AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHANGES AND DANGERS OF E-LEARNING

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Abstract: Change has always been a challenge for society. Over the years, analysing the cosequences of change, people have tried to tip the balance in benefits and progresses favor, reducing this way the risks and dangers. The theme of change in the organizational field is current, as there are many changes and reforms in society, this happens in romanian educational area too. The ability to adapt of the human resources involved in the process of change,has become a fundamental condition for success, no matter the area, and in more and more cases, a condition for survival. In the current global context, changes that take place in the social and educational area require day by day a rethink of the educational approach, in accordance with the necessity to find new strategies and resources to create the premises of a trained, free person, able to adapt easily in a changing society.
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1. Introduction

In the middle of a sanitary, economic and social crisis, the last months have brought to the entire humanity a new challenge- the challenge of implementing change quickly and effectively. The new Coronavirus reconfigured the face of humanity, forcing it to step backward and rethink the ways of approach to change that it had been analyzing for years, but which it must implement today at a very fast pace.

Given this context, projects that were intended to start at a future time or projects that were in their early stages were implemented. This includes the digitalization of education. This is not a completely new project for Romania.

The Europe 2020 strategy, with the priority of "Smart growth- developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation", considers it to be conducive to developing equal opportunities and ensuring access to education, training and lifelong learning for all citizens.

In January 2018, the Digital Education Action Plan, a project that was created to be implemented in the education systems of all the European Union countries, appears. This plan consists of eleven supporting actions designed to support the integration of digital technology into education and the development of digital skills of those involved in education.

The Action Plan sets out three priorities, mentioning how European Union countries can be helped to adapt their education systems to the requirements of the digital age, and how new technologies can be integrated into the educational and training process. The three priorities are:

- The efficient integration of digital technology into education process, with reference to equipping the educational places with specific devices;
- Developing digital skills and competences for all those involved in education, by participating in training courses for teachers, or in seminars/optional for the students;
- The existence of a prospective vision of improving the educational act using a better analysis of the current situation in the education system.

Its implementation has been quite cumbersome, has faced many controversy and has raised new problems for all human resources involved in the education act. However, on-line education has become the only viable option in the context of the pandemic and, starting with 11th of March 2020, it applies in Romania.

2.   Advantages and disadvantages of using e-learning- about cyberbullying

Initially, by the term of e-learning was understood the use of digital technology in education. But during the time, the term has widened, and it now means facilitating learning and improving education performance by using technological resources appropriate to the education system. At the same time, e-learning is also an initiative that seeks to bring together teachers and pupils, no matter their geographical barriers and physical distances, into the virtual environment.

In her paper *"The critical study of the current e-learning systems"*, Iuliana Dobre proposes the following definition of the e-learning term: "Any act or virtual process used to obtain data, information, skills or knowledge. E-learning thus means learning in a virtual world where technology cooperates with human creativity to accelerate and facilitate deep knowledge of the studied area" (Dobre, 2010, p. 5).

The e-learning concept has gained ground step by step in Romania. While at first it was viewed with scepticism, both by teachers and pupils and parents, as the time has passed and successful experiences in different European education systems have been publicised, e-learning is also becoming a practice in educational institutions in our country.

Nowadays, in a world where the Covid-19 pandemic managed to disrupt the routine of life in many of the world's countries, e-learning is proved to be the saving solution for education. Among measures taken for the safety of individuals and preventing the spread of disease, social isolation was the most important. People were forced to give up many of the activities they used to do, to respect their own home space, without contact with others than family members. The professional activities were carried out from home (as far as possible). The transport was restricted. Schools have been closed and teaching has moved to the online environment. For this change many teachers were not prepared, but the adaptation is being gradually made and the process is still ongoing. The e-learning platform, an alternative for education, has become the main way for teaching.

Implementing e-learning brings a number of advantages and disadvantages in comparison to the traditional education system.

Advantages are:
- Crossing physical borders;
- The posibility to access educational content at any time and from anywhere;
- Efficient presentation of the information;
- Linking learning styles to the benefit of the students;
- Combining traditional learning methods with modern learning methods;
- Adequacy of time resources according to the needs of the group;
- Creating groups focused on interests, bringing together people of all ages, with different studies.

