

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN THE ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Alexandra ZAMFIRACHE¹

Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on many industries and sectors around the world. Education was no exception, having suffered a lot during this period. The changes in the Romanian education system have affected all environmental participants/ stakeholders in this field: students, teachers, business, public authorities, government. Perhaps one of the most provocative changes during the emergency was the shift to online education, which affected all students and teachers around the world. The purpose of the research is to perform an analysis on the problems and challenges in the Romanian higher education.*

Key words: *Romanian higher education, COVID-19 pandemic, distant socialization*

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a threat that has endangered the social and economic system, but especially health systems around the world (Kamran et al., 2022). To represent the gravity of the situation, the top 20 economies (G20) have promised an investment of 5 trillion USD (AlJazeera, 2020.).

The education system has not been without repercussions either. In fact, it has suffered a lot due to the restrictions imposed by the authorities. The transition to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic was a form of compromise, in relation to the epidemiological situation.

Education is one of the areas that has undergone a number of changes over time. However, the most sudden change occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the effects have affected both students and teachers around the world.

The purpose of the research is to analyse and present the problems and challenges in Romanian higher education accurately.

In order to understand the repercussions of these changes, it is necessary to analyse the extent of the Romanian higher education system. For this, some official statistics are

¹ Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration, Transilvania University of Braşov, alexandra.zamfirache@unitbv.ro ORCID ID 0000-0002-6141-443X

reproduced below. Of course, their evolution over time is very important, and this is detailed in Table 1, which shows the evolution of higher education institutes in Romania in the period 2012-2020.

Table 1

The evolution of higher education institutes in Romania, by form of ownership, in the period 2012-2020

		Year								
		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Higher education institutes	Total	107	103	101	99	97	95	92	90	89
	Public property	56	56	56	56	56	56	55	55	54
	Private property	51	47	45	43	41	39	37	35	35

As it can be observed from the statistical data, the total number of higher education institutes in Romania is decreasing, for the analysed period, reaching from 107 in 2012, to only 89 in 2020. The distribution by form of ownership is approximately equal in the first year analysed (2012), with the result that, in 2020, public institutions will gain ground in front of private ones (54 public institutions versus 35 private ones).

For the year 2020, the information on the regions of Romania is detailed.

Table 2

The distribution of higher education institutes in Romania in 2020 according to forms of ownership and regions of the country

		Form of ownership		
		Total	Public property	Private property
Total		89	54	35
Regions of the country	NORTH-WEST region	13	7	6
	CENTER region	9	7	2
	NORTH-EAST region	11	7	4
	SOUTH-EAST region	7	4	3
	SUD-MUNTENIA region	4	3	1
	BUCHAREST - ILFOV region	32	17	15

BUCHAREST - ILFOV region records the largest share of higher education institutes in Romania in 2020. When analysing these data, we must take into account the fact that Bucharest is the capital of the country.

2. Context and analysis of problems and challenges in the Romanian higher education

Over the last period, a series of scientific articles have analysed the Romanian education system in the COVID period, with emphasis on the transition to the online

environment (Edelhauser and Lupu-Dima, 2020; Gavriluță et al., 2022; Edelhauser and Lupu-Dima, 2021.).

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced education to move into a distance learning (DL) model (Jusas et al., 2022). Although before the pandemic the e-learning system was rarely used (by both students and teachers), students accepted online learning, even if they considered it less attractive than the traditional education system. The results of a study (Ionescu et.al. 2020) shows that, from the teacher-student-parent perspective, e-learning is an effective solution for sustainable learning in the current and future conditions, but requires good collaboration between parents and teachers, careful monitoring of children's/students' behaviour to identify and combat possible effects caused by changing learning and social realities.

Currently, there are multiple challenges addressed to higher education, the one generated by the COVID Pandemic being only the most recent example. Among the most important challenges are: the paradigm shift in learning to a new pedagogy, the transition from digital education to smart specializations, the great challenge of the Romanian higher education by moving from technological evolution to quantifying the professions of the future. A good example is in the field of engineering, where the traditional and prospective demand for technicians is no longer sufficient, thus rethinking the professional identification of engineers (Baliasov et al., 2017). Of course, in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, there have also been other series of challenges that universities had to adapt to.

In order to try to cope with all the changes, it was necessary to develop digital skills (in line with the ultra-rapid evolution of technology), to adapt and integrate artificial intelligence into the learning-development process (especially for involvement in research) etc. These changes have been adopted by both students and teachers.

The problems that universities have to answer are many, from the effects of the demographic crisis (which is a real challenge at the level of Central and Eastern European states, which can generate real disruptions in education systems and thus in the evolution of society), to the continuous redefinition of the roles of universities in relation to the economic environment. Of course, this demographic crisis is felt in Romania as well.

