Coping Mechanisms and Adaptation Strategies for Students in Online Education in Romania

Camelia Nicoleta Negut[1]

Abstract: In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased risk of increasing the infection rate, all forms of education have undergone organizational changes, including the transition to education on the online platform. This measure was a novelty for Romanian education, which generated less desired, or less beneficial effects among participants in the educational process in Romania, both among students and teachers. The lack of physical contact, the physical presence in classes generated a stressful situation regarding the adaptation to the new form of development of the educational act with the help of the technological resources which in turn were a great challenge for both students and teachers. All these changes in logistics and infrastructure have determined the actors involved in the educational act to resort to specific coping mechanisms and strategies to adapt to the new educational trend.

Keywords: stress; cognitive effort; frustration; emotional memory; communication; coping mechanisms; affectivity

Introduction

The educational act involves a training activity through which the teacher transfers to the educated, in this case the pupil / student certain knowledge that he must acquire and develop certain skills to operate with them whenever necessary. Therefore, the educational act is not just a simple transfer of knowledge, but a development process

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[1] Graduate, Faculty of Communication and International Relations, Specialization Psychology, Danubius University of Galati, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., 800654 Galati, Romania, Tel.: +40372361102; Fax: +40372361290, Coresponding author: cami_nicoleta@yahoo.co.uk.

in which at least two parties are involved, namely the pupil / student and the teacher. The mastery of an educational act consists in the ability of a teacher to discover the potential of the educated and the adoption of techniques designed to contribute to the proper development of the educated, so that the transfer of knowledge is a means of education and not the goal itself. And for an educational act to be complete, resources are needed not only of a cognitive and affective nature.

Communication is an important resource, both verbal and nonverbal language are regulatory factors of the educational act, in the absence of which teaching-learning become rigid processes, without affective substratum, reducing almost to the level of individual study, which is not the educational act in itself but only a component part, a stage of it.

The Role of Affective Memory in the Learning Process

Affective memory (Th. Ribot) or emotional memory as it is also called by some authors (Bolles, 1988, pp. 29-41) refers to memory that refers to certain types of emotional feelings, which like knowledge (as in the case of cognitive memory) are stored and subsequently brought to light and updated. Affective memory is considered to be a specific type of memory, involving the phenomenon of state dependence, which means that when updating the emotional content, we will experience the same state as when storing information, emotion, of course at a lower level of intensity.

It is known that emotional feelings can be manifested through facial expressions, the timbre of the voice and other elements of nonverbal language.

Thus, it is considered that in the educational act, in this case in the learning process, the affective memory plays an important role in updating the assimilated information. In other words, we remember much more easily the notions that were deepened in a favorable emotional framework, in the context in which we created an emotional connection with the teacher or with the object / discipline itself. Nonverbal language and emotional feelings are an important basis when it comes to assimilating a significant amount of data. We retain for much longer information that has not been mechanically stored or without an affective basis, and this affective basis must represent at least the affectivity either towards the discipline studied or towards the teacher who teaches it.

Stressors present in the context of online education

The change in the educational paradigm seen as a measure of adaptation to the new epidemiological framework generated by the SARS Cov-II virus generated, among others, a significant number of stressors for both parties involved in the educational act, which were correlated with either technological means or various adaptation strategies. Among them, we consider it opportune to mention the most frequent stressors in the mentioned context:

1. **Emotional stress generated by poor communication on educational platforms (blockages, relocations, desynchronizations, etc.)**

Adapting to the transition of online education on the platform was a stress for most of the actors involved in the education system, first of all the stress generated by the imminence or possibility of freezing the platforms, followed by the impossibility of relocating to class, fear of not being heard. Portfolios - oral presentations / speeches on the platform with image blocks, etc.

2. **Emotional stress generated by the lack of a private platform for open hours on the platform, with the camera on**. It was found that many pupils or students, even teachers, encountered problems in conducting online classes with the camera / sound open, in the absence of a private space, or there were two teachers in the same room and interference occurred, or pupils / students they did not have the necessary means at home, sometimes having to share the same room or the same device for several brothers.

3. **Emotional stress generated by the harmful effect of technological means on the human body (headphones, screens**)- which had an impact at least on the level of the two sensitive organs that were most requested, namely the eyes and ears. The number of hours spent in front of the computer, as well as the headphones on the ears, the long exposure time, without breaks, had an unpleasant effect not only on the physical level, transposed by fatigue, burning sensation in the connective membrane of the eyes, vibrant tympanic sensation, pressure on the eardrum due to the large number of hours spent with headphones in the ears, poor circulation due to the large number of hours spent in the sitting position, but also mentally due to psycho-cognitive overload due to the intense number of hours online without recovery / recreation breaks between hours, but only 10 minutes for the transfer from one team / discipline to another.

4. **Emotional stress generated by insufficient technological means (high-performance computers, software**). It was found that for some students, at least in terms of practical work or technical subjects, the lack of high-performance, high-capacity computers that could run certain software needed in many of the technical disciplines generated frustrations and negative feelings about the fact that a lot of knowledge is lost that can generate educational blockages.

