EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING IN QUARANTINE TIME. VIEWS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION TEACHERS

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Abstract

The function of education using digital media and the internet, because of the pandemic, introduced a debate on distance learning into the scientific and public discourse. The purpose of this study was to research teachers' views on the implementation of emergency remote education during the pandemic. More specific the main goals were to explore teachers' views on the objectives of "emergency remote education", its characteristics in its implementation in the Greek education system and the results of its implementation. the qualitative method was used to approximate the meanings and experiences of the participating teachers. The participants in our survey were fifteen (15) Primary Education teachers from Lesvos-Greece. The results of the research highlight that the implementation of "emergency remote education" in the period of the pandemic and the transfer of face-to-face teaching in a virtual environment, highlighted the concerns that exist for education (applied teaching practices, readiness of students and teachers, materials provided, etc.) and for the contribution of digital media in the transformation of social inequalities in new hierarchies and power relations in the field of education.

Keywords: Primary education, Emergency remote teaching

Introduction

The function of education using digital media and the internet, because of the pandemic, introduced a debate on distance learning into the scientific and public discourse. Its application has its origins in the 20th century and is based on specific principles, its form is qualitatively influenced by the educational tools it uses and promotes self-action, self-learning and the discovery learning process (Anastasiadis, & Manousou, 2016: 60-75). In the postmodern era the application of digital interactive media (Harper et al., 2004) have transformed content and function of education (Page, 2012: 36-38) and deconstructed the traditional model of teaching (Tzifopoulos, 2020). In face-to-face teaching the space is metric and is considered as an experienced place of learning only if students come up with meaning-making, while in distance learning it is expressed in an intangible and digital form, including forms of self – learning (Keegan, 1980), while teaching time is flexible and negotiable each time (Sofos, 2015: 8-19). Distance education is based on student independence (Giagli et al., 2010), cooperation and social interaction (Sofos, & Mantzioukas, 2013), but also in planned and organised learning with the increasing use of technical equipment (Saba, 2014).

The above, with the spread of the pandemic and in combination with the way the online education was implemented, became a focal point of the sociological and educational discourse (Bozkurt, & Sharma, 2020; Jimoyiannis et al., 2020a,b. Hodges et al., 2020; Milman, 2020)

From face-to-face teaching to "emergency distance learning"

The rapid spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus around the world led to its containment and closure of educational institutions (Murphy, 2020). According to UNESCO, over 1.5 billion students in 165 countries are affected by school closures (UNESCO, 2020). Distance learning in Greece,, until pandemic time, involved limited groups of adults (Karalis, & Pavlis-Korres, 2010; Kalogiannakis et al., 2009). In early 2020, applies to all educational levels because of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. The manner and urgency of its implementation led several researchers to define the education provided over the internet

as "emergency remote education/teaching" (Bozkurt, & Sharma, 2020; Hodges et al, 2020) or "pandemic pedagogy" (Jimoyiannis et al., 2020b. Milman, 2020). Several researchers state "emergency remote education" as an alternative term that differentiates high-quality distance education from emergency teaching, which was implemented at the time of the pandemic (Hodges et al, 2020).

This shift of education, outside the school building (Charalambous, & Psathitis, 2018), to "emergency remote teaching" helped to avoid social detachment and to reconfigure social functions (Zisi, & Chtouris 2020: 41-64). However, the emergence of digital and online media as dominant has shaped new perceptions of social relations and social structure and has highlighted new perspectives on the historical development of education and how to deal with distance learning (Tzifopoulos, 2020). The historicity of the lived experience of social subjects in the knowledge society is exemplified in the educational process. The colonisation of the living space of pedagogical interaction by technological means digitalises educational activity and their prolonged use creates another "virtual" reality, further alienating human nature and social relations. The "normality" of today is tested in terms of the moralisation of the responsibility of individuals (students, teachers, parents) and risk and fear, as rational "institutions", limit the boundaries of social space and the freedoms of democracy.

At the same time, the autonomy of space and time during teaching does not individualise learning, nor does it create more favourable conditions for students, since the exclusion of the "digitally illiterate" for reasons related to class, economic, geographical and biological limitations (Georgoulas, 2020; Toquero, 2021) compose the new context of the society of risk and form new spaces of "outcasts". The usual forms of students' resistance (e.g. closed cameras, non-active participation in the lesson process, involvement in other activities during lesson time, etc.) do nothing but confirm digital and social inequalities, since the criteria of efficiency and effectiveness remain, without introducing the "digital" and social diversity of the student population in the context of reflection on the new school reality.

