The school year 2020-2021 in Romania during the pandemic

Engl. transl.: The school year 2020-2021 in Romania during the pandemic

# Keywords

* COVID-19
* remote online school
* Romania
* digital inequalities
* digital pedagogies

# Details

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Luxembourg

## Topics

* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities
* Literacy and skills
* Social mediation
* Online safety and policy regulation

## Sample

29 interviews with teachers, school principals, school inspectors, students, parents, librarians and NGOs

## Implications For Educators About

* Digital citizenship
* School innovation
* Professional development

## Implications For Policy Makers About

# Abstract

This report presents the educational response to COVID-19 crisis in Romania during the2020-2021 school year, a summary in Romanian is found in the annex. Through a qualitative methodology, the project aimed to understand how different educational systems adapted to the pandemic situation in the 2020-2021 school year and to map some good practices in this regard. The report relies on 29 semi structured interviews conducted between March and April 2021 with Romanian stakeholders (e.g., school staff, students, parents, NGOs representatives), with a focus on the compulsory Romanian educational system. The main conclusion is that the 2020-2021 school year was marked by ad hoc decisions guided mainly by the public health authorities though centralised approach and less or at all has it answered to education-based reasons. In this context, remote schooling prevailed, and it mostly took the form of synchronous online classes. This marks a plain transition of traditional classes in the new, screen mediated environment. Whereas the main issue discussed in the public space, and partially addressed by authorities, was inequality in access –understood as having access to a digital device and an internet connection– less visible but important issues were neglected. Some of these issues discussed in the report are: the lack of educational digital content and genuine digital pedagogies, lack of curriculum adjustments, lack of profound, systemic and effective inclusive approach for vulnerable students. A hybrid system was also tried, but despite its very promising opportunities, various issues in infrastructure made its implementation flawed. The first consensus among the interviewees was that although the Romanian educational system managed to take an important step forward on the digitisation path, there is still much more to be improved. Secondly, there was a consensus on how different this school year impacted students, the phrase that best described the situation being: the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. The report ends presenting some proposals for improving education in a similar situation.

# Outcome

"""The 2020-2021 school year was clearly an exceptional one in the history of Romanian educational system. It generated new practices and a lot of emotions, both positive and negative, among teachers, students and parents. It also made more visible some old and latent problems of the system and offered solutions for some others. Based on the portrait we drew relying on the interviews, we draw the following some general conclusions and recommendations.
The digitisation of the Romanian educational system has started. Schools and students’ access to technology, though not entirely fixed, was partially addressed. Most schools now have an online platform that proved to be workable if the situation enforced its usage. Most teachers handle digital tools for online classes, and some proved to be innovative in their online teaching. But there is still room for improvement. Apart from what has been mentioned by our respondents as possibilities to improve the education in a similar situation (see above), understanding and taking advantage of the online learning possibilities would be of added value. For instance, teaching children how to learn and encouraging their autonomy in learning together with the reconsideration of teachers’ role as facilitator of learning (and not as a repository of content) would make it possible to have genuine online learning when needed, with a balanced ratio of individual asynchronous work and synchronous meetings with students. As expressed by a teacher, Romanian students lack more than devices for online learning; they lack self-studying skills and autonomy in learning.
From all the interviews came out that teachers’ main concerns were covering the curriculum and grading students. Both aspects were challenged by the online and hybrid system. Less was reported about how to address students’ wellbeing (and teachers’, as a matter of fact) or adjusting the curriculum (by reducing it) and the assessment methods (by favouring the formative assessment against the grades-oriented approach) to be sure that students really learned in the new settings. The inflexibility of the system to adjust to the new situations and the centralises decision made most of the interviewees rather pessimistic regarding their students’ achievements during this year, though there was a general acknowledgement that most teachers did their best at the individual level.
One of the gains of the pandemic situation was the strengthening of the partnership among stakeholders. In many situations parents were on board to support their children and this was very useful, especially for vulnerable students. But it must be said that for various reasons some parents are not able to support their children (from lack of time or other types of resources, to lack of knowledge) and the education system should not make them entirely responsible for their children’s education; instead, the system should adjust their policies to support in a systematic way these vulnerable students and their families.
Although some steps forward were made to support vulnerable students during these harsh times, they were rather small when compared with the difficulties these children faced, the conclusion being that their learning gaps deepened. For some of them being at school means more than having access to some content that could be made available via online learning anyway. It also means to have access to a time and a space for education that is not granted for them while at home. Understanding vulnerable students’ real needs and designing sustainable solutions for ensuring their right to education must be a pillar of the inclusion policies.
Moreover, a true partnership with students and listening to their voices is needed. Teachers also feel they are unheard, or their opinion is not considered. Thus, sometimes even well-intended programmes from the policy level do not work effectively as they are implemented in a rushed manner, without consulting stakeholders already knowledgeable in the field and also without providing a mechanism of support that the school might need.
Finally, using new digital technology in education is a moving target. Our interviews pictured a very broad understanding of what is new technology and what it means to use them in education. Therefore, teachers have to be always tuned in, to learn about these technologies, their opportunities in education and their risks and constraints – be it pedagogical, legal, or ethical. Permanent available training that would present them with these new solutions, but also teaching them to integrate the solutions in their teaching practices, to be reflexive and critical about them are a must, as digital education is not only about digital tools, but also about digital pedagogies. "" (Velicu, 2021, p. 33)"