



Theoretical article

WHAT IS THE NEW ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN DISTANCE LEARNING?

Vasiliki Kordatou, Ph.D. student

***Department of Psychology, SWU "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria.**

Email: vasokordatou@gmail.com

Abstract:

The Covid 19 pandemic brought some significant changes to the global education system. The confinement that occurred necessitated digital teaching at all levels with teachers and school managers assuming new roles adapted to the new data of the time and freed from the traditional and outdated way of teaching which were based on teacher-centrism and authority. However, the new technological conditions proved to be demanding on a practical level, making the work of teachers more difficult. Finally, this article concerns the new role of teachers and school leaders during the Covid 19 period.

Keywords: COVID-19, digital teaching, new role, teachers, school principals

Introduction

In the period of the pandemic due to COVID-19, the global education system was still deemed necessary to adapt to new digital conditions in order for the educational work to continue uninterrupted for students and educational staff. In particular, teachers of all levels and school leaders needed to acclimatize to their new and upgraded role in a short period of time through the help of technology to expand their knowledge still to enliven students and their parents on a psychological level still to reform the curriculum and eliminate the distance to manage any problem of communication, behavior and education through distance learning (Deloitte, 2021).

In general, the school authorities need to create an environment in which students will have the opportunity to express their personality, participate freely in the lesson, expand their intellectual horizons, without insecurity and fear, freed from the anachronistic and traditional way of teaching still adopting a new, more modern and flexible role (Papaloi, 2012).

1.1. New role of teachers through emerging distance education

The role of teachers in distance education is complex and multifaceted, which is far from the traditional way of teaching in the classroom, and this is because the teacher functioned more as an animator, coordinator of learning processes, creator of favorable conditions for learning (Papadimitriou & Lionarakis, 2010). The teachers have to execute diverse roles – to plan, facilitate and implement learning, providing different sources of learning such as books, articles, videos and so one; to make some demonstrations, to motivate and support the students, to evaluate their achievements (Mayasari & Kemal, 2020).

The teachers in Greece during the first quarantine of the Covid-19 pandemic seemed to cope at a fairly fast pace given the economic and social difficulties that it was necessary to overcome and dedicated themselves to the new technological conditions and managed to cope successfully with the new digital platforms due to their voluntary efforts (Athanatou & Yfantopoulos, 2021). In particular, the will and personal effort of teachers of all levels were among the main instruments for managing the new educational conditions.

In addition, an important role in the part of distance education from the teachers' side was played by the effort to connect and help each other between parents, colleagues and students, which in order to bring positive results. The teachers offered their help at a psychological and educational level to the parents, especially, in order to reassure them to calm their anxiety and in turn help their children in their lessons. The perceived support by teachers has been especially important for parents' satisfaction with school during the Covid-19 pandemic (Haller & Novita, 2021).

Therefore, through continuous information and communication, the teachers guided the parents on technical and educational issues, psychologically supported their colleagues and took care to strengthen their relationship with the students, mainly in psychological level as the students, regardless of their age, were forced to adapt immediately to the new conditions, something that was quite soul-destroying and new for their new reality, with the consequence that they exceeded their working hours many times (Tsakalogianni, 2020).

In addition, it was necessary for the teacher to demonstrate adaptability and flexibility in the detailed curriculum, and also to formulate some new teaching methods in the subjects in order to make their understanding more efficient and, by extension, to solve various communication problems that were created due to distance (Athanatou & Yfantopoulos, 2021).

It was necessary for the teacher to adapt several things from the traditional model of education and above all necessary to upgrade the educational material for children with educational needs in order to better understand and enrich the digital material considering the social and economic conditions in each society combined with the psychological burden of students, due to confinement (Kousloglou, 2020).

As mentioned by Anastasiadis (2020), the new role of teachers is:

- To strengthen emotional involvement and social presence and to reconnect the student with the teacher in the new digital environment.
- To help restore students' communication with each other by positively charging the climate of the online classroom.
- To support students in their efforts to connect the living environment with the new digital classroom, emphasizing their common elements, thus helping students to better adapt to the new reality.
- To spend time designing some new activities that will easily introduce the student to the new digital learning and will facilitate the student to discover, expand and master new knowledge.
- To design activities that will challenge and invite the student more while introducing him/her to a new way of processing information in order to facilitate him/her to discover his/her own learning paths and less to evaluate him/her by transmitting exam anxiety.

During the first period of distance education the teachers appeared to be quite hesitant about the limits of their new role in the new technological teaching conditions that is why they were updated by the individualized education program by the Greek Ministry in order to be fully informed about their tasks and obligations (Anastasiadis, 2020). Finally, in order for teachers to be more responsive to their new role, it is important to devote time to digital training in order to cope with any technical problems. Conducting the course with distance teaching makes them feel more self-confidence (Zhao et al., 2020).