The emerging image of school education, from the application of ICT is not politically neutral, but is ideologically oriented and through symbolic violence intensifies the hegemony of the privileged of the "knowledge society", in all social activities, involving increasingly wider social strata. New digital practices and experiences transform and / or compose new values and ideologies, which are not mechanically reproduced mechanistically, but through a dialectical view of social reality where structural forms and interactions are meaningful within their historical context (Costandius, & Bitzer, 2015).

Education policy for remote education in Greece

The application of distance learning in Greece was introduced with a Circular Ministry of Education, which sent to all schools on 27/02/20. It included instructions on how to prevent the spread of pandemic and at the same time reassured the educational community, mentioning that its activity is at seasonally expected levels. (Pandektis, 2020: 14). Gradually from 26/02/20 with circular No. 13530 until 10/03/20 with Circular No. 16838 (Pandektis, 2020), educational structures were closed individually in areas where the first cases of the disease occurred and by a joint ministerial decision adopted on 10/03/20 in all the structures of the country were temporarily closed from 11 to 24 March 2020 (Pandektis, 2020). On 20/03/20, a Legislative Act states that "... the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs may take all necessary measures to enable all educational structures, regardless of type and level, public or private, to provide distance learning ...." (Pandektis, 2020: 227-228). On 15 May 2020, (Government Gazette 1859/B/15.5.2020), concerning modern distance learning, states that "... the school units ... may provide modern distance learning ...". The word 'may' indicates the optionality of its remote nature and avoids discussion and responsibility for the existence or lack of appropriate technical infrastructure, as well as responsibility for the training of teachers. In the school year 2020-2021, school units operate remotely, except short periods of time, while the curricula in Higher Education also operate in the same way (GG3955/B/15.09.2020, GG 4899/B/06-11-2020, GG 4383/B /05.10.2020).

The need for political decisions on the rapid implementation of distance learning brings teachers face to face with changes in the way of their work, the equipment inadequacy, technological problems and their lack of training (Jimoyiannis et al., 2020a;b;Sofos, 2021). The hasty application of "remote education" aims, among other things, to maintain a "semblance of normality", while children are placed in immaterial classrooms/schools symbolically, socially and actually to be serviced the needs of adults

(Jimoyiannis et al., 2020; Kougioumoutzakis, 2020). From surveys in Greece, teachers' attitudes were positive towards the implementation of e-learning as a temporary measure for this particular emergency situation, but they stated their need for continuous training. Their discourse had concerns about the changes in the role of teachers and the methodology of teaching practice (Giavrimis,, & Nikolaou, 2020; Jimoyiannis et al., 2020a), but also about the social and digital inequalities that "remote education" creates for teachers and students (Giavrimis,, & Nikolaou, 2020; Rallis, 2021). . In the new social reality of lockdowns, digitality plays a dominant role in everyday life, altering or transforming school reality, raising issues of new discipline and individual responsibility in the management of behaviour and social boundaries.

The purpose of this study was to research teachers' views on the implementation of emergency remote education during the pandemic. More specific the main goals were to explore teachers' views on the objectives of "emergency remote education", its characteristics in its implementation in the Greek education system and the results of its implementation. the qualitative method was used to approximate the meanings and experiences of the participating teachers.

Method

In this research, the qualitative method (semi-structured interview) was used to explore through the discourse of the participating teachers their views the implementation of emergency remote education during the pandemic. On the basis of the participants' discourse, we have an understanding of the reality and the reconstruction of its parts. Every part of this reality delineates and specifies it in a particular way. Social scientists, when analyzing interviews, try to reconstitute how individuals identify and conceptualize the particular cases they face (Tsiolis, 2018).

Participants

The selection of the participants in this research was based on the appropriateness and adequacy of their answers to the research questions, so that the analysis of the living reality in "emergency remote education" in the time of the pandemic be possible. The participants in our survey were fifteen (15) Primary Education teachers from Lesvos-Greece. The choice of Lesvos was made because it is an island region and secondly there are no other relevant surveys in Primary Education in "emergency remote education"for the period of the pandemic. Of the participants nine (9) were women and six (6) men. Also, nine (9) were teachers in typical education, two (2) in Special Education, two (2) were Computer Science *Teacher*, one (1) English Language teacher and one (1) Music Education teacher. Eight (8) teachers belong to the age group from 29-40 years old, while the remaining seven (7) belong to the age group from 41-57. In the first age group we have five (5) women and three (3) men, while in the second four (4) women and three (3) men.

