E-LEARNING CHALLENGE – RISKS AND CHANGES

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Abstract: During the COVID-19 crisis, countries world wide tried to implement rapidly, some measures to reduce the risks posed by changes in education. Thus, the speed of reaction and implementation of responses to change became crucial, without neglecting the limits and risks of resource. In this context, all countries are exploring ways to reopen schools and, in parallel, are designing new models of education that extend the boundaries of physical schools through technology. Although a large number of challenges have been faced by students and teachers in the case of online teaching and learning, the good news is that online courses are undoubtedly a laudable initiative, in the sense that it reduces as much as possible, the loss of teaching activities. In order to develop this new education, teachers and students should be encouraged to see everything as a challenge, to invest in their own training, to overcome some inconveniences and to implement in a proper way only what facilitates teaching, learning and assessment in the current conditions.
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1. Introduction

The 2019-2020 school year brought us some of the most difficult challenges and risks, but also opportunities to change our attitudes and adapt to the new, in the context of digitalizing education.

As in other countries, educational institutions in Romania were closed from March to June.

In order to ensure uninterrupted education for students, the Ministry of National Education encouraged teachers to organize online courses and, in addition, began to broadcast programs for students through national television.

Once that children returned in the classroom, respecting all the rules of hygiene and social distance imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic, schools are forced to reinvent themselves, lessons come to life in front of screens, and new methods make their way into learning.

These unprecedented days, online learning seems to be the only way to solve the academic crisis that is affecting the entire globe. And yet, *how does one move from the occasional use of computers to enhance face-to-face teaching and learning to the use of virtual environments for courses conducted entirely online according to a variety of educational models*?

In order to answer this question we must first establish what online learning represents and how its implementation has been achieved so far.

When one talks about online learning, we notice that the literature uses different terminology: e-learning, internet learning, distributed learning, network learning, TV-learning, virtual learning, computer-assisted learning, web-based learning and distance learning. All these terms imply that the student is not in the school environment, but is at a distance from the teacher, using a form of technology (most commonly a computer) to access the materials needed for learning, to interact with teachers and colleagues.

Thus, the literature offers various definitions of online learning, observing its evolution, with the expansion of this practice. Below (Chart 1) we make a brief review of the definition of the concept:

Chart 1. Defining the concept of online learning

1997	Khan, B.	online training is an innovative approach to deliver education to a distant audience using the Web as a medium
1999	Carliner, S.	online learning is an educational material that is presented on a computer
2000	Istrate, O.	e-learning is a type of distance education, as a planned teaching-learning experience organized by an institution that provides mediated materials in a sequential and logical order to be assimilated by students in their own way
2005	Guri-Rosenblit	e-learning is the use of e-learning media for a variety of learning purposes, ranging from additional functions in conventional classrooms to the complete replacement of face-to-face sessions with online sessions.
2006	Jereb and Šmitek,	e-learning refers to learning processes using computers to mediate learning and teaching activities of synchronous and asynchronous
2007	González-Videgaray	e-learning means learning based on information and communication technologies with pedagogical interaction between pupils and content, students and instructors or among students through the web
2009	Ellis, Ginns and Piggott	e-learning is defined as the information and communication technologies used to support students to improve their learning.

Source: prepared by the authors

However, online learning involves more than just the presentation and delivery of materials using the internet: the learner and the learning process should be the focus of online learning.

Thus, we believe that online learning could be defined as the use of computers as tools to access learning materials and to gain knowledge, but also to interact with teachers and colleagues in order to improve the learning experience.

2. Opportunities and threats in online learning

Increasingly, organizations are adopting online learning as the main method of employee training (Simmons, 2002). At the same time, educational institutions are mainly online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this context, the actors involved in the educational process identified both benefits and opportunities, but also risks and threats brought by online learning.

We continue to try to summarize these aspects in the form of a SWOT analysis (Figure 1).

Figure 1. S.W.O.T. Analysis

Strenghts	Weaknesses
• There are no time zones, and location and distance are not an issue; • In asynchronous online learning, students can access materials online at any time, while synchronous online learning allows real-time interaction between students and teachers; • Students can use the Internet to access the most current and relevant materials in the field in which they study; • Online materials can be updated and students can see the changes in real time.	• Lack of technological devices or internet access for some of the participants in education (both students and teachers); • Students cannot be supervised by their parents throughout their online teaching activities; • The existence of a significant proportion of teachers who do not have the digital skills necessary to carry out quality online activities; • Lack of training courses in the field.
Oportunities	**Threatens**
• If properly designed, the e-learning system can be used to determine the needs and current level of students and to assign materials appropriately in order to achieve the desired results; • The information transmission environment is not the determining factor in the quality of learning, but rather the design of the course determines the efficiency of learning. (Rovai, 2002)	• Anxiety associated with the use of technology; • Being outside the comfort zone; • Perception of inequity in evaluation, especially in "group" tasks; • Inability (perceived) or difficulty in peer interaction, especially in presentations.

Source: prepared by the authors

3. Management of the risks generated by the online learning process

The 2020-2021 school year, marked by the global health crisis triggered by the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, forced us to witness a radical change that involves organizational, structural and functional changes, by rethinking the use of information technology, and implicitly, of the functioning of the organization, with an impact on the values and culture of the organizational entity.

In addition to the political, economic and social changes generated by the rapid spread of the effects of this ruthless virus, educational organizations face new risks that may affect decision-making, but also the effectiveness and efficiency of activities related to general and specific objectives.

Risks are situations or events that have not yet occurred but may occur in the future, in which case the achievement of pre-determined results is threatened or potentiated, so the risks may be either threats or opportunities and should be addressed as a combination. between probability and impact.