1.2. The role of managers during distance education

The education system during the pandemic was immediately confronted with the new conditions and changes that needed to be processed in order to cope with distance education. Specifically, the teachers, as previously mentioned, were necessary in a short period of time to cope with the new technological

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means with all the shortcomings even while the students had to acclimatize to the new way of teaching as confined for a long period of time at home (Bakirtzis, 2021; Liakopoulou & Stavropoulou, 2021).

The school director had to reshape the roles and duties of all staff and adapt them to the new emergency needs (Anastasiadis, 2020). Specifically, principals at all levels had to acclimatize to the new conditions of being isolated from the school in a remote location and managing an educational institution, putting aside their personal concerns and insecurities and coping with the unknown in a daily changing situation (Harris, 2020) and make use of social media to maintain daily communication with teaching staff (Earp, 2020).

In addition, the principal needs to direct the entire school community in order to function properly and especially to guide and advise the teachers on any institutional and new means that have been established for distance learning. To instill credibility and confidence on a psychological level to the educational staff, as well as to the students and their parents (Kotter, 2001).

In particular, the principal as a school leader found it necessary during the period of suspension to work more hours in order to be available for any technical and educational difficulties faced by teachers and students and to respond to any questions they felt needed to be answered (Saitis, 2008).

As Harris and Jones (2020) point out, school leaders owe during emergency needs to be on hand and respond to all expectations of all educational staff. It is necessary for the manager to be flexible in order to deal with any difficulty and if this is not possible, he/she must plan it immediately in order to resolve any problem (Starr, 2020). Furthermore, the new role of the director becomes a more flexible, animating, communicative, consultative, adaptive, not only administrative (Karakatsani et al., 2012).

According to Tatsiu (2020), school principals in intercultural schools had not only to face the new conditions at a technical and psychological levels but also to make sure that minority students were not isolated more, for this reason they had to encourage and help in practice these children and more specifically:

- To listen to the problems and difficulties of the parents, showing that they are good listeners.
- To convey the message in a simple language with short and clear instructions.
- Demonstrate patience, composure, and connection in an effort to keep balance with all involved.

Finally, school directors need to motivate and inform the educational staff about any training through courses or seminars in digital training in order to expand their knowledge in distance education and respond more efficiently to their new tasks (Anastasiadis and Kotsidis, 2017).

1.3. The role of the school psychologist and administrative staff during the Covid-19 pandemic

Initially, the role of the school psychologist concerns the management of the mental state and psychological experiences of the student, the identification of people with disabilities, the smooth integration of students with special educational needs in school and their reinforcement at an educational level, as well as counseling (Hatzichristou, 2015; Nikolopoulos, 2008). However, the Covid - 19 pandemic has resulted in the entire educational staff together and school psychologists to cope with the new challenges and in particular to strengthen their role through distance education in order to ensure both students' and their own intellectual and psychological well-being (Harris, 2020). More specifically, school psychologists during the confinement and therefore the use of the digital platform needed to communicate with parents and students in order to reassure them psychologically about the new educational teaching, to inform them about the pandemic, and to reinforce positively all the teaching staff, as they were confused with their new teaching tasks (Gregus et al., 2022). In addition, the main concern of the school psychologist was to take care of the counseling program that would follow in order to deal with the needs of the students at a distance, which made the situation quite difficult, as the physical presence made the assessment part easier,

however the distance counseling appeared to be more immediate in terms of access for all students even in mountainous or remote areas (King et al., 2022). In particular, the biggest challenge for school psychologists in the pandemic was to manage the psychology of the students, as due to the confinement they became socially isolated enough with the consequences of being alienated from their social surroundings (Gregus et al., 2022) and closing in on themselves presenting increased rates of childhood depression (Racine et al., 2021), so it was necessary to choose the counseling treatment for each person and to devote more time to psychotherapy, exceeding their hours of workload.

Similarly, for the administrative staff, the needs during the pandemic period were increased, as it was necessary to arrange them immediately in order for the school to function smoothly, according to the new way of teaching and contact. More specifically, the administration increased communication with parents and teachers on a digital level in order to resolve practical logistical issues and to confirm that all students have access to the internet. The administrative staff even managed crises from parents and teachers through a more team-based collaborative communication as opposed to the traditional management model that took a more formal stance, but also they informed teachers and parents directly about the new instructions from the Ministry of Education regarding digital teaching, so as to avoid mistakes when implementing digital education (Harris, 2020).

In conclusion, all the school staff during the pandemic faced an unprecedented crisis that was necessary to cope with in order to continue the orderly operation of the school, aiming at the educational and psychological balance of the educational system.

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