Research tool

The research was conducted using the semi-structured interview method, which is also the most widely used method in social sciences (Iosifidis, 2017: 73-74). The tool of our research contains two thematic sections. In the first thematic section there are questions related to the knowledge and views of teachers on the concept of distance learning, its forms, the technical infrastructure required for its implementation, the role of the teacher, its effectiveness, and the cases in which it is applied. It also examines the role of ICT in education, the digital divide and information literacy. In the second thematic section there are questions on distance learning, implemented during the covid-19 pandemic in primary education. In particular, the questions focus on "why" it was implemented and for what purpose, what were its characteristics, its advantages and disadvantages, its necessity and its consequences. In addition, the Greek Educational Policy implemented during this period of time is examined, and teachers' proposals for a more effective distance education are also explored.

Research procedure

Initial contact with participants was made by telephone and after they agreed to take part in the research, interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded. Participants took part in our survey completely voluntarily (without any compulsion or enforcement). The personal information of the participants in the survey was kept in complete confidentiality and the principle of avoidance of

deception was followed (Tsiolis, 2014: 75-82). The verbal data was then recorded, and analyzed. The interpretative validity, related to the degree of matching of quality data with the interpretations and representations resulting from them (Iosifidis, 2017: 189-192), has been respected. During the course of the research, issues arose that made it difficult for it to progress, but were not insurmountable. The most important issue was the lockdown that was implemented at the end of 2020, and made it difficult to "communicate" with participants.

Findings

Educational Policy Objectives in the Implementation of Remote Teaching

The objectives of The Educational Policy are separated from the participants in cognitive and social. The cognitive objectives focus on continuing the educational process, keeping students in touch with the learned knowledge, and making its consolidation as much as possible: *I9: "... because they tried not to lose the school year for the students."* The social objectives concern the maintenance of the daily life of students and their good psychology:

> I14: "... They want the psychological part better supported. That is to say to support the students psychologically ...", I1: "To keep the students in a normality...".

They also relate to the political and social costs calculated by the Ministry of Education in order to implement its Education Policy: *I13:* "Obviously to sell the narrative that everything is going well and that the learning process is working ....",

Application characteristics of emergency remote training

Organization in modern- asynchronous training

The organization of the Ministry of Education was judged by teachers to be inadequate because the platforms it chose did not serve the volume of courses: I7: "No, at first it was completely *disorganized. If we talk about asynchronous education, terrible problems occured,... Because the system couldn't handle many users, at first it was literally crawling. ..",* I8: "It was hasty I think....There was no one we could ask him questions and so on."

Modern- asynchronous education

. The platforms proposed by the Ministry of Education to support remote teaching presented many problems, at least at the beginning of the implementation of the project.

> I1: "In my case, in asynchronous, I did not encounter a problem. From colleagues I heard that they had difficulty several times uploading their material because of the massive effort at the same time".

At the same time, in modern education there were at first major problems of access to platforms, which over time improved, but not satisfactorily. It was also reported that the platforms of modern teaching were not friendly in their use for students and teachers:

> I7: "... after a week we also entered modern teaching with webex, which of course had too many problems. ... it takes a good enough connection to your home to be able to support it",

> I8: "They are a little unwieldy and not so friendly, as far as children and teachers are not."

Teaching materials

Although this was a new form of teaching, the teaching material was not determined by the Ministry of Education. It was left to the discretion and discretion of each teacher, because according to their views there was no comfort of time on the part of the Ministry to create new material. This was expressed by the confusing instructions for repetitions, the coverage of the material and the teaching of new:

> I8: "At first there were no clear instructions. At first it was optional, then it became mandatory from one point onwards. Again this mandatory was according to everyone's choice. So if there isn't a clear framework or the subject matter that we need to teach automatically comes out, make sure that these things have to be done, these things shouldn't be done when this year's material comes out..."

The old material available from the Ministry of Education in its electronic educational repositories, (Photodentro, Aesop), was considered by the teachers to be obsolete and unfit to be used in the present situation: I1: "We were supposed to be told that you could use material from specific pages of the

Ministry, but for our needs there was *nothing. I mean for my class at least. Let's just say, while I was looking, I didn't find anything."*

Legal arrangements

The participating teachers were placed for the legal arrangements of the Ministry of Education. They all said they were unsatisfactory, since the personal data of themselves and the students was exposed to anyone who sought it or had been given to companies:*, S3:* "For personal data, I do not know what could happen, I am skeptical."" .

Difficulties

The most important difficulties were:

(a) the lack of electronic equipment by students and the poor connection:

> I11: "There were problems of lack of logistical infrastructure. Many students didn't even have a computer or Tablet. There were problems connecting to an internet provider.....'.

