Challenges of Homeschooling in Romania during Pandemic Times

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Abstract: Innovations assets during the pandemic time and gradually commitment formed it fundamental to transform traditional education methods and made current many crucial breakpoints in the educational process in early childhood education.

The present study is an augmentation to the issue of the virtual learning environment at preschools. Multiplying the lines of open and distance learning, including cyberculture as a new note in learning, attracting the Internet as a source and means of teaching, increasing in real-time the links between computer-mediated education partners, reporting on cyberspace as a privileged environment, on the performance of the education, in general, are conclusive examples of the stated evolution. It does not mean that everything in school is moving from the current to the virtual.

This study selected descriptive survey research for quantitative methods. The research design used appropriate frequencies to collect responses through an online data from Facebook group members ("Pregătim preșcolarii pentru școală"). The target population comprised of 280 parents in Romania. One-self administered questionnaires were used to obtain data on parents' perceptions of conventional schooling and in decision making, they should involve pupils in a homeschool setting.

We suggest that a parent's moderate degree of engagement through online learning is essential as it involves reinforce to a child. The results provided here shows that learning process based on inquiry-approach could contribute to the development of home education programs and curriculum resources and materials for early childhood education. Also, present the perspectives of accelerated curricula for gifted children from the mainstream education system during pandemic times.

Keywords: *early childhood education; online learning; pandemic; home education programs.*

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1. Introduction: Increasing impact of homeschooling in European education systems

In the last decade, the problems of preschool education are among the fundamental themes of pedagogical research and reforms in the culture around the world. These actions of renovating the structures and the content of learning in many countries have also extended to the level of preschools direction. (Anghel, 2018)

Climate change, energy transition and an endless number of new digital opportunities: understanding the fundamentals of science and technology is more critical than ever for responsible modelling of our world - today and in the future. Success depends on finding the right approach: in school, it is far too familiar for the facts were simply memorized, rather than fully understood and applied. The concept of learning based on scientific inquiry is our guiding principle in these efforts. (Anders et al., 2013)

What characterizes the problem of the contemporary world is not the existence of change (which is a permanence on the scale of existence conceptualized since antiquity under the well-known phrase "pantha rhei"), but its super-accelerated rhythms (Olteanu, 1982). The increasingly serious signals received from the world of science since the 1990s underline the imperative to change humanity's attitude towards becoming. (Peretti, 1996). This becomes possible by articulating education for change with the new paradigm of development and creativity.

Accordingly to OECD, homeschooling during the coronavirus could change education forever OECD (Broom, 2020). Technology and information processing digitization, exclusively the swift advancement of the Internet is generating divers in our routine lives and have also lead critical adjustments in the Romanian system of education. Without a necessary and precise updating 21st Century Competencies (Knowledge and skills), online education's power to become correspondent- or in some cases equivalent- to conventional training, it cannot be excluded.

In the last three months, interest in online learning options is sure to increase. It has made high returns to keep an eye on preschooler's progress, provoked children to enrol in learning activities, established and guided preschoolers learning time at home. (Rothermel, 2015). The study' key takeaway from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides directions shaping education from the U.S.A., showing 3.4% of students were homeschooled since 1999. (NCES, 2019)

Even today, the majority of homeschooling families have chosen to do so for religious reasons and moral values. Encompassed by these homeschool families, a principled part of educational experts regarding the occasion of homeschooling during pandemic times suggests evidence that homeschooling raises academic performance. For exceptionally gifted students, homeschooling is a flexible alternative education option for his or her accelerated subjects any other place the traditional school priorities just couldn't bear up. Work at home was like-minded to kids who play professional sports, art jobs that involve travelling (i.e. child musicians), to provide religious or moral instructions. This child has special needs or exceptional students. (Ray, 2017; Silva, 2018).

As the global phenomenon of COVID-19 seems likely to increase worldwide, transformations and attempts to adapt the Romanian education system to global and especially continental changes, ensuring the quality of education in Romania is measured concretely, in accordance with the recommendations of the National Committee for Special Emergency Situations, measures for the resumption of activity in educational establishments, in safe conditions for students, teachers, school staff and parents. Courses in preschool, primary, secondary, high school, vocational and post-secondary education remain suspended, but technology-assisted learning will continue.

