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ORIGINAL PAPER

The importance of teachers for the educational system

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Abstract

The worldwide educational system has been changing and reshaping its structure continuously. In nowadays, education as a stand-alone word can have multiple definitions – but, if we refer to the system, then education comprises: modern buildings, trained teachers, teaching methods, receivers (those who are enrolled in different levels of education) and unlimited access to the latest technology. All of these represent the result of thousands of years in which societies evolved and decided to organise their first schools and to acknowledge the fact that the only way to transfer information to future generations is through education.

History shows that ancient civilisations set the basis of education. Archaeologists discovered that it was – almost 3000 years B.C. - on the territories of ancient *Mesopotamia* where education and forms of schools appeared for the first time. Back then, teachers were called *scribes* and they taught reading and writing mainly to the male children from wealthy families. Later, other proofs of education appeared: old documents like *papyrus scrolls* and paintings showing pupils learning how to read and write were found in Egypt and Greece. In time, schools started to diversify their subjects and children were taught: arithmetic, philosophy, how to write official documents, music, poetry and physical training. Moving on, chronologically, it was only in the 20th century when education expanded - reaching mass access, improved its teaching methods and introduced new disciplines. Teachers became the central part of this system along with the pupils and students who attended classes/ courses.

This article will explore the importance of teachers for the educational system by emphasizing their role in nowadays society. Although we are living in a period in which we are dominated by algorithm, teachers and the educational system prove the fact that they can adapt and integrate these innovations in their classrooms.

Key words: *educational system, teachers, new technologies. evolution, challenges*

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The evolution of teachers – different stages before technology

In Antiquity, teachers were regarded as sage and philosophical people. Those who passed down traditions or moral codes were the elders and the leaders of the group/ tribe. In ancient Greece, Rome and China, philosophers taught small groups of people. It was then when Confucius, Plato and Socrates appeared. They were dedicated teachers and their theories survived because students wrote down their presentations.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, certain western countries gathered their knowledge and teaching processes around religious institutions. These institutions served as schools were monks and priests taught groups of pupils. Their courses offered information on Latin, Theology and Rhetoric.

During the 11th century, the first universities appeared in Europe. The University of Bologna – the oldest university from the European continent had teachers who presented academic lectures in front of students. The first courses at this higher-education institution were related to the Roman law. In fact, the University of Bologna was set up in 1088 and it was the first European higher education institution where students took notes, had access to lectures and one thing that made it unique was the fact that it was ran by students. "*At first only a school of law, Bologna successively incorporated the other branches of learning. In 1316, a school of arts and medicine was formed; and in the latter half of the same century a school of theology was founded….”* (Mullinger, 1873:73)

The University of Bologna followed by the University of Cambridge and the University of Paris (Sorbonne) have opened new doors for education and learning because they offered spacious institutions with amphitheatres and lecture halls.

Nevertheless, it was in the 15th century when education registered a massive expansion due to the appearance of the printing process. The printing technology led to the publishment of many books that began to be spread worldwide. Printing books at a big scale offered access to information and knowledge to the general public. European societies went from hand-copied manuscripts to massive communication through written texts that were printed in large series and send out to the wide audience. Printed books led to the rise in literacy and to easier access to foreign languages rather than to just one standardized language which at that time was Latin.

Even though in those times printed books were not instantly affordable, they became the tools that encouraged reading within different social classes. Moreover, printed books helped education include science, history, geography and literature among its subjects of study. Printing did another thing – it helped teachers shift from dictating long lessons to discussions and debates based on the printed versions of books and texts. Once students had access to books, they could focus on reading and understanding the information rather than spending long hours to write after dictation. Countries witnessed an increase in the interest for knowledge and printed books opened the path for the establishment of public education. The centuries that followed 16th, 17th and 18th century gave education the necessary infrastructure to reach a broader public and to improve literacy.

At the end of the 18th century until the beginning of the 20th century, education was well-established in all European countries. The general public had access to schools and to printed materials fact which gave people access to information and knowledge. In the 19th century, teaching became an official profession.

The 19th century was the catalyst for education. The development of technology and industry helped people realize that literacy was an advantage for the workforce that

had to follow instructions, read and write documents, schedule the work hours and create different products demanded by societies.

The 19th century was represented by the Industrial Revolution. Rural farming was gradually replaced by urban factories. People moved to cities and governments had to adapt education and schools in order to answer to the demands of the industry.

