

Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Education

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Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant and multifaceted impact on the teaching profession and the educational process as a whole. Distance education developed rapidly, introducing new methods and approaches, but it also raised concerns about alienation and the reduction of direct human interaction. There is strong skepticism about the future of the profession, the role, and the duties of educators, while significant changes in curricula and the development of digital skills are also expected. Educators express fears that the profession may turn into a "lonely" and "mediated" activity, threatening the essential and ethical dimension of teaching. Nevertheless, the pandemic appears to open paths for the redefinition and dynamic evolution of educational practice and the role of the teacher in the future.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, distance education, digital skills, teaching profession, transformations in education, E-learning.

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Introduction

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at the global level created an unprecedented scenario for both citizens and organized society. Educational systems worldwide were called upon to transition rapidly to a new environment that would support home-based learning in emergencies.

During the 2020 lockdown, many countries were faced with a series of diverse measures, depending on their national specificities, the level of knowledge and skills of their educators in new technologies, and their familiarity with distance education, as they attempted to address the emerging challenges within their national educational systems.

Distance education is a form of learning that utilizes the Internet. It allows students to learn from home or any location using a computer, rather than attending classes in person. This concept involves the use of technology to share lessons and educational content (Gkimisis & Apostolakis, 2011).

In the Greek educational context, when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2020, schools had to find new methods of teaching. One of the key questions explored in this study concerns the conditions of the teaching profession during a pandemic crisis. Specifically, in an effort to assess how Greek educators responded to the pandemic, this research focuses on two major challenges

they faced: the implementation of distance education and the management of everyday school life.

The aim of the present study is twofold: first, to record the work of teachers within the new educational environment; and second, to explore how teachers themselves perceive their professional development in the post-COVID era, particularly through the lens of remote teaching.

Research Methodology

In alignment with the purpose of this research study, the following specific objectives were set:

- To highlight how teachers responded to the COVID-19 pandemic under the new teaching conditions.
- To explore how teachers envision their teaching practice in the post-COVID era in terms of effective distance learning.

Data Collection – Type of Interview Selected

In addition to a literature and online review, the data were collected through a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are primarily guided by the interviewer (in this case, the researcher), aiming to elicit data, experiences, and information

relevant to the research topic and objectives (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008).

Using the semi-structured interview as a qualitative research tool provides flexibility both in how data are collected and in how participants respond. In this sense, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher a degree of adaptability in decoding attitudes, perceptions, ideas, and representations, aiming to uncover both explicit and implicit dimensions through interaction, dialogue, and the exchange of questions and answers (Fotopoulos-Zogos, 2016).

Sample

The interview was conducted online on December 10, 2024, via Zoom, through real-time communication with a 40-year-old primary school teacher from the region of Attica, Greece. The interview protocol specified that the session would not be recorded. For ethical reasons, the interview is anonymous, and the participant's name will not be disclosed. Instead, a code name ("P1") was used to identify findings. This was deemed the only safe way to ensure a stress-free environment that would allow the participant to freely express opinions related to the research questions of the present study.

The research sample was selected using random sampling, as it was considered the most appropriate method to serve the aims of the study (Iosifidis, 2003).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a qualitative research approach, as qualitative methodology enables a deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives by focusing on their experiences, the challenges they faced, and their views on the implementation process (Mason, 2003; Robson, 2010).

To ensure the validity of the data and enhance the effectiveness of their processing, the researcher examined various methods to organize and categorize the collected data more efficiently.

Based on a set of predefined questions, two main thematic categories were formulated, encompassing ten questions aligned with the purpose and specific objectives of this study. Specifically:

- Thematic Category 1 (Questions 1–5) addressed the problems teachers encountered during the pandemic.
- Thematic Category 2 (Questions 6–10) focused on the future of schooling and learning in the post-COVID era.

Researcher's Role

The research process was conducted with particular care and attention. The researcher kept detailed notes throughout the interview, a fact that was communicated to the interviewee from the outset. Subsequently, the interview guide notes were crosschecked and compiled into a core text, which, through content analysis, was organized into key thematic categories linked to the main research questions.

Findings

The following responses emerged from the transcription of the interview:

Section 1: Problems faced by teachers during the pandemic

1. Did the pandemic crisis in Greece catch you by surprise?

- Yes, the pandemic caught both society and the educational system by surprise. The shift to remote learning happened rapidly, and there was a general sense of uncertainty and insecurity due to lack of preparation.

2. Had you received any training in the use of distance learning tools?

- Most teachers had not received adequate training before the pandemic. Some seminars and workshops were organized during the crisis, but they were often insufficient or did not fully address our real needs.

3. How would you characterize the measures taken by the state to deal with the pandemic?

- The measures were often makeshift and poorly organized. There was a lack of infrastructure and support for both teachers and students. However, efforts were made to keep the educational process going despite the challenges.

4. What problems did you face?

- Major problems included lack of equipment, unstable internet connections, difficulty maintaining student engagement, emotional detachment from the learning environment, and increased psychological pressure on teachers.

5. Were there any inequalities observed among students regarding access to online education?

- Yes, inequalities were evident, especially between urban and rural students and among families of different socioeconomic status. Many students lacked the necessary devices or a quiet environment to study.

Section 2: The future of schooling and learning in the post-COVID-19 era

6. How do you see the future of learning in the post-COVID-19 era?

- The future seems to involve a combination of traditional and digital learning. The pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of education and highlighted the need for hybrid teaching models.