Disadvantages are:
- Internet access is not available for all children. According to the National Statistics Institute in 2019, 75.7% of romanian households had access to internet from home, which is an increase with 3.4% from 2018, 61.8% of them are in the urban areas (graph 1). However, internet connection also depends on other factors such as the existence of digital service providers, the financial possibilities of the families, or the level of education of the family's legal representative. The influence of all these

factors is reflected in the decision of connecting to the internet, which explais the large gaps encountered between urban and rural areas.
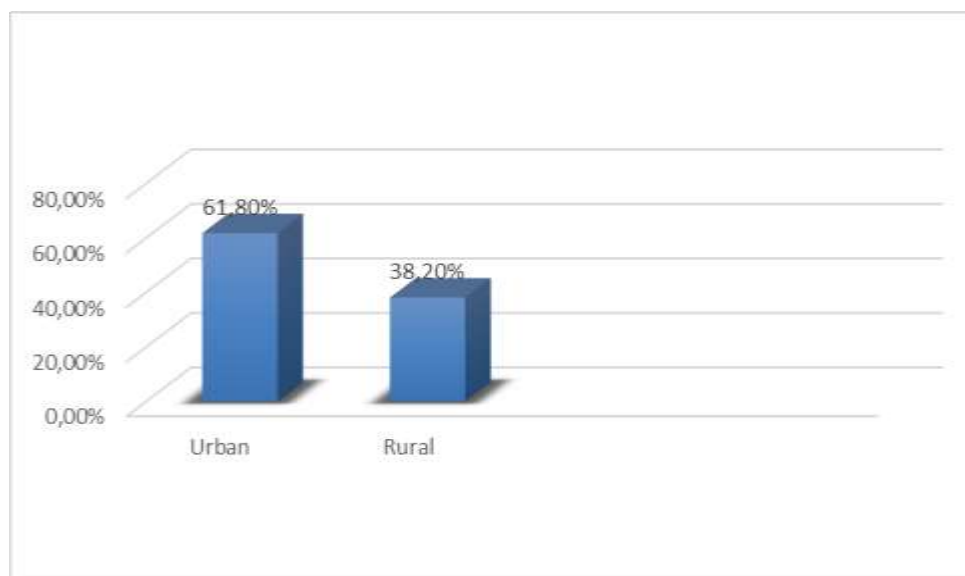
Graph 1. Structure of households with access to the Internet at home, by residence area, in 2019

Source: done by authors according to INSSE data

- High drop-out rate among children, they need constant adult supervision to participate in online education activities;
- Security of personal data of the sites and applications used in e-learning;
- Minimum experience in computer use;
- Cyberbullying.

Of all the above, worldwide, there is a significant increase of cyberbullying.

Cyberbulling is a form of cyber aggression that is affecting more and more people, especially young people. The negative effects are multiple, from anxiety, anger, fear, frustration, lack of confidence in their own forces, to depression and even suicide. It can be associated with disinterest in school, in the favorite activities, school backsliding, problems in the family. Cyberbulling influences the emotional-psychological dimension, through the negative conditions it gives to the individual, and the social-relational dimension, by reducing self-esteem, reducing the interaction with others, and by leaving school.

Young people are constantly connected to technology and they do this for school activity, to stay in touch with their friends, to learn about celebrities, play games, share their creations, or for many other reasons. As online communication tools have become a part of their lives, it is not surprising that some young people have decided to use technology to be malicious or threatening with others.

The desire to claim superiority in front of others, to humble or to verbally abuse is one of the impulses that characterize many of those who communicate in the virtual environment. These people are aggressive and impulsive also during their direct interaction with others. This form of violence manifested through social media, sns, mail, chat, online forum is called cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying has been identified, after a survey, as having the following weight: online rumors (13.3%), malicious comments online (14.3%), threats via a mobile phone text message (8.4%) (Hindja and Patchin, 2019a, p. 1). Between 10% and 40% of young people are estimated to have experienced cyberbullying.

