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Resilience and Mentalities of Teachers from Romania Regarding the Usage and Efficiency of the E-Learning

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the perceptions and mentalities of teachers from the public teaching system from Romania regarding the ways that they were into contact with the eLearning platforms due to COVID 19 pandemic period. Even though in Romania at that time, or in present there are no legal framework regarding the eLearning platforms for pupils. By exception from the National Ministry of Education from Romania, the eLearning platforms were considered a proper solution for Romanian system for teaching during COVID 19. Once with the end date of the alert situation for COVID 19, 8 March 2022, and after finding the advantages of eLearning system a law project proposal is in discussion for proper regulation.
The pilot study was focusing on semi-structured interview and participatory observation of the 39 teachers from public national system from Romania (North East and Bucharest-Ilfov development areas). They act from the first level of education, – kindergarten, continuing with primary school, elementary school, high school and until the final level, - meaning, university.
The result of our pilot study reveals the fact that there are two types of teachers that use eLearning system, the `active` and `passive` type. Each of them have their own characteristics and were resilient to change because of lack of abilities for eLearning and not having references points from where to start. Step by step they became more self-confident and take into consideration to include in the future the eLearning system into their onsite future teaching method.

Keywords: *teachers; resilience; mentalities; eLearning platforms; perceptions.*

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INTRODUCTION

All our lives we are governed by direct interaction with teachers. Beside the parents, teachers offer us models and even have their role and influence in the choice of our direction in life for different disciplines or passions such as physics, chemistry, literature etc. From early childhood, when we go to kindergarten and to all stages of our development, until the university level, teachers are there in each evolution stage. Also, after becoming professionals on the job market we keep having contact with teachers through different types of long life learning programs that contribute to our continuous life experience (Larsen & Tascón, n.d.). In some situations, we also become teachers and take the role of our previous models and during our activity we keep recalling the information and methods that they used for teaching us or even do the opposite, we do exactly what we did not like at our teachers.

The way that teachers faces the crisis situations (Donnelly et al., 2020) and they show us models of resilience during the interaction with them influences our way of perceptions and what would be our behavior in the future for similar situations. Even the fact that during our teaching period we managed to interact and study with flexible and modern approaches for using eLearning with onsite teaching methods and even innovation across disciplines (Pan et al., 2010) contributes to our mentalities of bringing our own contribution to research or even to professional development of future pupils.

The type of teacher that comes into our lives and their way of passing their knowledge and experience is very important for all generations. We must not forget that also teachers are people, beside the job that they have, and they also have their own limitations and are not able to know everything and even they need time to adapt and evolve to new global challenges that appear each day.

Nowadays, due to COVID 19 pandemic crisis teachers from Romania had a double challenge to face: first, was due to their personal role as parents, children, grandchildren, spouse; and second, as their professional role as teachers in different stages from public national system from our country. Their way of acting or reacting to eLearning system that came as the solution for continuing the learning program for pupils (Moore et al., 2011) was relevant for the way they pass over the information for the actual generation that are in the system. The mentalities and the resilience of the teachers for usage of this teaching method is relevant in the meaning that we can transform a difficult new situation into an opportunity for the future.

As we can see in the Oxford Advanced Learner`s Dictionary the definition of mentality is given as being `the particular attitude or way of thinking of a person or group` (*Oxford Advanced Learner`s Dictionary*, n.d.a). And, in our global present times the teachers' community needs to be up to date with recent challenges and evolve in a short period of time and not let the wrong mentalities to stop developing.

I. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

For obtaining the results of this paper we choose to do a *pilot study focused on semi-structured interview and participatory observation of the subjects* to be able to fill in, as accurate as possible, the results issued form the present obtained data. The subjects that I took into consideration are teachers from all the levels of teaching from the national system that agreed to participate at the research and gave their informed consent. The total number of participants at the pilot study is formed from 39 persons from two development areas from Romania (North East and Bucharest-Ilfov development areas). All 39 teachers who work in institutions from public national system of education. They act from the first level of education, – kindergarten, continuing with primary school, elementary school, high school and until the final level, - meaning, university. The period of the study was from the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic period (march 2020), when it was declared the emergency stage in Romania until present day (march 2022).