It has been found that Romanian universities have rapidly adapted (especially in the last two years of the pandemic) educational resources, in the context of the pandemic, developing and adapting online education through the use of dedicated platforms and/or by creating their own applications/platforms, discussing today an educational digital ecosystem.

Romanian higher education must continue to evolve. Currently, students can be connected (e.g. via digital connection) to the university. At the same time, students have access to curricula, trainings or other teaching or non-teaching materials, which help them increase their level of education.

Who knows what the future holds? Maybe in a few years, we will discuss the connection with the help of virtual reality or other digital means that will develop. This shows the direct link between the evolution of technology and its implementation in the act of learning.

Although the advantages of using technology, but also of the measures by which higher education has responded to multiple challenges are described, however, in the end, higher education shows its resilience to some extent (for example by deepening the challenges related to students, teachers, digitalization in the period of the COVID Pandemic-19).

Distant Socialization is a newly introduced term, as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational activity in Romania. Human behaviour has suffered greatly, and in order to adapt to social changes, it has been a necessary evil (yet it also has benefits, such as improving the quality of life or identifying opportunities). Their contribution to society is particularly significant in times of crisis and pandemic. The pandemic had consequences not only on health, as one of the major and significant effects was represented by social distancing. As a result, the global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need to change social behaviour around the globe.

The research managed to show successfully what are the main problems faced by the Romanian education system, especially during the pandemic period. These are represented in a synthetic figure (Figure 1.).

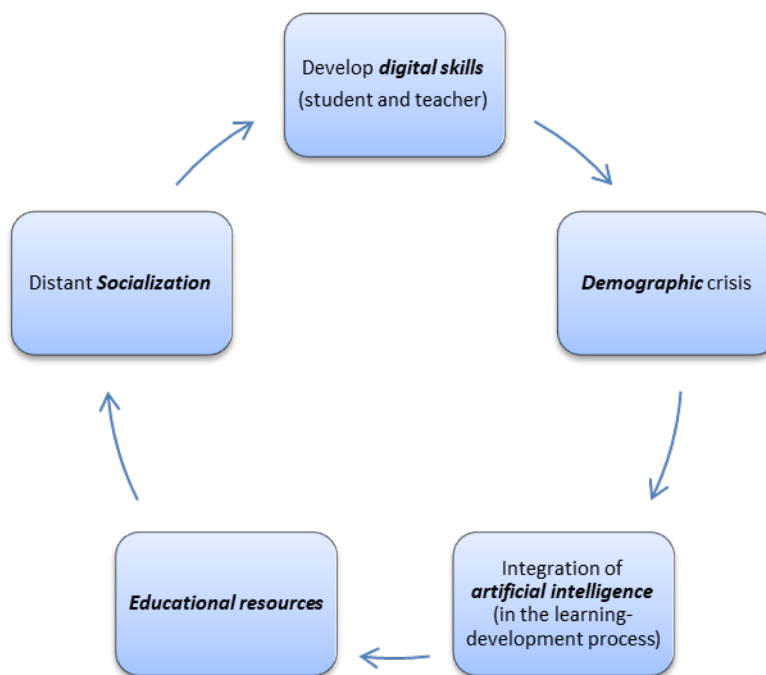


Fig. 1. Summary of the main problems facing the Romanian higher education system
Source: Performed by the author

3. Conclusions and Discussions

Romania needs research, both fundamental research and applied research, and the primary role is the attribute of universities, where there is both modern research

infrastructure (conducted in recent years, especially through European funds) and human resources.

In the current reality, Europe and, implicitly, the national and international academic environment are in a real change in relation to the present pandemic challenges, and the educational act in these times must offer optimal solutions in safe conditions. In the last two academic years, online activities have been carried out combined with some defined hybrid activities, which has required an adapted pedagogy or even a new pedagogy, aimed at building a quality educational act.

Ideally, the higher education system, should preserve the positive elements of digitalization and use the benefits of internationalization, by increasing the opportunity to practice an education in certain fields (such as economics), which offers opportunities to potential students abroad. Online education developed to such an extent is still a new concept for Romania (given that there are still certain areas of the country where there are no internet connections), not explored enough. However, there are also disadvantages of online education, such as “the teacher's eye, in the classroom”, “voice inflections”, “body language”, etc. which define the "arsenal of the real teacher".

In the future, it becomes necessary for higher education to know about sustainable development (Probst, 2022.). Following the results of the research, the article highlights a model that briefly presents the main conclusions (Figure 2).