The most popular social networks are also the environments where cyberbullying frequently appears: Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, but also on sites such as YouTube, Twitch and Live.me.

A major disadvantage of cyberbullying is that the author can hide his identity, which makes him manifest his aggression with more cruelty than he would have done it face-to-face (Donegan, 2012).

The "mask" that anonymity gives him (false addresses, aliases) develops the most violent tendencies, and in the same time he cannot see the victim, which is why the empathization function is reduced.

In the cybernetic environment, the number of victims, aggressors and witnesses is unlimited. By making the actions viral, information moves quickly and can be seen by a very large number of people with a single key press.

Adolescents are a group with a higher degree of vulnerability to these unhealthy habits. So, although many parents buy mobile phones to protect children, it is a fact that the phone becomes a cyberbullying tool.

The visibility of personal data online is a risk that many adolescents are not able to manage. In this way they can expose information about themselves and they become victims of cyberbullying.

The negative effects of cyberbullying spread to the intimidated individual like a snowball, with long-standing repercussions for personality development.

Although this is an extreme consequence of cyberbullying, suicid is the third most common cause of mortality among young people aged 12-17. A link has been found between intimidation, harassment, verbal/mental assault and self-murder thoughts and attempts (Hindija and Patchin, 2019a).

A particular problem is that the intimidation and cyber-harassment of young people are the basis for antisocial behavior, delinquency, crime and criminality of future adults. So, both victims and aggressors are affected in the long run.

Regarding the gender approach, the data reflect the fact that the proportion of cyberbullying among girls (38.7%) is higher than among boys (34.1%). This does not necessarily show the higher vulnerability of girls, but the power of confirming these behaviors, many of them not recognizing that they are victims, being afraid not to be disregarded by others (Hindija and Patchin, 2019a).

The use of mobile phones has become a way of life, a necessary and time consuming element. In recent years this problem is associated with technology dependence, mental behavioral deviation or disorder like anxiety, depression. A study by researchers at Rescue time, monitoring an application of i0S and Android, shows that we spend an average of 3 hours and 15 minutes per day on the phone (The Guardian, 2019).

The inappropriate use of technology can affect young people's lives. It is a fact that cyberbullying is a phenomenon that has grown up and must be stopped. All actors involved in children's education should work together to resolve this problem: family, school and community.

Parents say they do not have the necessary training and time to supervise the devices that their children use and have high expectations from school. Teachers involve children in online training programs and activities, but they cannot interfere in children's behavior when they are far from school. Authorities only get involved when there is a clear evidence of a crime, when the harm is already done.

But it is easier to prevent, rather than to combat, and measures need to be taken by both the family and the school and also by community representants. Only with a sustained effort of all of those that are involved we can face this problem. School's rules must consider efficient programs to prevent and combat violence in the school environment,

linking prevention measures with current legislation. And because the problem of cyberbulling is getting worse in the same time with the technological progress, anti-bullying policies and laws should develop in parallel with the evolution of this phenomenon.

Legislative, cyberbullying is not sufficiently recognized and supported yet. The first steps in this way have been taken also in Romania over the last two years, but we are taking baby steps, and the way is long and difficult.

3. Kolb Cycle applications in the e-learning context

The human resources involved in education (teachers, pupils, parents) are at a critical moment. Each of them shall act in accordance with some indications, more or less clear, and shall learn from each other on the go; but all of them wishing that the teaching-learning-evaluating process to go further, adapting to this exceptional situation. Given the global context, we are facing an on-going adaptation to the new way in which education is carried out, and we have to develop new skills. This is not, however, new. Over the years, various people have developed theories about how people learn a new skill.

David A. Kolb developed its model (often named ''Kolb Cycle'' – Figure 1) in the '70s. He presents a cycle of steps which people take to learn new skills, adapt to new learning situations.

The four steps of Kolb's model are the following:

1. Concrete experience - new experience or situation or reinterpretation of an existing experience is encountered. In our case, we are talking about a new situation, that of the total transposition of the educational act in the virtual environment. At this stage, both teachers and students have a new experience: They learn to access and adapt platforms and sites to use them in a learning context. Things are starting to move, but there are problems (children are getting bored, they miss the activities).