7. What impact do you think distance learning will have on the learning process?

- Distance learning offers flexibility and access to knowledge, but it reduces interaction and collaboration. If not properly supported, it may lead to depersonalization of the learning process and a decline in quality.

8. In which situations do you think technological and digital developments can benefit the teaching profession?

- They can be beneficial for differentiated instruction, in remote areas, flexible programs, and for enhancing creativity through multimedia and interactive tools.

9. To what extent will teachers be able to develop autonomy in a remote teaching environment?

- Autonomy can be enhanced through flexibility in lesson planning, but there are also limitations imposed by

platforms and technical requirements, which often reduce the teacher to a "facilitator" rather than a true educator.

10. Do you have concerns about the state using distance education as an alternative for schools in islands and remote areas?

- Yes, there is concern that distance learning might be used as a low-cost substitute for hiring teachers in remote areas, which would reduce physical teacher presence and ultimately affect the quality of education.

Discussion

Teachers appear to feel more vulnerable and exposed during pandemics. One of the most significant issues they faced was the sudden transition to distance education. Particularly at the onset, the education system was caught off guard by this development. What becomes clearly evident is the lack of support and coordination, with much of the burden falling on the shoulders of teachers under the notion of personal responsibility.

A prevailing view is that the majority of educators lacked the pedagogical skills and technical know-how necessary to effectively implement distance learning methodologies. This finding is consistent with other studies, which have noted that although teachers generally demonstrate a positive attitude toward digital tools, many—especially those without sufficient digital literacy—feel insecure and unprepared when attempting to integrate these tools into their teaching practice (Sergis & Koutromanos, 2013).

Nevertheless, acknowledging these challenges did not prevent teachers from engaging in educational activities. The present interview revealed a strong sense of responsibility toward students, a commitment to continuing education, and a need to update their professional knowledge. There was also recognition of the urgent need for action and the growing importance of finding a balance between in-person teaching and e-learning, which is seen as a future necessity.

More crucial than the lack of technological pedagogical expertise is the need to shape and manage teachers' attitudes and perceptions. According to Pajares (1992), teachers develop complex networks of beliefs and attitudes around every educational issue and context. These significantly influence daily decisions related to lesson planning, instructional choices, and classroom activities.

The lack of training was recognized as a structural weakness of the education system—particularly at a time when it was most needed. Surprisingly, no systematic training programs were implemented for all teachers, despite there being sufficient time to develop the necessary conditions for the widespread adoption of distance education across all levels of schooling.

It is widely accepted that the creative use of digital tools in education requires time, appropriately equipped environments, well-organized and up-to-date training programs for teachers, flexible curricula, and the necessary financial and institutional support. However, it has also been observed that teachers' high willingness to use educational technologies often contrasts sharply with their actual day-to-day implementation (Petko et al., 2018).

Regarding the future of schools—particularly in the post-COVID-19 era—teachers appear cautiously concerned. Nearly all participants agreed that distance education will likely be used in

various alternative or blended forms, in combination with traditional teaching methods, in the near future.

However, beyond the issue of distance education, certain concerns are also expressed regarding the alienation and hesitation that may be further intensified within learning communities.

Another significant issue relates to the learning process itself. Special attention is drawn to the fact that studying and learning increasingly require the constant mediation of a computer or camera. This raises concerns about the impact of such a shift on the nature of study and learning, as traditional reading, writing, and face-to-face interaction are placed at serious risk.

More broadly, there is undeniable skepticism about the evolution, prospects, and future of the teaching profession. Questions are being raised about how the profession will be practiced at all levels, and what the future holds for its fields, responsibilities, and specialized skills. These questions form part of a wider debate and a general sense of concern, without doubt.

It is anticipated that in the near future, restructuring and significant changes will take place that will influence the teaching profession. This belief stems from the expectation that curricular reforms will occur, both in core learning and in teacher training content, particularly linked to the need for developing digital competencies and e-learning capabilities, which are essential for expanding teaching opportunities.

Equally important are the concerns raised regarding the role of distance education in remote and inaccessible regions. Some educators worry that screens, microphones, and high-speed internet networks might replace them, while others argue that such projections are exaggerated, unrealistic, and nearly impossible to implement.

Of particular importance is the concern that a traditionally direct and human-centered profession may be transformed into a solitary and mediated occupation, where individuals are expected to perform cognitive tasks in a mechanistic way, lacking the value and ethical dimension offered by face-to-face teaching as an act of human interaction.

Conclusion

In summary, it is evident that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the teaching profession has been substantial. Teachers experienced exceptionally unprecedented and challenging circumstances.

Given the absence of recent historical precedents, it becomes clear that educators are facing an extremely complex reality marked by national and international shifts, restructuring, and institutional transformations that will undoubtedly leave a lasting imprint on both the teaching profession and the education system as a whole.

As such, the teaching profession appears to be entering a new dynamic phase in the near future—one that incorporates elements capable of further utilizing the toolkit of distance learning methodologies and, more broadly, e-learning approaches and techniques.

Therefore, it is likely that the teaching conditions shaped during the COVID-19 era will give rise to changes that redefine the position and role of teachers. In a sense, the extent to which pandemics influence the nature of the teaching profession, as well as the degree to which emerging learning models reshape the

professional identity of teachers and the structure of schools, appears to be a decisive factor for the future of education.

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