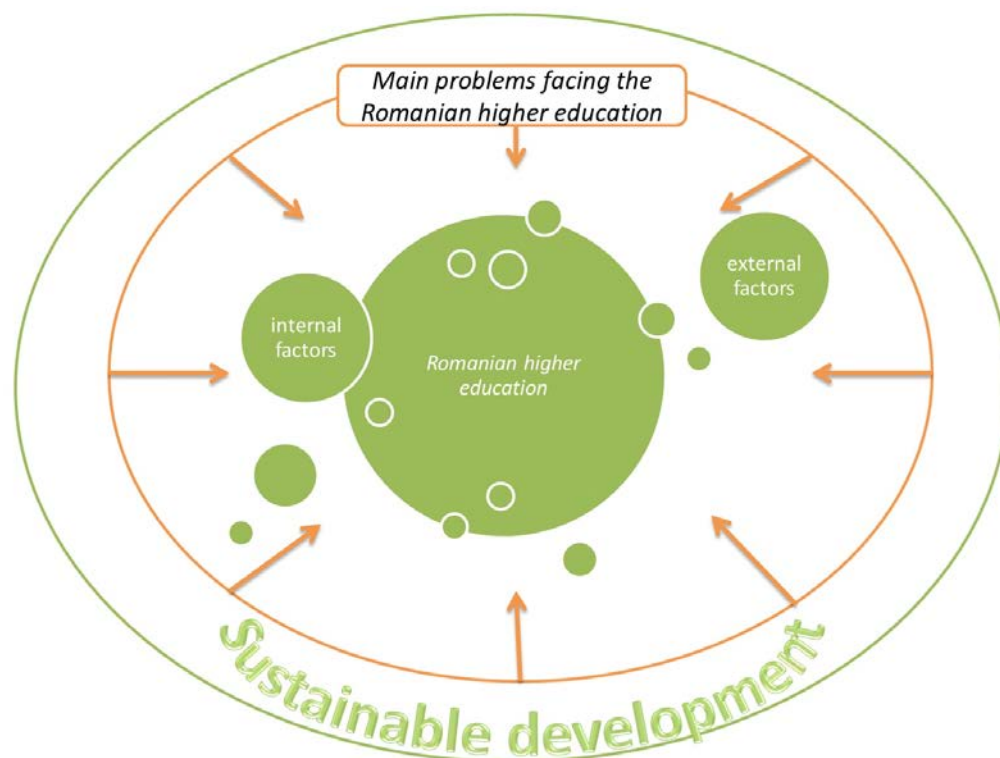


Fig. 2. The main conclusions of the research

Source: Performed by the author

In conclusion, it is recommended people should not forget that **today's teachers are the ones who prepare tomorrow's craftsmen for some jobs that do not yet exist**. This is especially noticeable from all the changes which the higher education system has gone through lately, and which have been analysed in the article.

References

- AlJazeera, 2020. *G20 Pledges \$5 Trillion to Defend Global Economy against COVID-19*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/g20-pledges-5-trillion-defend-global-economy-covid-19-200326185218460.html>> [Accessed 7th July 2022].
- Baliasov, A.A., Boronina, L.N., Vishnevsky, I.R., Belova, O., 2017. Value orientations of future engineers in the context of professional identity formation. *11th International Technology, Education and Development Conference*, Valencia, Spain, Mar 06-08, 2017, Book Series: INTED Proceedings, pp. 5558-5567
- Edelhauser, E., Lupu-Dima, L., 2020. Is Romania Prepared for eLearning during the COVID-19 Pandemic? *Sustainability* 12(13), 5438. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12135438>
- Edelhauser, E, Lupu-Dima, L., 2021. One Year of Online Education in COVID-19 Age, a Challenge for the Romanian Education System. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(15), DOI: 10.3390/ijerph18158129
- Gavriliuță, C., Dalban, C. M., Ioan, B. G., 2022. Educational, Emotional, and Social Impact of the Emergency State of COVID-19 on Romanian University Students, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(7), 3990. DOI:10.3390/ijerph19073990
- Ionescu, C.A., Paschia, L., Nicolau, N.L.G., Stanescu, S.G., Stancescu, V.M.N., Coman, M.D., Uzlau, M.C., 2020. Analysis of the E-Learning Education System during Pandemic Period-COVID-19 in Romania. *Sustainability* 12(21), 9030, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12219030>
- Jusas, V., Butkiene, R., Venčkauskas, A., Grigaliūnas, Š., Gudoniene, D., Burbaite, R., Misnevs, B., 2022. Sustainable and Security Focused Multimodal Models for Distance Learning. *Sustainability*, 14(6), 3414; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14063414>
- Kamran, S.M., Khaskhely, M.K., Nassani, A.A., Haffar, M., Abro, M.M.Q., 2022. Social Entrepreneurship Opportunities via Distant Socialization and Social Value Creation. *Sustainability*, 14(6), 3170. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14063170>
- Probst, L., 2022. Higher Education for Sustainability: A Critical Review of the Empirical Evidence 2013–2020. *Sustainability*, 14(6), 3402; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14063402>