2. Home education programs vs Blended programs

The researches in the zone of homeschooling have inquired into numerous angles and prospects in enclosing the advantages of homeschooling as a substitute for formal education (Jamaludin et al., 2015). Metha-analyses by the authors also provide whether homeschooling as an active and healthy learning option and assess homeschooled kids who may require special education (Jolly & Matthews, 2012)

The last basis attribute of an elective home education program reveals to responsibility for guidance and discipline. When parents decide for a home education program for your child, you have the charge for outlining, advising, and conducting your child's education program (McReynolds, 2007). Either parents or school authority selected will direct the schedule to the student. Stepping homeschoolers can be challenging since many eventually go back to public schools. (Ray, 2017)

3. What about Romania's homeschooling?

Home education in Romania is outlawed as a second to public schooling. It is unrecognized to most significant people before COVID-19, widely unnoticed by educational and sociological research. Until now, it exists and is expanding. The forthcoming paper demonstrates the first results from a still open-ended inquiring research outline. It comprises distinct methods of qualitative research such as participant observation, measure analysis and qualitative questionnaires. The objective of the frame is to hike an insight into the Romania home education movement and to analyse the findings from a pedagogical point of view.

In Romania, some education experts have criticized the idea of homeschooling. Still, the phenomenon is increasing because of growing parents' distrust of the ability of the state education system to prepare students for 21st-century society. Also, Wikipedia confirmed that Romanian homeschooling society has over 500 people doing homeschooling while it is legal under restrictive conditions. Children with special needs including physical ailments, learning disabilities, and terminal illness do not allow them to be physically present some of the local school districts may allow homeschool students, by a certified teacher who plans to supervise the student teaching.

Homeschooling Association from Romania argues that empowering parents to facilitate participation in children's education process, in their training, knowing their possibilities and needs, better than anyone else becomes the credo that enacts cultivating and overlooking childhood as the particular commitment of the parent. (Brewer & Lubienski, 2017)

The low scores of Romania in the PISA test (Salceanu, 2019) heightening to discussions about the Romania school system, which are at the moment nearly pinched at all levels. Obligatory school presence is in this context, only rarely questioned, and if then, without a chance of success. In the inner of the dispute are topics like the organization of the school system, blended learning methods and the question of appropriate education at preschool age. The considerations to support elements from countries that were more successful in PISA are mostly in association with these marks. There is no benefit to the fact that the Romanians laws concerning compulsory schooling belong to the most restrictive regulations in Europe. (Salceanu, 2019)

Based on the above elaboration, this study aims to examine parents opinion about some research questions: (1) *Is Homeschooling more effective than the public school?* And (2) *What are the types of Homeschooling known by parents?* And (3)

What kind of homeschooling program did parents apply to their children at home during the pandemic?

Methods

Participants in this study were 280 homeschooling **parents** of **children** in pre-K. The mean age of participants was 280:39 years (SD = 3.84). The participants were parents of the Facebook group, "Pregătim preșcolarii pentru școală" providing homeschooling tips for parents from Romania. The residence of the participants were quite diverse, in which most lived in Cluj-Napoca (N = 150; 53.57%), in Bacău (N = 79; 28.21%), in Sighetu-Marmatiei (N = 9; 3.21%), in Bucuresti (N = 21; 7.5%) and in Oradea (N = 21; 7.5%).

4. Homeschooling Demographics

Fig 1. Parents demographic information

Source: Author own conception

One-self administered questionnaires to 40 items, were used to obtain data on parents perceptions of traditional schooling and situation of Learning Process Management of Homeschooling during the pandemic of COVID-19, in which parents provide home education resources and have a positive involvement of their children. Questionnaires have been completed by the parents two times at 2-month intervals, between April& March 2020. To measure parents decision making, if they should involve pupils in a homeschool setting, we developed a scale range of responses from 1 to 6

with choices of responses from highly appropriate to highly inappropriate. This scale has six items with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.874.

5. Results and discussions

Parents recognize an education at home, homeschooling, as an elucidation to the crisis of the educational system during the pandemic time. The parents' concerns were given in Table 1.

Table 1 - Parents think about homeschooling as an alternative type of education
Source: Author own conception

Frequency	Percent	
8	9.5	
230-279 (average)	45	54.7
>280 (above average)	31	35.8
Total	84	100.0

The results show that more than half 45 (54.7 %) of parents feel that homeschooling better alternative to a traditional school system, 31 (35.8%) said that is satisfied with school academic performances it was above average. Only 8 (9.5%) indicated that their performance was below average. The study investigates if homeschooling used by parents could be explaining the performance trend in the sub-sections following. (see figure 2)

Fig.2. Parents who agree about homeschooling in the Romanian educational system
Source: Author own conception

The findings of this study indicate the interest of parents for application of blended learning methods to homeschooling is contrasting from school authority programs. Mixed learning methods use a particular approach, namely inquiry-based learning, that uses experiments themes to link multiple subjects so that they can provide significant experiences to preschoolers. During the pandemic, parents choose to apply mixt methods and exploratory methods (see figure 3).