2. Reflecting on the new experience – now teachers and students reflect on their experience and wonder how they can improve it. At this stage, a brainstorming can be achieved in order to be given ideas by pupils and teachers, for example: Proposals for more interactive platforms, adapting learning time to socialization;

3. Abstract conceptualisation – based on the reflection achieved, an abstract theory of the given situation is now developed. This will allow teachers to set long-term learning targets and give students time to become more familiar to this new learning context, while students will gain experience in using learning platforms, sharing ideas with all of those who are involved.

4. Active experimentation – now is the time for both teachers and students to put the learning into practice. More precisely, the next e-learning sessions will be scheduled in advance, adapted to the communication needs of the children and involve them as partners in the e-learning act.
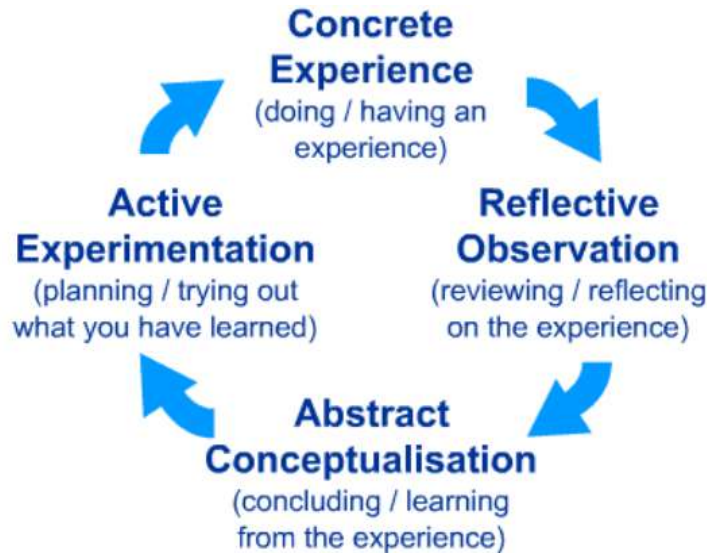
Figure 1. Kolb Cycle

Source: McLeod, S.A., 2017. Kolb - learning styles and Experiential learning Cycle. *Simply psychology*. [online] Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html> [Accessed 7 April 2020].

The Kolb Cycle cand be used by teachers who are in the situation of carrying out their activity on-line, to critically evaluate the mood to learn of the students and also to develop learning opportunities appropriate to the context.

Conclusions

The society we live in is changing at a steady pace. In order to survive, education systems must also learn how to permanently change. No strategy lasts forever. That is why planning and implementing learning cycles offer opportunities of adaptation to the current global situation.

Like any change e-learning found its supporters and contestants, but it is certain that there is an exponential development of information and communication technology, which, step by step, is taking place in the Romanian education system, showing new perspectives for educational practice by implementing modern teaching-learning and evaluation methods, specific to the information society.

In addition to the benefits of global connectivity, online space offers young people the opportunity to post and send any information without thinking about the consequences. This risk is difficult to manage, but the first step would be that it should not be ignored. Formal or informal reaction to an inappropriate online behavior is not the solution, collective and responsible engagement is the right way to address the problem. Implementing anti-bullying prevention programs from the earliest possible age will increase safety in schools and the idea that any intimidation, harassment, aggression behavior is unacceptable and will be punished.

Cyberbullying is a form of violence in virtual space, and violence, unfortunately, is present in a society where competition is encouraged. The total elimination of this phenomenon is not a realistic goal, but we can act effectively in a preventive manner, keeping pace with the technological innovation.

In this particularly complicated international context, which raises more new challenges day by day, we need to learn from our own experiences, ask the right questions

and look for new information so that we can formulate strategies that are appropriate to current practices.

The continuous cycle of experimenting, reflexive observation, conceptualisation and reexperimentation of strategies for all areas of the social system in general and of the education system in particular leads to learning and then to Change.

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