In the 20th century, education continued its development. Until the widespread of the internet, teaching and learning had four major components: the teacher, the student, the school/ high school/ university and the library. The teacher was the guide, the tutor, the one who helped the student understand the new terminology. The student took notes and went to the library for additional information. Those were the times when: "*A simple chalkboard sketch can replace a slide. A classroom discussion can replace a video. Asking students to explain concepts in their own words can replace digital assessments*." (Fajle, 2026:12)

Education in the 20th century

In the 20th century, education became an important pillar for each society. In Europe, especially after the 2nd World War there was a boom in establishing new schools, high schools and universities. Most of the European countries started gradually to raise the mandatory school-leaving age to 15 and later to 16 years old. Due to the need of reconstruction after two World Wars, countries like Germany, UK and France brought diversity to the types of degrees that they offered to students. Many *baby boomers* (children born between 1946 and 1964) wanted to continue their studies looking for different specializations offered in higher education. Therefore, they enrolled in universities increasing the educational figures. This meant that Europe went from less than 5% of young adults who joined a university to a system that encouraged the general public to join a higher education institution.

The shift of the education from basic toward highly specialized knowledge and to advanced curricula, pushed teachers to look for training that would help them master modern scientific and pedagogical practices. That meant that teachers had to learn pedagogy – an essential subject – that would help them create a good management for each class/ course. Teachers received training that focused on different teaching methods which had to align to each child/ student's age, interest and other external factors that could influence his/ her educational achievements.

The 20th century encouraged education to focus on developing critical thinking rather than rote memorization. In time, the educational system adapted its teaching methods because they had to fit to the changes that were coming from the industry, economy and the world of business. Lifelong learning, technological fluency and the ability to offer support to students – all these became mandatory for teachers. They had to attend seminars, enroll in workshops and obtain special degrees that offered them further certification for the domain in which they taught.

According to Vincent Carpentier in his study *Higher Education in Modern Europe,* the interest for higher education registered a significant increase in the 20th century: "*A process of growing mass participation in higher education, mainly led by public institutions, took place in Europe after 1945. It was clearly the result of long-term transformations in society and the economy, combined with profound changes triggered by two global wars and the Great Depression in the first half of the twentieth century*" (Carpentier,Rury&Tamura, 2019:267)

While education spread to the general public, technology registered an historical moment in 1969 when scientists sent the first electronic message via a virtual network. This was the beginning of the internet – the network that connects people online. In time, this network reached institutions, including schools and universities in waves and in the 90s internet connection started to be popular worldwide. At the beginning, computers weren't so performant and they were used mainly for typing documents or trying new software. Teachers embraced this new network as it promised to be very helpful and also because they: "… *are often searching for new methods or approaches to implement in order to manage a classroom problem, to develop their teaching or simply to break the routine*" (Scorțan, 2024: 144)

In the 2000s, the internet and its devices were implemented in schools and universities. For a period of ten years this new technology made a lot of changes and slowly, printed materials, books or reports were replaced by their online versions. Teachers could access easier online libraries or use their personal computers for school/ university paperwork. Due to the internet, the tasks of teachers gained other values because they were entering a classroom not only to teach but also to guide and mentor their students in their journey of discovering the online world that could and can be used in their education.

The 21st century – Digitalization and the challenges for teachers

As we entered the 21st century, education transformed and improved its methods because it kept pace with technology. Teachers and educational institutions evolved alongside the new tech developments. The transition from printing to online versions of books, dictionaries, classes was facilitated by: "*The evolution of technology, worldwide access to the internet (the largest and fastest way of communication) and the appearance of social media are important changes that have been adopted by the majority of the educational institutions" (*Stoian, 2019:125)

Technology came as a helpful tool for teachers as it saved them time and offered instant information. Teachers could shape the online information and customize it for their pupils/ students. The intelligent board, the laptop, the tablet and even the desktop computer were virtual libraries and keepers of important school/ university documents. Integrating these devices in the educational process helps teachers as well as students because they: "… need to be prepared to succeed in the academic or business world after they finish school since social media skills and digital literacy are extremely appreciated…" (Bărbuceanu, 2020:141)

The fact that technology was introduced gradually, gave time to the educational system to prepare and to purchase all the peripherals needed for a modern class. Teachers received specialized training and courses, being encouraged to use this huge virtual network. All these digital tools gave immense opportunities and reshaped the entire architecture of a class / course. Apart from the physical devices, teachers and students could log in on different platforms. Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams are virtual places where the teacher connects with his/ her class, shares classroom materials, loads books, starts online meetings, sends instant messages and the list can continue. Moreover, on these platforms students can turn-in their assignments, drop comments or ask for further explanations. They are an extension of the physical class/ course and they are meant to encourage a continuous process of teaching and learning.