Fig. 3. Methods and styles in Homeschooling
Source: Author own conception

Results also signified that more than half 50 (59.5%) strongly disagreed and 15 (17.9%) disagreed that home education programs offer opportunities for students to learn, think innovatively, and develop their potential optimally. However, 5 (6.0%) disagreed while 4 (4.8%) strongly agreed that parents insisted on children's following the regular schools. At least, 45 (53.6%) strongly agreed that homeschooling is a better option for exceptional children, 30 (35.7%) students with disabilities, 4 (4.8%) homeschooling in families with two or three children's whiles 5 (6.0%) for students in two-parent households. (See figure 4).

Fig. 4. What type of children homeschool?

Source: Author own conception

Findings of the study further showed that 28 (33.3%) of parents strongly agreed and 24 (28.6%) that school authority programs that would help their children succeed on the achievement tests but 18 (21.4%) disagreed and two (2.4%) disagreed with the statement. In comparison, 12 (14.3%) were indecisive.

From the findings, the majority of the parent considers they should have teaching qualifications to homeschool program (89.3%). This program means that homeschool parents attend evaluation techniques, school authority courses, blended learning methods, especially inquiry-based learning, to support micro homeschooling management. Also, the parents for our study considered that teachers educational level is an essential premise to teach children with a particular *type of Homeschools* as following: Classical education for Homeschool, Charlotte Mason Style Homeschool, Montessori for homeschool Homeschool Unit Studies, Eclectic Homeschool, Unschooling. Findings suggest that 72 % of participants regarded Montessori for homeschool as excellent or good, while 63 % gave the same rating to Eclectic school or Charlotte Mason style homeschool. Classical education for homeschool received excellent or good ratings from 54 % of parents; homeschool unit studies from 44 %, and unschooling type from 42 %.

Fig. 5. Types of homeschools
Source: Author own conception

6. Discussions

Homeschooling intrinsically will almost certainly continue to increase after the Coronavirus Pandemic, and nations and communities will encounter the question of how best to offset the interests of children, parents and society in the branch of education and schooling.

Homeschooling will persist fruitful ground for research—not only as a compelling educational phenomenon in and of itself but also for what it drives us to consider the scope of education more broadly.

Our results indicate that the vast majority of the participants advocate home-based education. Participants who would prefer homeschooling have concerns for the following: (1) innovative thinking and optimal development for every child; (2) poor learning environment at school; and (3) standardized individuals brought up at school. As elaborated in the Results section, a comparison concerning preferences generated by homeschooling a better alternative than public education reveals significant differences in students style learning.

The originality of our study is to provide clarifications on how parents believe that homeschooling could occupy the education of preschoolers, in the context of social events such as the pandemic. In Romania, homeschooling is a taboo subject, so identifying those types of

parents who choose a variety of homeschooling, depending on the category to which their child belongs, becomes a priority in future studies. Furthermore, we consider that it is essential to allocate reviews on that type of homeschooling curriculum that suits our Romanian schools and in what legal form it could be legalized in Romania. This study does not opt for a particular kind of homeschoolers, but on the contrary, argues the role of blended learning methods to fulfil an inclusive education. Moreover is located at the border between public schools and online learning settings.

Further, the results reveal that parents and students would need meeting places, books and materials, electronic resources, extra-curricular activities, financial support and some classes at schools to attend once homeschooling was allowed. In this respect, the Ministry of National Education in Romania should set up a department for homeschooling and prepare curricula and educational materials through this department. Besides, it should provide necessary regulations for the inspection and evaluation of homeschooled students as well as develop strategies to deal with problems that may come up when homeschooling.

As discussed, the priorities of the Ministry of National Education is digitalization of Romanian education, which includes equipping all schools with interactive whiteboards, while middle school and high school students could receive tablets to be used both at school, as well as at home when preparing lessons.

The results of this study present a base of useful descriptive information on homeschooling, which should provide a more detailed understanding of public whose involvement beliefs lead them to homeschool. The results of this study also offer new information about why some people choose to school or homeschool; in doing so, they may provide a basis for continuing inquiry into family motivations for the public, independent, and homeschool approaches to educating children in Europe.

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