The selection for participation at this study was completely voluntarily and the researcher assured the full anonymity for the subjects. Also, the paper has its own limitations regarding the fact that the subjects may not be completely honest or did not want to answer to some of the items from the semi-structured interview. The researcher tried to fulfill this limitation by using the participatory observation during the interview and having direct contact in informal meetings with the respondents.

II. MENTALITIES AND PERCEPTIONS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN USAGE OF ELEARNING PLATFORMS

In Romania, maybe due to the long period of communism that we have been until December 1989, or due to our origins as a Latin people or simple because we do not have the proper models and good examples, some of us tend to be very resilient to sudden change. The elderly generations still have a great influence over the younger persons and have a moral ascendant regarding different issues about life in general. Even though mentalities and perceptions are synonyms, have similar meaning in our minds. And the

Oxford Advanced Learner`s Dictionary presents the definition of perception as being `an idea, a belief or an image you have as a result of how you see or understand something` (Oxford Advanced Learner`s Dictionary, n.d.b). The two nouns govern our daily life and are very often used when you try to explain others your refuse to experiment new things or event to try overstep from our comfort zone that we are used to.

The gap between generations form our country is tremendous large because the actual persons ageing 30-45 experimented the migration outside the country and succeeded to have different information and models regarding the opportunities that we can offer for our children. At the other end, there is the generation between 45-65 and over that lived a large part of their lives during the communism period and are able to compare the two periods and they keep nostalgia about that era and the advantages that they can consider that existed. And, also there is the generation between 15-30 years old (Raiu, 2021) who were born after the revolution and the only information they have regarding the communism period is from history books, internet or objective live speech information from their parents or grandparents. This generation, lived in a country during its development due to democracy and membership as European Union (EU) country and getting into contact with much more change that the two generations ahead of them. Depending on each generation flexibility and willing less to change they can step to next stages in a short period of time or in a more longer one. There are many factors that influence these elements and we must take them all into consideration for us to analyze.

Regarding this issue, for example, we wanted to see the perceptions of teachers from our pilot study regarding the usage of eLearning methods and platforms for pupils from Romania public teaching system. To see if there are some specific reasons for using or not using this type of teaching. Which are those reasons? What are the arguments? Is the age of the teacher an impediment for using the eLearning for pupils? And what may be the obstacles that appeared during usage of eLearning platforms.

At the very beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic period we had the opportunity to interview the subjects, to have informal discussions regarding the new types of teaching and the ways that the teachers needed to adapt in such short period of time. All the 39 persons participated at the project study hoped that after the emergency period they will go back to their usual activity of teaching onsite. But when the emergency period has been extended and new ways of teaching needed to be identified and applied very quickly. As a short solution was identified the WhatsApp group that was used prior for simple communication with the parents or students.

At the beginning, because there was no eLearning infrastructure to each teaching unity (kindergarten, school, high school, university), the teachers needed to find proper means to keep doing their jobs – teach the pupils/students online. We were able to distinguish two types of persons: an active one and a passive one. Meaning that the active category of teachers used free platforms such as `Zoom`, `Meet`, `WebEx`, `Teams`, `WhatsApp`. And the majority of the subjects said that they tried to find a solution to send the information to pupils, being included in the active category of teachers. But, there was also the passive category of teachers. These kind of respondents said that *`because the teaching unity did not provide them the means for teaching they did nothing and keep waiting for a solution and resolution from the leading management of the organization`* (respondent) or *`my job description did not involve this kind of activity`* (respondent). The infographic for this item can be seen in figure 1 from below:

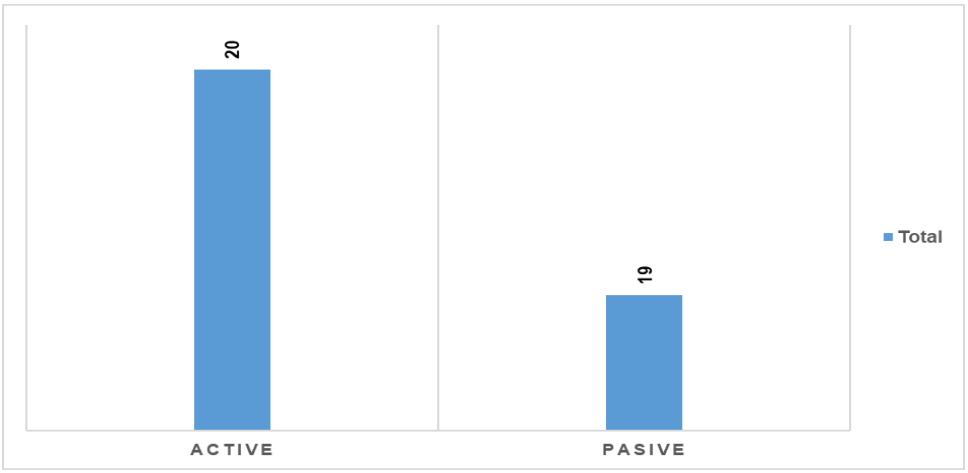


Figure no. 1. Distribution of teachers on `active` and `passive` attitude
Source: Author's own conception

We did not notice a distinctive element regarding the `active` or `passive` attitude of respondents related to age variable. As a result of our pilot study we can state that age is not a factor that can influence or contribute to the perceptions of adopting different attitudes among teachers. Similar opinion was given by teachers with different ages and from both of the development areas of the country.

When we kept focusing on `the reasons why they acted that way`, choosing one of the two categories we succeeded to identify that the bases of their decision was related to their perceptions and mentalities. The category that was `active` considered that it was in the pupil's interest and their job as

teacher to find now teaching methods and keep doing the activity until proper solutions will be found for the entire teaching unity. These types of teachers are the proactive ones, with initiatives and want to keep learning and evolving no matter the age they have. We were able to find in our pilot study teachers with 60 years' old who managed to organize innovative and creative classes with pupils at their disciplines. And students are very involved and actively participate to classes. The type of teachers that are passive are the ones who have lower interest in doing some other things than the usual staff and also not considering that this is a new obligation of their job description. They did not want to take initiative and passed the responsibilities to management team. These type of teachers are very good executive and with no initiatives of their ones.

The COVID 19 pandemic brought our teaching unities to a stage that they needed to adapt and change (Whiteley et al., 2013) the management culture and to reorganize to that pupils keep contact with the teaching personnel and keep passing at their next level to school. Into this direction, next we will see how did interact teachers with the opportunities given by the eLearning system.

III. RESILIENCE OF TEACHERS IN USING THE ELEARNING FOR TEACHING

Before the COVID 19 pandemic in Romania the eLearning platforms were not used in majority of the teaching activity. The only places that the eLearning platforms tried to be implemented were at university level and only for international conferences. But this type of utility was used at a very low scale. We have noticed that in some universities from Romania there were created the sections for the eLearning platforms on their official websites but without proper activity (Mitrea, 2020). And once with the COVID 19 pandemic these sections became fully active at their entire capacity being the only available element that kept the teaching activity to continue in the new conditions.

But we have to take into consideration the fact that, at that time nor in present when we write this paper, in Romania does not exist legal framework for recognized online teaching. During the pandemic period there was an exception adopted at national level and some scientifically voices were even wondering if Romania was prepared for eLearning during that period (Edelhauser & Lupu-Dima, 2020). From our knowledge and mass-media information, now there is a law project proposal in discussion for including also online through eLearning platforms for teaching for pupils, mostly for university level but also some exceptionally situation for pupils from

secondary school (for example: pupils who are hospitalized for a longer period of time, or have different disabilities that puts them in the impossibility to participate onsite classroom etc.). If, in present there is only the two legal possibilities: to study face-to-face or at distance learning. In near future, as a positive consequence of the COVID 19 pandemic will be introduced the online teaching possibility. We must mention, that this type of teaching is very common outside Romania in other European countries or developed countries all over the world.

Continuing our scientifically research we wanted to identify which are the elements that can conduct to resilience among teachers for using the eLearning platforms. Also, what can contribute to easier the transition from onsite teaching to online type. Finally, how can we keep using the eLearning platforms after the pandemic period into our teaching activity?

