CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION, ESPECIALLY DURING TIMES OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Enkela Binaj

Departamenti i Gjuhës Angleze
Fakulteti i Gjuhëve të Huaja, Universiteti i Tiranës
E-mail: enkela binaji@unitir.edu.al

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 epidemic undoubtedly has a historically significant impact on the global educational system. Governments and educational institutions all around the world have started several policy initiatives in response to this pandemic to support students' education. Amid a global pandemic finding solutions has become more urgent. A new 21st-century aid delivery strategy based on an effective operational public-private partnership and results- based finance model must be developed to address the severe global education problem of today. A more effective and coherent global education architecture will also be necessary for success. Simply providing more money won't solve the issue, thus new leaders at the highest level are needed, as well as fresh ideas.

Keywords: Learning Platforms, Internet, Pedagogy, COVID-19 and Online Teaching, Technology, Digital Generation, Challenges.

1. Introduction

Globalization and social media have made the world more accessible than it has ever been. Simultaneously, rising income disparities have further divided the world's population. The twenty-first century schools, universities, businesses, and society as a whole are grappling with fundamental educational issues. We are living in a paradigm-shifting era, where technological, demographic, social, environmental, economic, and political changes are causing us to rethink our educational structure. Youngsters who are looking towards the future are at the center of this whirlwind. Each child holds the potential to grow into a powerful, ethical, creative, critical, and active adult.

2. Content:

Since the first days of 2020, numerous educational institutions around the world had to suspend face-to-face instruction because of the growing fears about the COVID-19 virus's spread and the urgency to stop it. Without a doubt, the coronavirus exposed new weaknesses in global education systems. Given that the future is unpredictable, society now needs adaptable and robust educational systems. More schools now have to figure out how to

continue teaching and learning while under the prospect of lengthy future shutdowns as a result of the Novel Coronavirus, other possible global pandemics and the ensuing COVID-19 epidemic. This study will look at how teaching and learning can carry on in such unheard-of circumstances. Thus, the following research topics serve as the basis for this study:

1. What difficulties exist in ensuring that students' learning is unaffected?

2. How to handle these difficulties if the situation persists?

During the COVID-19 epidemic, significant, nationwide initiatives to use technology to promote remote learning, distance education, and online learning were sprouting and changing swiftly. However, current literature highlights other flaws, such the inadequate infrastructure for online education, the lack of training for teachers, the knowledge gap, the complexity of the home environment, and so forth (Murgatrotd, 2020).

The COVID-19 epidemic was a heavy lever that brought about a significant shift in the educational process at any institution of higher learning and pointed it in the direction of information and cutting-edge technologies. Foreign and domestic researchers who have been tracking the widespread adoption of online learning have noted that the pandemic has prompted a re-examination and fresh understanding of such fundamental elements of the academic environment as academic infrastructure, educational platforms, and the readiness of teachers and students for it

It will take a generation to overhaul the currently deficient education systems in dozens of countries, and it will require consistent top-level political leadership as well as significant new donor and developing country contributions. Thus, International organizations started paying

particular attention to the document Education Response in Crises and Emergencies. UNESCO stated in the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, that countries should:

Provide alternative modes of learning and education for children and adolescents who are not in education institutions, and put in place equivalency and bridging programs, recognized, and accredited by the state, to ensure flexible learning in both formal and non-formal settings, including in emergency situations (R. H. Huang et al., 2020, p. 1).

Education systems must change to become more robust, equitable, and inclusive, leveraging technology to benefit all students and building on the innovations and collaborations that have evolved throughout this crisis.

Key Features of 21st Century Education

In different countries including Albania, the ministries of education place a lot of emphasis on education for the twenty-first century, but they will be missing some of its most crucial components if they don't approach the subject from a sustainability perspective. The traditional focus on acquiring skills necessary for employment in the current global economy raises the question of whether the global economy can be sustained over the course of this century. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the key features of such modern education, such as follows:

I. **Personalized learning** Treating children as unique individuals is crucial. The "plague" of standard testing and a standard curriculum that most school systems experience is caused by the ostensible demands of the market. Because of this, they are raising generations of kids who are unable to "think around the corner or outside the box." It is essential to picture a change in how students are educated, and the educational system is set up. Every kid is considered as a singular personality, and the creation of a personalized education plan is the first step in the child's education. The kid is evaluated in each of the areas that are taught, and based on the results, integrated lesson plans are created that build on the knowledge the child already has and use instructional techniques appropriate to that level. The youngster is one of a group of pupils whose instructor oversees creating a unique lesson plan for each student. Activities when the teacher works with the student one-on-one are part of that plan. All these measures are more challenging while transforming the academic environment into "online classroom".

