

Aspects regarding the advantages and disadvantages of online education

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Abstract

The pandemic period that we face has brought profound changes in our society, economy and education, and even if they take place in a limited timeframe, or at least this is what we hope for, their effects will be noticed for another few years after the pandemic is over. At this moment, many employees work from home, the learning process takes place online, which was hard to imagine some time ago, at least in Romania, and anyhow not in its entirety, as it happens today. In this context, some valid questions are raised: will online education be extended in Romania? In what context? What are the advantages and disadvantages of online education?

Keywords: Online education; advantages and disadvantages

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In U.S., in April 2020 McKinsey & Company's representatives wrote on "entering new educational territory", showing among other aspects how this "forced and abrupt move to remote learning has not been easy" (Heitz, et al. 2020). Some months later, other McKinsey & Company's representatives underlined that the "necessity of continued remote learning cannot be an excuse for inaction or indifference" (Dorn, et al. 2020). At the European Union level was set the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 (by building on the 2018-2020 plan), in which was underlined from the very beginning (among other aspects) that: "Online, distance and blended learning are specific examples of how technology can be used to support teaching and learning processes" (European Commission, 2020).

It is well-known that on their important path of experiencing the relationship between what they inherit and acquire, students' awareness should be raised by education (preparing for knowing), as highlighted by John Lyons while analyzing Paulo Freire's educational theory (Lyons, 2018).

A Romanian Professor, Varujan Pambuccian, mathematician and computer scientist, does not believe that online education will be made permanent: "I don't think that after the current crisis we will witness a rapid development of this type of education, because when the crisis is over, we will find ourselves again in the classic paradigm and it will be perpetuated. I am not sure if it's desirable or not, this is a matter of necessity after all. We need to be careful, if online education is needed somewhere, then the answer is yes, it is desirable. If there is no need for it somewhere else, then it is not desirable, obviously" (Coroianu a, 2020)

From an institutional, administrative and organizational point of view, online education allows the continuation of the teaching activity, the carrying out of the teaching – learning – evaluation process, even if in a new paradigm; practically, everything continues its course, the activity takes place as usual, but in fact in a new normal manner, within the framework of the new technologies, which were already present in the daily lives of children, students, education beneficiaries.

We believe that this special moment that we all face, will leave its mark on our society and on our lives in general. Concerning education, two hypotheses emerge:

- a) The general use of online education, or in other words, mass online education and the transfer of the “face to face”, classic, traditional education to the private sphere, thus becoming a minority (given the fact that, in Romania, private lessons are still present);
- b) The extension of online education or rather its use where it is necessary (isolated places or with a low school population, for example).



Regarding this subject, the President of the Romanian Academy, Professor Ioan Aurel Pop, stated: “I view this solution as a temporary one, necessary during these times when we cannot see our pupils and students face to face, but it is not a long term solution. School, ever since it was organized by the Greeks and the Romans, implies the presence of the teacher face to face with those who are meant to receive the school’s message. Therefore, I do not believe that this solution should be made permanent. I don’t think it will be imposed, it could be used more frequently – as distance learning already exists in Romanian and international high education – some might even prefer it, but I repeat, my opinion is that classic education, with the pupil’s eyes facing the eyes of the teacher, with the emotion that the teacher transmits, cannot be replaced by anything. The message goes from one person to another” (Coroianu b, 2020).



Starting from the aspects mentioned above, we highlight a series of advantages of the online education system:

- Reducing the time, in fact gaining the time that otherwise would be used to go to and come from school, which implies a reduction of the traffic in big cities (for those who choose a school that is further away from home) and eliminating the effort of the children from the rural areas, who had to walk long distances in order to get to their schools;
- Children remain in their environment, the one from home, which is beneficial for those who had to face the school's infrastructure problems; thus, improper conditions are avoided, such as classrooms which lack proper heating;
- Bullying is avoided, as it is a major issue nowadays, but in fact it is transferred online;
- Children become more familiar with technology and in fact use it in a proper manner, with a view to learning; technology should be regarded as a support mechanism for the learning process;
- Overcrowding is avoided in schools, especially in the urban areas, where there are many overcrowded schools;
- Parents have access to the class activity, they can see how the child is doing in classroom, but also the teacher's activity, and they can follow up on homework and supervise the child's activity;
- Students who also have a job and support themselves can participate in the online courses.

Regarding the disadvantages, the most relevant are the following:

- The lack of access to technology poses serious challenges (not enough devices, but also bad connections, especially given the fact that networks are overused) or insufficient devices (students frequently invoke the lack of the webcam, for example);
- The lack of a proper and correct evaluation, in the context of an academic ethic, which implies creativity from the teachers' part, so that subjects, projects and homework are not copied;
- Many teachers have limited abilities in using online platforms or do not have the proper digital abilities, which means that they should be trained in an organized manner, on the one hand, but also individually through personal study, on the other hand;
- The lack of appropriate spaces for online study in small houses, where there are more children in the family, in the rural areas, in poor families or in families where parents work from home;
- The lack of concentration at the online lessons, given the fact that the teacher cannot supervise the pupils and that at live lessons the webcam and/or the microphone can be turned off;
- More pressure on the pupil/student who has to make more effort than he/she was used to; the pupil/student is often forced to study and discover certain notions on his/her own and for some this is more difficult or extremely difficult;
- More pressure for parents, especially for those with small children, from the primary and secondary school, as they have to assist them also with the use of devices (if they have these abilities, of course) and with their homework (and most of them do not know how); practically, the parent becomes the teacher of his/her own child, which means taking on a new role;

- The interaction between pupil/student and teacher is more difficult, especially if the former does not understand certain concepts, which means that tutoring becomes necessary (if the teacher is available);
- Children, students interact less with one another and social distancing affects their social relations and abilities; they do not communicate as much and depend even more on technology and the online environment, which is a major issue of current times.



Conclusions

This quasi online pandemic period invites us first and foremost to be more creative, in order to cope with the situation on a personal and professional level. For teachers, creativity implies finding the most effective and attractive teaching and motivation methods for students. Moreover, evaluation receives new meanings in the context of academic ethics and freedom; without evaluation, the educational process cannot be finalized and this phase is essential in order to move forward, progress and overcome the present period.

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