The main element that we managed to identify that conducts to resilience of teachers for using the eLearning platforms was the fact that they do not have the knowledge and proper abilities to use the applications. They were resilient because they needed a period of time and mentoring for learning the applications and their opportunities and afterwards, they be confident enough to teach the pupils through it. Some respondents mentioned *`it is difficult to me to learn someone something that I do not even know`* (respondent) or *`I have not learned at the proper time when I was young now is too late for me to learn in such a short period of time`* (respondent). They lack the confidence on themselves and were not sure enough they would be able to have all the information they needed.

In the classic teaching scenario, a teacher has enough time to prepare himself for the hour that he would have to attend to the pupils. He prepares the materials, chooses the proper method for passing the information for a specific lesson, has some proper exercises to use for pupils. And all the 50 minutes' hour is properly organized. Instead, for the online classed, at the very beginning of the usage of the eLearning platforms the teachers were resilient because they did not have enough time to prepare and organize their hour. And, also did not had a proper period of time to participate themselves as students to such a class. They had no references from where to start and no relevant examples from where to start (Poyner, 2017).

Another element that conducted to resilience among teachers for using the eLearning platforms was the self-confidence on managing the class and passing the information for pupils (Malureanu et al., 2021). The subjects of the pilot study stated that they were not confident enough (Elmi, 2020) that the information they present reaches to their pupils by the eLearning platforms systems. For example, if in the classic scenario some pupils are not

active or involved during the class the teacher can easily see him and is able to intervene, but in the online activity, you have very limited access to see what pupils are doing, or even if they are in front of the laptop and have no proper means to control his attention. In this case, the teachers consider that the eLearning platform have a minus point for teaching activity at younger ages of pupils, such as kindergarten or primary school, and can be taken into consideration only for secondary school or high school (Sibalde Vanderley et al., 2020) and university level (Rakic et al., 2020).

Resilience was also identified among teacher's respondents when they stated that, on the platforms that each teaching unity created, beside them and the pupils will be also a third actor (meaning the administrator of the platform or a person from the management team). This person has access to the online classes and can enter and even participate at the online hour. In the onsite classes this was a type of evaluation called inspection and is made once at a determined known period of time. The so called `spy` was seen as an unwelcomed person for the teachers and this also contributed to resilience for usage of the eLearning platforms. Even though it was obvious that one person or two persons from the management team were not physically able to participate at online classes due to the huge amount of activities or event their own online classes. The fact, that there was the idea that a `spy` can enter online and monitor your activity conducted to resilience on behalf of the teachers.

We were able to notice that after the period of COVID 19 when there were conducted classes online or even hybrid type the teachers stated that they began to get used to eLearning platforms and became more confident and take into consideration not to totally exclude it from their future teaching methods (Abcouwer & Takács, 2018). Some of the respondents even declared that during the usage of the eLearning platforms they included in their activities reference to online videos and YouTube programmes (Selvaratnam & Kavitha, 2020) (Kröninger-Jungaberle et al., 2015), which they did not use until then. And they noticed that pupils became more interested on that discussed item. Another advantage that some of the respondents mentioned was the fact that through eLearning platforms they managed to easily get into contact with homologs from other countries and even give short lectures on specific theme for pupils.

CONCLUSIONS

Mentalities stand at the base of the resilience behavior of teacher from public system from Romania. The way that the teachers are `active` or `passive` for using the eLearning platforms into their daily activity influences

actual and future generations of professionals and even future teachers when will be their time. Teachers are models for our present generations and they have an important influence in planting the seed of usage of eLearning systems.

If, after the difficult period of time during the COVID 19 pandemic with all of its challenges for the teaching personnel and the pupils, the positive result was the fact that in present at national level it is in discussion the law project proposal for eLearning with legal regulations and proper stipulations; it is a favorable consequence for our country and for our children. Why? Because this will bring them more viable opportunities and will be able to have a more flexible teaching strategy. Also, will be easier to make exchanges with homologs from different countries on similar thematic for interest for pupils.

We are confident that through time the mentalities will evolve in a better direction for our teachers and they will also enjoy the possibilities that the eLearning offers to their time management and even class management. And this way they will be able to better perform and have even more quality classes for their attendees and keep being a proper model for the present pupil's future professionals on a global labor market where we can bring our innovative contribution to teaching.

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