II. **Equity, diversity, and inclusivity-** This is a crucial source of information that addresses the requirement for academic organizations to create policies that are current, active, and fluid by design, supporting an ongoing examination of best practices with an overt commitment to continuous improvement, as well as an influence for future leaders who will rise through the ranks. How the leadership and faculty of academic institutions manage cultural and other types of disparities in higher education is one of the most significant difficulties that these institutions face. High racial tensions and the growing demand for equality indicate that major reforms are required to make progress. The pedagogies employed in numerous courses value the interactions that students have with one another and with the instructor in order to learn. In these classes, the teaching/learning environment is created to welcome and model a learning community where students participate in critical conversations and role-playing exercises that encourage perspective awareness and reflection. This is particularly true of diversity courses that aim to promote transformative learning, perspective awareness, group learning, critical discourse, and reflective thinking. Distant learning posed an insurmountable challenge to ensuring equity and inclusivity.

III.   **Learning through doing-** The basic tenet of learning by doing is that as we perform an action, we can learn more about it. Another way to consider this is to approach something more actively rather than just passively learning about it. The claim is that participation in active learning fosters deeper learning and that making errors is acceptable, as long as you learn from them. This way of thinking gave this method a new name: experiential learning. During the times of pandemic demonstration and experiential learning became challenging. Consider being a professor for professions such as doctors or musicians who could not demonstrate or impart such knowledge to their students from the distance of their homes.

IV.   **Changed role of the teacher –students at the centre of teaching methods** - Due to the coronavirus epidemic, the teacher's job has undergone a significant transformation in the last years. Remote learning was thrust to the forefront of every school, college, and educational institution's approach to learning, and teachers were compelled to rethink their delivery strategies to accommodate this new

digital and pandemic - induced reality. Teachers have had to adapt to a new form of delivery at record speed over the past 28 months, which has involved combining small face-to-face sessions with remote classes.

V. **Relations & Face-to-face interactions** - The provision of social support and information to families, as well as the development of healthy relationships with families, are crucial for high-quality early childhood programs. Children benefit from their early learning experiences when home and schoolwork together to maintain routines and provide support (Raikes and Edwards 2009). For families with disabled children, collaborating and working in partnership with other families to support them in assisting their children in achieving the goals for schooling and everyday living is even more significant (Sheehey 2007). Technology has both beneficial and harmful effects on our personal and professional life as it increasingly permeates both. Because of the increased educational and time commitment standards of the information age, many people now spend less time with their families. According to Knopf and Swick (2008), the information era necessitates greater educational levels and more time commitment, which means that many people will have less time to spend with their families. Meanwhile, technology plays distinctive and important roles in the dissemination of knowledge and resources as well as in the provision of social networking for people.

VI.   **Teacher professionalization-** there is little doubt that the pandemic has made the difficulties of teaching more apparent. To minimize any disruption to learning caused by remote instruction, teachers had to quickly adapt and upgrade their skills. Teachers have participated in trainings to help them upgrade their skills and better adapt to a new reality. However, the long-term effects of this new knowledge and experiences compel teachers to ponder what the future of teaching itself will look like.

VII.   **Technology as a major component of distant - learning and teaching during a global pandemic-** new technology is one of the most potent influences reshaping the roles of educators like teachers and students. Information scarcity was the foundation of the previous style

of instruction. There were few alternative avenues for one to acquire knowledge, therefore teachers and their books served as knowledge oracles. But the world of today is flooded with data from a huge number of print and electronic sources. The primary goal of education today is to assist students understand how to use facts by fostering their capacity for critical thought, problem- solving, making well-informed decisions, and the creation of knowledge that will benefit both the individual student and society. Teachers now have more time to work one-on-one or in small groups with pupils as they are not required to serve as the primary information providers.

Some challenges of the 21st Century's Education

1. What difficulties exist in ensuring that students' learning is unaffected?

The environment we live in is constantly changing and the ability to stay ahead of time is part of one's survival. Educators of today face the challenging need to adapt their pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of their 21st century learners, becoming able to tailor education to meet future needs of both learner and society. Despite this, there have been many difficulties for students, instructors, administrators, and education leaders as a result of the abrupt switch from in-person to online learning.