The 21st century is a challenging time in which everyone needs to adapt and it is: "*Undoubtedly, technique and psychology as well as information content remain relevant,*

however, as educators and formulators of information, we must strive towards remaining close to that which is contemporary" (Lăpădat&Lăpădat, 2020: 139) The need for adaptation gives the educational system a versatile part that places the teacher in the center because he/ she has to form the student so that he/ she can find, evaluate, select and synthesize the information that is coming from websites, links, tutorials, etc. After graduation, for example, from high school and university, the student has to be ready to use the accumulated knowledge and also to know how to navigate online in order to get the most accurate information for a future workplace or business. The teacher is the guide, the mentor and the companion who teaches not only his subject but also encourages the student to learn how to select the best option from the *world wide web*.

It is true that until technology, the teacher and physical libraries were the only sources of information; with the advent of the internet, online search engines brought a lot of alternative sources that are used for educational purposes. Still, teachers through their specialized degrees are the key link between students and the world of the internet. Leaving a student alone in front of a computer with internet connection gives him no chances or very few chances to learn on his own. The internet and the algorithm only display information without teaching. Therefore, the role of teachers is essential in the educational path of students because it offers specialized guidance. Even though: "It *is obvious that we must not neglect students 'dependence on technology, which makes them impatient and rebellious, and develops their ability to operate with several things simultaneously (multitasking)"* (Chirițescu&Păunescu, 2024: 236); we have to take in consideration that the educational system comes to support and to mentor.

A.I. tools such as Chat GPT or Google Gemini - support for education

To continue the list of innovations from the 21st century, I have to mention the virtual assistants that were launched four years ago – more precisely in 2022. This new software innovation opened the door for other approaches and revolutionized all domains including the educational system. *A.I., ChatGPT or Google Gemini* (to mention just a few) are virtual assistants, libraries, dictionaries – practically they can answer questions from every domain of activity. They are designed to work with humans and to give them the necessary information within seconds. They are practical and can be accessed from the mobile phone as well as from the computer or laptop. They are meant to help us in urgent situations or in everyday life every time we need to find a solution, an answer or just to double-check what we already know. Nonetheless, we have to know that the information that we get from these virtual assistants has to be verified because these *chatbots* are not flawless. For the educational system these virtual assistants offer additional support and resources therefore they are incredibly healthy for education. Teachers and learners have started to integrate and to work with them for different educational purposes. As an English teacher and researcher, I have to say that these internet tools: "… *will help the English teacher stay active and connected to the changes and updates that occur in the English vocabulary. No matter if we speak about new English teachers or about experienced ones, professional development should be encouraged for both categories." (*Stoian, 2019: 1716)

Professional development is essential for teachers and can be enabled with the help of these new virtual *chatbots* – software that offer assistance through text and voice interaction. For students, A.I. and the other internet tools mentioned above can function as a private tutor who comes to offer additional explanation in different situations. Learning to work and to integrate all these technological breakthroughs in the classroom

will satisfy students' curiosity and will keep them active and interested during teaching hours.

"Faced with the vast and varied complexity of a changing and constantly evolving school, it is necessary to leverage some fundamental characteristics of teaching to increase levels of inclusion in the classroom and improve the learning conditions for all students." (Scorțan, 2025:112) Thus, education and teachers have the role of balancing traditional teaching methods with the innovative support that is offered by these virtual assistants. In classrooms there has to be an equal use of methods in order to keep all the students involved and interested, practically the teaching hours need to offer a blend between tradition and innovation.

In conclusion, as the world evolved, education evolved as well. From Antiquity until nowadays a lot of changes influenced teachers, students and education in general.

The 21st century has offered us many surprises – the internet, tech-devices, different software and virtual assistants (*chatbots*). As this century started in 2001 and we are in 2026, we can expect other innovations and discoveries until 2100 when it will end. As for teachers, their role is essential for education and that is why they have to continue to adapt their teaching methods and to work on their professional development. Educating intelligence is necessary if the world wants to keep its evolution. In order to evolve we need to innovate and true innovation requires educated people.

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