Several stated that the platforms highlighted social inequalities and class privileges:

> I10: "... It was also a class issue. To students who have a computer and the right equipment, yes the platforms worked. After a point they didn't freeze, the E-class and webex after a point.' .....» ,

> I8: "First of all it increases social inequalities. So some kids who don't have the means we mentioned above are like they're not in school. The others move on, at least by some means. So it's not fair at all to continue."

b) The traditional classroom. The home as a place of teaching and learning, for the young students of Primary Education is an unprecedented experience, because it is shared with all family members all hours of the day. It transforms you, while in many cases the necessary living space of everyone is reduced, with the result that students cannot concentrate on their lesson, while the participation of other family members in the lesson in Primary education is in some cases intense and / or necessary , because of age.

> I2: "But when we're in the house where things come up, brothers, parents, it's hard to concentrate. The child must be fully focused. I find it difficult from home to concentrate,"

> I7: "Young children cannot operate the computer, so parents should have time, or grandparents respectively have time and be familiar with electronic media."

(c) The psychological state of the pupils is adversely affected by the internment, lack of play, school and activities, possible unemployment of the parents, lack of contact with many familiar persons:

> I1: "... when they see that their parents do not go to work, they do not leave the house, neither for school, nor for game, nor for the other activities, ... suspect that something serious is going on',

> I3: "... the children had a very emotional charge and what they lacked was contact with their classmates. ..."

> and

(d) the lack of coherence during the course, as the relationship was individualized, but also the teaching control was limited:

> I15: "... in relation to the class was number of units, we were not a coherent group. Just personalized a lot of kids. It was a one-way relationship. There was no circle,"

> I9: "... Because it will not be direct contact with the teacher to control them, correct them, ..."

Teachers training

Participants stress that there has been no training of teachers and the adequacy of logistical infrastructure by them:

> I2: "It was optional, because the school and teachers are not qualified for distance learning and the Ministry knows this."

They consider that the training, which did not take place, was necessary in order to enable teachers to cope with the use of electronic media and digital platforms.

> I14: "Teacher training was needed, yes. ... Certainly for this situation, peer-to-peer and heterogeneous education there could be some rapid lessons at a distance", I13: "Clearly, everyone was left to their own luck."

Teachers' efforts

Participants exceed the individual effort of teachers for training, in any way anyone could, to cope with the use of electronic means and platforms.

> I4: "... we are now called upon from classroom teachers to become teachers of the online platform. Therefore, no, we did not have the knowledge and we had to search for ourselves, that is, watch various videos in order to be informed", I7: "... everyone was looking for themselves to see what's going on and how it works.",

> I14: "... once again it took the personal work and passion of each teacher to respond to all this."

Consequences of the implementation of distance learning

The positive consequences are found in the continuation of the educational process, in the solidarity of teachers, in the avoidance of social integration and in the involvement of ICT in the educational process:

> I1: "It might have been positive that the children did not lose their knowledge to put it that way",

> I6: "But helped to tighten relationships, family relationships ...",

> I11: "I consider that some teachers who did not use in their daily teaching various digital repositories, such as the Photodentro and various electronic means, were forced to use them and perhaps incorporate them into their teaching from now on."

in the historical and political treatment of distance learning:

> I5: "The truth is that this thing really changed.... They stopped seeing it as a bad dragon, so to be said, and I hope that in the future, relatively immediate, they will also be equipped with interactive paintings, ..."

the promotion of solidarity and humanity among those involved (parents, residents of small communities and representatives of local institutions):

> I15: "... through the bakery in the neighborhood I could send some photocopies ...",

> I15: "The only computers that came to us were from a donation from a C.E.P., a company near our village, through the president of the village",

ensuring public health

> I6: "We haven't had the pandemic spread since we were confined to our homes. That's the main thing.'

and
in the cooperation of teachers:

> I15: "From a teacher's point of view, they understood how delicate things are, how much they are in the air, how alone they are and how important our solidarity, our relationship, our union, the collective relationship of professionals by industry is."

> I5: "From friends you can exchange material, from groups of your guild. ...»

The negative consequences of the implementation of remote teaching were the manifestation of the digital divide, the perpetuation of social inequalities, the financial burden on those involved and the question of whether this process is education or teaching.

> I14: "There were negative consequences that colleagues could not upload the material ... for students who did not have access, who never entered."

> I2: "Isolation. The children who could not participate were completely isolated, felt insecure, felt cut off from everywhere."

> I8: "First of all it increases social inequalities. So some kids who don't have the means we mentioned above are like they're not in school... »

I2: "Financially, some parents were forced to spend more money."