Difficulties caused by the invisible antagonist

- The use of information and communication technologies (hereinafter referred to as ICT), tools for online teaching and learning, computer and digital literacy, digital skills and competencies became important components of professional success, and it seems they will remain such.

- The move to distant learning, particularly in light of the COVID-19 epidemic, has altered the nature of education in the modern day. Today, efficient use of digital tools and educational resources is viewed as a crucial element in enhancing and raising the value of the educational experience. Through an expanding array of digital technology and resources, students acquire information and educators impart their theoretical and practical experience.

2. How to handle these difficulties if the situation persists?

The required competence in the field of ICT

Students and educators had to adapt quickly to the new realities of the digital format. A foreign language teacher must have a high level of ICT competence, which includes not only the ability to work with webinar programs, such as Zoom, MS Teams, Skype, but also:

- prepare and submit the training material in the electronic form

- choose from the entire variety of ICT tools exactly those that will contribute to the solution of various communicative and methodological tasks

- ensure the active interaction of all participants in the educational process.

It is not enough for a modern teacher to be technologically literate and be able to build and instill appropriate technological skills and abilities in students. They should be able to help students use ICT in order to successfully cooperate, solve emerging problems, master teaching skills and, as a result, become full-fledged citizens and employees

Online Independent learning as an outcome of our new reality:

Since its introduction in the middle of the 1990s, virtual schooling has emerged as a popular approach to remote learning. The most often used definition of a virtual school is an organization recognized by a state or regulatory body that provides education via remote learning, most frequently through the Internet. Although there are many various ways to categorize virtual schools, the three most popular delivery modalities are independent, asynchronous, and synchronous. Right now, the vast majority of students attending virtual schools tend to be a small group of academically bright, driven, and autonomous learners. For many students and educators, the rise of online course designs has altered the learning environment. Maximizing student online peer relationships is commonly advised as a recommended practice in online course design with the goal of creating a strong, if virtual, online learning community. Online education was present before the CoVid19 pandemic, and the following are worth mentioning:

- **Salman Khan** is the founder and faculty of the Khan

- Academy www.khanacademy.org a not-for-profit organization with the mission of providing a free world-class education to anyone,

anywhere. It now consists of self-paced software and, with over 1 million unique students per month, the most- used educational video repository on the Internet (over 30 million lessons delivered to-date).

- **University of People** - https://www.uopeople.edu- which offers 100% online, tuition-free degree programs

- **Hundreds of highly regarded colleges and universities** offer 100% online degree programs that enable students to take every class online.

3. Conclusions

The study's instructors/facilitators were able to use and have become proficient in the following tactics despite their limited resources:

- Using Facebook to share information with students, parents/ guardians, and other parties
- Creating pertinent worksheets and publishing them for students on social media sites
- Establishing chat groups on Viber and other platforms for learners' convenience. Active discussion with parents and students is facilitated through Viber groups
- Email exchanges with parents and guardians regarding student needs
- Utilizing mobile devices to reach students, creating supplemental worksheets for home- based learning in accordance with MoE's (Ministry of Education) guidelines, adopting MOODLE and other online platforms as workable alternatives.

Some of the tactics used by the facilitators/teachers include those described above. However, findings specifically highlight that:

• There is a lack of capacity to operationalize distance learning modalities and a shortage of appropriate distance learning tools and materials,

• Teachers/facilitators need to work with Ministries of Education to develop catch-up programs or condensed curricula to avoid losing a school year,

• Ramp up information dissemination and awareness-raising activities to inform students, parents, and the public of the risks associated with pandemics, etc.

To ensure that the learning opportunities provided correspond to broader educational objectives within an educational system, it can be crucial to organize digital educational content to align with existing curricula. It is also crucial to make content accessible on a variety of devices and mobile friendly. Universities need to work with internet service providers to help students have free or inexpensive access to online learning. Supporting staff who teach online is also important.

ICT has essentially become a powerful force in changing the educational landscape across the world. In response to COVID-19, education will migrate away from traditional physical classrooms, but this will require planning, collaboration, and thoughtful decision-making.

Planning and assisting with a big learning transformation can be started with the help of this study. We should have hope because the evidence suggests that learners are highly satisfied with and interested in ICT-immersed learning environments. There is little doubt that technology has had a significant impact on young people's online life. The educational aspirations and interests of pupils who have developed digital addictions can be synchronized by this digital revolution.

The level of ICT integration in the teaching process in Albanian schools is not adequate; as a result, this article will help to develop this process in the Albanian educational system, and its findings and recommendations will serve as a guide for future strategies.

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