or not to hold classes, and this highly permissive approach did not encourage work.

At the same time, many teachers have never taught online before, they didn't know (and still don't know) how to use an online platform.

There were situations in which each teacher conducted the class on a different platform, with a random timetable, which changes according to the availability of the teaching staff, differing from one week to another. The given assignments also had a non-unitary character, they were sent in docx or pdf format, or even as a simple picture taken with the phone in bad lighting and orientation conditions (Grosu, V., Socoliuc, M., Bostan, I., Hlaciuc E., Moraru, M., Domil, A., Mates, D. și Artene, A. 2014).

Infrastructure was and still is a big problem. Many teachers have access to the Internet and a smart phone to allow them a basic level of interaction with students. The problem that some have raised is related to the lack of working tools – not all teachers have a laptop to help them conduct their lessons.

Similarly, not all children have access to tablets and laptops, and the phone is not a solution. There are families with 2-3 children who do not have the opportunity to provide the children with an environment conducive to learning (table 1).

Table 1. Internet access

Mobile phone	90%
Desktop computer	12%
Laptop	18%
Tablet	8%

Source: Report - Analyzes the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on children's education, accessed on 17.03.2023, ora 14.00, <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/sci-ro/files/6f/6fc2797e-a8bc-4ed8-a760-b806e71c264d.pdf>

Going beyond the problems of organizing classes, there are problems related to Internet access. Due to digitization, the human interaction between teacher and student, as well as between students, has decreased (Kaden, U. 2020).

Hidden behind a screen, reduced to the size of a square on the monitor, participants in an online lesson cannot perceive the body language, the inflections of voices, or the appreciative smile of a colleague. All these small elements are actually essential in communication, in

developing an open relationship based on trust (Hanage, W-P., Brownstein, J-S., Layan, M., Vespignani, A., Tian, H., Dye, Ch., Pybus, O-G., Scarpino, S-V. 2020). The lack of these non-verbal elements in communication increases the feeling of fatigue, the so-called zoomfatigue.

It is harder to keep students' attention because they are distracted by other elements and because it is much harder to intervene when they do not understand something. Classic lectures and explanations that last more than 10 minutes in the online environment tire students.

If in face-to-face discussions, a teacher can "teach" for half an hour without losing the students' interest and attention, things are different online and the students feel disconnected.

The solution is the adaptation of teaching techniques to online education, although even the use of the most modern methods does not rise to the level of classical education that involved face-to-face interaction. Not even the most modern techniques can replace the student's distraction from class, nor the temptation to do something else (Devece, C., Palacios-Marqués, D., & Alguacil, M. P. 2016).

Students cannot be monitored as well online compared to classroom monitoring, and leaving microphones on as a means of monitoring creates background noise and microphonics and is too flawed a solution to be feasible (Golberstein, E., Wen, H., Miller, B. F. 2020).

There is data showing that some students and teachers have made progress during the pandemic. They propose key lessons for the better development of all students, promoting an approach that is especially beneficial for vulnerable students, historically perceived as "hard to approach" and "difficult to learn".

One of those lessons is how to ensure access to technology for every student. The digital divide is one of the oldest inequalities in education, but the health crisis has driven the need to find a solution to this problem. This enabled the implementation of a solution at a political level and did not leave it to the discretion of the charitable institutions, as has happened so far (Hakonsson, D. D., Klass, P., & Carroll, T., N. 2012).

While schools have been closed, the need for all students to have access to technology and the obstacles many face have received considerable media attention, as well as a number of creative equity policy innovations .

Solutions to support access to activities and curricular content for a variety of students have been identified. Beyond students' basic access to technology, 2020 has taught how important it is how it's used (Beycioglu, K., Kondakci, Y. 2020).

For example, teachers have creatively used technologies such as smart phones and applications such as Zoom or YouTube. They were used to deliver face-to-face lessons remotely and to blend learning for small groups participating physically and remotely through online learning environments such as Google Classroom.

The students received the recording of the lessons, which proved to be very useful for students with disabilities. They were able to access the material according to their time and could resume the lesson if they were unclear.

This blended face-to-face and online teaching model has been well received by students with disabilities and chronic illnesses, who have long sought this access, but without success, as schools argued it would be too difficult to put into practice (Hargreaves, A. 2004).

If many teachers found the transition to distance learning devices stressful and time-consuming, many others showed impressive creativity and flexibility and adopted new ways of working.

Some have used high-tech solutions such as sharing recordings of skills and teaching content or organizing discussion groups in virtual learning environments. Others innovated using less sophisticated solutions in places where access to digital devices and the Internet was much more difficult (teachers in remote areas turned to the radio).

This highlighted an important lesson of the pandemic: students who cannot come to school can still benefit from online education and connection with their teachers and peers through high-tech or less sophisticated solutions (Baker, J. A., Maupin, A. N. 2009).

The way teachers have used technologies during quarantine to regularly communicate and

maintain contact with vulnerable students and their families/guardians is a model of support that must be preserved in order to have healthy partnerships between the family environment and the school. For education in the digital age, technology plays an important role in learning.

Although, until now it was believed that technology would hinder and complicate the learning and teaching process, it has been found that it is actually a huge support for the current generation.

Studies of the impact of distance learning on students with disabilities indicate that such personalized and enhanced levels of support are hugely beneficial for learning and well-being. It is therefore not surprising to find that successful teachers described the support they received from their school leadership team or education departments as essential to being able to innovate autonomously and to procure sufficient resources.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, online education raises many problems, some related to poor infrastructure, others related to the way the online learning process is carried out. The problems relate to a rethinking of the subject, teaching methods, teacher education, but also the assessment of students. There are also problems specific to the age of the students, as the ability to concentrate of the students differs according to age, and teaching techniques must also take this aspect into account. The positive side is that using online education, children from disadvantaged backgrounds could also have access to information and detailed explanations. (Arora, K.A., Srinivasan, R. 2020).

Experienced teachers can record lessons and provide explanations on different topics, recordings that children will be able to access if they want more details or if they don't understand a certain concept.

As we moved forward and emerged from the pandemic, it was not forgotten that many schools and teachers did an extraordinary job to guarantee the engagement and learning of students, despite all the unforeseen difficulties. It was not easy, but for the first time, many teachers, schools and education systems implemented rapid and effective changes in policy and practice to support equity in education (Ashforth, B. E. 2020).

It is essential to honor these achievements in policy and practice and maintain them in order to redress existing inequities and transform the education system as it moves into the long-awaited new normal.

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