I1: "It is a discount of teaching, ie we said that teaching is a living process with the distance cannot be the same … socialization and all that."

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the teachers' views on the implementation of "emergency distance education" during the pandemic. The teachers of the research through their discourse defined that the goals of the "emergency distance education" were focused on the continuation of the educational process and the contact of the students with the taught knowledge, on maintaining their daily life and on the strengthening of their psychology, as well as to avoid from the official state the political and social costs (ensuring public health, avoiding social intrusion). With the application of the emergency measures in education, an veneer of normality was maintained (Kougioumoutzaki, 2020), which, however, does not approach the essential content of distance education. This was difficult to accomplish due to the inadequacies of its implementation and the unpreparedness of the participants. The organization of the Ministry of Education was considered by the teachers of the research as inadequate in relation to the digital resources of the school network (problems in connecting to the internet, insufficient logistical infrastructure, unfriendly digital platforms), the teaching material (outdated, inappropriate or incomplete or incomplete), the confusing instructions and teacher training (incomplete or under the individual responsibility of the teacher). The above had a direct impact on the transformation of the traditional classroom space with the use of digital media, while the teaching control was limited (little use of collaborative methods, individualized interaction, participation of other family members, etc.). The responsibility was transferred to individuals (students, teachers, parents, the rest of society), creating conditions of digital inequalities. They are confirmed in the international and Greek literature (Chen, 2010; Giavrimis, & Nikolaou, 2020; Sofos, 2020). According to the teachers, the educational process continued with their painstaking efforts, with practices of peer solidarity and social voluntary support. Thus, several issues of deficit policies related to new technologies and digital media have emerged (Sofos, 2020: 563-576). Criticism of the international and Greek literature on online education applications has shaped the term "emergency distance learning".

"Emergency distance learning", as it seems, from its applications in Greece concerns a technocratic management of education, without organized pedagogical principles, which simply transfers face-to-faceteaching without the corresponding adaptations to remote teaching withdigital means. The digitization of the interactions of students and teachers, but also in some cases the whole family, transforms the concept of privacy and transfers the control center in several cases outside the private space. The biographies and interactions of individuals in the historical-cultural context of inclusion and "virtual" reality are more heterogenized than ever. The embodiment of these practices is expressed as new values and ideologies or as fear, anxiety and emotional disorders, defining social interactions (Koutsogiannis, 2020; Morgan, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; Zisi, & Htouris, 2020). Even forms of "resistance" (camera closure, non-participation, etc.) that exist do not express the autonomy and freedom of the individual, but a confirmation of educational inequalities, as they are evaluated by indicators of efficiency and effectiveness and not by criteria of the diversity of individuals' needs and lived experience. The discipline of the student continues in terms of virtual reality, transferring the responsibility to the individual and bringing up digital inequalities at the first level.

The application of distance learning according to the research participants highlighted dimensions of the digital divide and the exclusion of digitally illiterate. The discourse of the participating teachers highlighted difficulties (lack of necessary skills, lack of necessary equipment, poor internet connection, etc.) that composed class, geographical, economic / educational differences and perpetuation of social inequalities in families and teachers during the implementation of distance teaching . These factors are reported to the international and Greek literature (Georgoulas, 2020; Davaki, 2020; Murphy, 2020; Paidousis, 2020; Ragnedda, & Muschert, 2013; Schumacher, & Kent, 2020; Serrano - Cinca et al., 2018; Treilaki, 2017). The mediating factors of social inequalities,however, do not act in isolation and autonomously, but are intersecting, composing new social strata that face the inequalities of the digital context. The school continues to be disinterested and indifferent to the cultural capital of the participants (Bourdieu, 1995) or to reproduce social inequalities (Bowls, & Gintis**).**

At the same time, through the teachers' discourse, the historical and political necessity of dealing with distance education in a more organised, systematic and pedagogical way, without having the form of "emergency remote education" was highlighted. Teachers see face-to-face teaching as irreplaceable, but in emergency situations they do not disagree with the use of distance learning. However, it is necessary to reflect, when introducing new dynamic processes in education, that the new environment is not only testing democratic systems and the autonomy of individuals, but also collective solidarity and the cultural level of peoples (Habermas, & Günther, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of "emergency remote education" in the period of the pandemic and the transfer of face-to-face teaching in a virtual environment, highlighted the concerns that exist for education (applied teaching practices, readiness of students and teachers, materials provided, etc.) and for the contribution of digital media in the transformation of social inequalities in new hierarchies and power relations in the field of education. The new project in our time is an inclusive, sustainable and collaborative digital future (Vishkaie, 2020).

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