5. **Emotional stress generated by insufficient time allocated to the final assessment / exams (short time for the assessment session, in some disciplines)**. The exam session, in addition to its natural stress, also generated additional stress with negative emotions and anxiety and ruminant thoughts for some students who felt that they would not be able to meet the requirements during the assessment on the platform, having as substrate the fear of network failure, fear that they will not be able to upload materials on time, that they will not be sent in the right format, etc.

6. **Emotional stress generated by the lack of activities in laboratories**

The lack of practical activities generated a lot of frustration among the students as they were put in the situation that certain knowledge that needed to be taught and learned in a practical way to be taught this time in a theoretical or superficial way, respectively through video material, drawings, images, in the absence of a direct contact with the studied object or the concept studied.

7. **Emotional stress- frustrations generated by organizing classes on online platforms.** It was found that not all teachers were prepared / trained to conduct an online educational act. It is necessary to mention a difference between distance learning (ID) which involved consulting educational resources present on the study platform, followed by an online assessment and online learning on the platform, a new concept in our country, which involves a continuation or replacement of education with physical present by resorting to technological means. The difference is the presence in front of the camera and a team activity, compared to distance learning which mostly involved individual study.

All these situations generated many negative emotions, frustrations, fears and sometimes depressions on both students and teachers who were put in the situation of adapting the material taught for an artificial system, online. Therefore, the first effects began to appear, both among certain students who experienced cognitive-behavioral changes, cognitive dissonances such as "I can't do this, I don't have time to finish ... I will fail the exam ... etc.", as well as on a physical level through

somatizations of negative emotions, transposed by the low quality of sleep, or dream hyperactivity, dreams related to what happens at school, fears, etc.

Coping Mechanisms and Strategies for Conducting Online Education

In the context created, many of the students and teachers chose to create their own plan for the development of the educational act as an adaptive support to the new educational requirements.

➢ **Coping measures adopted by students**

• **Acceptance of the condition / situation.** Some of the students tried as much as possible to understand the situation, to accept it and take it as such. They gave up the victim's behavior and resorted to resources of mental energization, such as breathing exercises, reading books / motivational excerpts, outdoor walks.

• **Adoption of a work plan.** It was found that more organized students started to prepare their work much earlier, to allocate enough time to log in and / or relocate on platforms where appropriate. In terms of knowledge, students concerned about their academic development used various educational resources, specialized sites, forums, organized their study hours in the sense that they increased individual work activities, making worksheets, briefs, videos, and so on to support their educational process.

• **Calling up for specialized help.** In cases of more serious behavioral disorders, some of the students were advised to seek specialized help, which benefited from counseling and mental recovery programs.

• **Many of the student colleagues asked for support to some colleagues for certain homework, explanations, etc.** Others sought the advice of friends or teachers to ask for support where they needed it, adopting an attitude of trust and acceptance that it is normal to ask for someone's help and that you should not do it all on your own.

➢ **Coping measures adopted by teachers**

o **Efficient organization of working hours on the platform.** In the current context, teachers have had to restructure their educational material into a more accessible form, suggestive / deductive power point presentations that come in support not only of students but also in their support, avoiding long and endless

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speeches. The use of images proved to be effective primarily in order to capture students' attention and initiate dialogues in order to maintain minimal contact with students, as well as their involvement in the lesson**.**

o **Additional training on the operation of technological platforms.** Not all teachers were trained minimally to operate with online platforms, so after proper training teachers became much more active on platforms, succeeding in re-establishing the broken link with students, thus increasing the flow of educational materials run on the platform.

o **Adoption of solutions to replace practical activities.** This was one of the most demanding measures for many teachers. Depending on the creative and inspirational resources of each, some teachers have managed to provide support materials or informational video content to meet students in order to facilitate the assimilation of knowledge that needed to be acquired in a practical way**.**

o **Maintaining the emotional connection with the students / pupils.** Maintaining a positive image and an emotional connection with pupils / students by offering explanatory support, or free discussions to support the establishment of a relationship similar to the classroom, the presence of positive emotions and optimistic spirit.

Conclusions

Through this case study we tried to highlight the most common stressors encountered in the context of digital education, both at the level of students / pupils and at the level of teachers. We cannot say that the adaptation to the digital educational stage was an easy one and not even it was over. The available adaptation resources have made it possible to go through this stage in a more experimental way, the effects of which will be observed along the way. The implications and psychic effects are as important as those of an educational nature, so I consider it appropriate and necessary the conduction of some research study on the effects of this experimental educational stage, I say experimental not in the sense of conducting an experiment intentionally but in terms of the spontaneity of the context that required the application of these recourse measures to online education. Even so, this period is a good basis for the development of sustainable educational strategies that contribute to the stability of the educational act both in physical and online format. Also, in the context of these strategies will be aimed at the analysis of the development of coping mechanisms at

the mental level both from the perspective of teachers and students from the perspective of avoiding an emotional collapse.

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