Starting from the produced effects, the risk is defined as a measure of the inconsistency between the different possible results, more or less favorable or unfavorable in a future action (Ceaușu, 2000). This approach also introduces the potential positive aspect of risk by adding the results of possible favorable activities.

In educational organizational entities, risk can be perceived as a planning tool, available to the manager, extremely useful in prioritizing the areas of interest of the institution and in establishing strategies and activities that reduce the negative impact on the general and operational objectives of the educational institution.

Given the implementation of the concept of risk in educational organizations, as part of the internal management control system, the accelerated development of information technology and the emergence of pandemic changes, which require the transfer of learning activities in the virtual environment, educational institutions, from at all levels, must fully carry out the stages of the risk management cycle, in order to provide reasonable assurance on increasing the likelihood of achieving the organization's objectives.

In a general approach, risk management involves the identification, analysis and ongoing assessment of risks that may arise during the course of activities, as well as the planning of effective actions to be carried out in risk situations. (Andersen and Schroder, 2010).

Risk management, according to national legislation, is a complex process of identifying, analyzing and responding to possible risks of a public entity, through a scientific approach, which uses material, financial, human and information resources to achieve objectives, aimed at reducing exposure to losses.

If we refer to information systems, which today are an ideal tool for teaching-learning-assessment activities, risk management can be defined as the whole of the efforts of the relevant ministry, school inspectorates and educational institutions to combat threats, vulnerabilities and consequences due to unprotected data, information and knowledge.

At the same time, given the low experience of managers of educational institutions and teachers, in terms of risk management generated by online learning activities, it is necessary to address only the process of identifying risks.

Given the concepts presented, risks identified in the virtual environment can be considered: violation of the confidentiality and integrity of the personal data of children, parents and teachers.

4. Flipped Classroom Method

This is the first time in Romania when online education has been widely introduced, and, in terms of the teaching-learning-assessment process, the pros and cons have already been reported, both by the teachers involved and of students and parents.

Thus, in order to adapt to the changes brought about by the implementation of e-learning, teachers have to reorganize their teaching method by adopting new techniques and strategies. Among them, the Flipped Classroom method stands out, an unconventional learning method, in which the roles of the participants in the instructive-educational process are partially reversed.

However, although the idea of the overthrown class has gained more and more ground lately, however, specialists have not formulated a uniform definition for this concept.

Thus, according to the author Ash K., the term flipping comes from the idea of taking the teacher's instructions during the formal class time (synchronous meetings) and moving them home (asynchronous meetings), so that the class time is used for students to engage active in practice and skills building (Ash, 2012).

In the original version, the method involved the use of lecture videos outside of class, thus providing more time in the virtual classroom to involve students in active learning. However, it seems that the traditional (synchronous) mode of instruction remains unchanged, except that the time spent in class conferences is done at home.

Presenting advantages and disadvantages, the original version of the Flipped Classroom method found supporters and contestants. We still mention two opinions (Chart 2), of the authors Neilsen and Millard.

Chart 2. Flipped Classroom Method Advantages and disadvantages

Five reasons to carefully implement the *Flipped Classroom* (**Neilsen, 2012**):	Five reasons why the *Flipped Classroom* **works (Millard, 2012)**
Lack of technology at home	Increases students engagement
Increases the number of homework for students, taking up their free time	Strengthens team-based skills
There is the possibility of repeating the same materials, both in asynchronous and in synchronous meetings.	Provides personalized guidance to students
Teamwork leads to the creation of inequities	Focuses the discussion in class
It is built on a traditional model of teaching and learning	It gives more freedom to schools for more efficient organization of synchronous working time

Source: prepared by the authors

In the version adapted to the current context, the specialists borrowed the basic idea of the method, but developed four new pillars, based on which teachers can build their lessons reversed in the online environment. The four pillars are:

- **F** - *Flexible environment*: the adoption of various learning modes specific to the virtual environment. Students choose when and where to learn.
- **L** - *Learning culture*: the student-centered approach, in order to actively involve them in the construction of knowledge.
- **I** - *Intentional content*: efficient selection of content, methods and strategies so that time spent synchronously is used to the maximum, depending on the level of the class and the subject matter.
- **P** - *Professional educator*: reflecting on one's own practices, adopting less prominent roles, constantly improving training, accepting constructive criticism.

This approach can lead to the creation of dynamic online activities, in which students do not get bored, while acquiring work skills in the online environment and training the skills needed to acquire knowledge specific to age and cognitive development.

5. Conclusions

In order to ensure the continuity of students' learning, even in conditions of suspension of activities physically carried out in educational institutions, some governments are looking to find a solution in online education initiatives.

Such initiatives are also found in the Romanian education system, and include: the use of synchronous online communication and the design, delivery and asynchronous online evaluation of learning activities within a virtual platform.

For many researchers and practitioners in the field of online education, the health crisis caused by the New Coronavirus is considered an opportunity to support both students and institutions, by filling the gap left by the conventional (face-to-face activities).

Indeed, online education has a number of advantages, primarily that it allows teachers and students to continue to teach and learn from any location without interruption.

However, let us not forget that these "emergency" online education initiatives are generally untested and, in some cases, are not constantly applied in all educational institutions. In addition, e-learning initiatives can be implemented with less risk only if students (and teachers) have reliable access to the technology and resources needed to conduct online activities.

Governments and decision-makers have tried, in a short time, to create a legal framework for the implementation of online education, to transmit the necessary methodologies and the desired results of the practice.

Risk management provides educational organizational entities with a wide and varied range of ideas, concepts, techniques and tools for collecting and analyzing information, data and knowledge about potential adverse events and developing strategy to respond to these challenges specific to the educational organizational environment.

National experts in the field of education strive to find a good way forward by validating common goals and objectives, but leaving each institution flexible in how to implement online learning.

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