



Research Article

Education Between Norm and Reality: The Impact of Normative Discrepancies on Children with Special Educational Needs

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Abstract

This paper examines the digitalization of the educational system and the impact of modern technologies on the teaching and learning process. In this context, a legitimate question arises: how can teachers preserve their essential role in an environment where intelligent systems provide multisensory and personalized learning experiences, and, at the same time, how do society and the state respond to the needs of children with special educational needs? Rather than providing definitive answers, this study aims to encourage reflection on an issue that is shaping both the present and the future of education. Students should not be assessed solely according to their current level of knowledge but also in relation to their potential for growth. Consequently, the teacher's mission extends beyond knowledge transmission to supporting each learner in becoming the best version of themselves. The development of transversal competences, including critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and collaboration, has become essential in an increasingly dynamic society. The traditional role of the teacher as a mere transmitter of information must evolve, as this function can now be complemented by digital technologies. Nevertheless, teachers remain indispensable as mentors and facilitators, guiding students in developing the competences required to face future challenges. Technology should therefore serve education rather than diminish its human dimension. The discussion is framed within the context of inclusive education, with particular attention to children with special educational needs, who are especially vulnerable to rapid educational and social changes. Building an educational climate founded on respect, empathy, and cooperation requires the active involvement of teachers, parents, students, educational institutions, local communities, and public authorities. The Romanian educational system continues to face significant challenges in implementing inclusive policies. Although school desegregation and inclusion are firmly established in legislation, their practical implementation often remains inconsistent. According to data published by the Romanian Ministry of Education, 23.2% of school classes display indicators of segregation. Moreover, the frequent turnover of education ministers and the constant shifts in educational policies have undermined legislative coherence. As a result, many valuable reform initiatives have disappeared into a veritable “Mariana Trench” of public administration, where promising projects are lost before producing lasting effects, while their consequences are borne by the entire educational community. Ultimately, genuine inclusion requires more than administrative measures; it demands the development of an authentic culture of inclusion grounded in dialogue, shared responsibility, and human values. Passion and compassion remain defining qualities of the contemporary teacher. Only through collaboration and coherent educational policies can an inclusive, equitable, and future-oriented educational system be achieved.

Keywords

Education, Inclusive Education, Children with Special Educational Needs

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1. Introduction

Education is an essential component of any civilization, [7] any state, and any society. Its fundamental role is affirmed in principle in all democratic communities, but few states actually give it the importance they proclaim. The transmission of information is often associated with the act of teaching, but this is only part of what a teacher is called upon to do, as their role is much more complex. In fact, character building and refinement are intrinsic to the purpose of education and cannot be separated from the educational process.

Excessive digitization risks affecting students' potential development [16], particularly by diminishing the exercise of analytical thinking [1]. While a few years ago the main concern was social media and its impact on concentration, today's challenges are more complex. The extensive use of artificial intelligence is changing the learning paradigm and raising additional ethical and pedagogical issues. However, the difficulties of the education system cannot be reduced solely to the technological dimension. A significant part of social dysfunction stems from poor or ineffective education. Early education has consistently proven to be a determining factor in an individual's subsequent development. [13] Conflicts, disagreements, and various forms of social instability are essentially correlated with the precariousness of moral and civic education, and therefore with the lack, ineffectiveness, or poor quality of education. Solidarity, understanding, and compassion are not only values promoted in the religious sphere, but also fundamental benchmarks of education.

The rank given to the education system in the hierarchy of values reflects precisely the formative dimension that it implies [17]. Building human character by transmitting values, principles, and knowledge will be reflected in the way individuals integrate into society and, of course, in the professionalism with which they will carry out their work in the field for which they have been trained. The central idea does not focus exclusively on the intellectual side, but on the development of skills, a broader concept than the simple accumulation of information, as mentioned above. Knowledge can be limited and, therefore, predetermined, whereas skills, on the other hand, give students autonomy and the ability to acquire new abilities and information. This highlights the undeniable value of teachers and the major responsibility they bear. Education must focus, first and foremost, on its main actors: teachers and students.

2. The Formative Mission of Education

Starting from the premise of the importance of the teacher's role, the concept of social education is based on a humanistic dimension, directly involving the affective component. Inclusive education is essential for the development of a balanced conscience, [15] connected to moral and ethical values. [18]

The early cultivation of these values is essential, if not decisive, for the formation of a civic sense focused on the acquisition of full autonomy. Equally, it is true that character formation begins in the family and is subsequently shaped within the institutional framework of the educational institution, without minimizing the related role of the teacher [19].

In this context, inclusive education is based on a humanistic foundation that seeks both to develop the moral dimension of the individual and to cultivate a spirit of fellowship. [13] The feeling of solidarity and, in particular, compassion must be cultivated in the family, with the teacher playing a complementary but essential role in reinforcing these principles. Inclusive education ultimately involves transmitting values by personal example [10].

The shortcomings of education in Romania are not caused exclusively by political instability, reforms, and the derisory decisions of the Ministry of Education, but also by the way in which society understands the concept of inclusive education. Controversy often arises between the two concepts of equity and equality. Many parents do not understand why certain students are treated differently, considering these measures to be an affront to their children's academic dignity. Of course, it is even worse when the teacher himself does not understand the distinction between the two concepts and the need for differentiated treatment between undiagnosed students and those recognized as having special needs. In fact, problems also arise in the way the two concepts are implemented. A student's special needs should not lead to a plan of action that clearly isolates that student from the group. The sensitivity with which the teacher approaches the situation is extremely important. [20] They must convey the idea of compassion and understanding to the class, without giving rise to discussions, malicious reactions, or frustrations. Similarly, in the case of students with special needs, measures must be proportionate and adapted. It is important to note that adaptability does not imply exclusion.

The successive transitions undergone by the Romanian education system have generated, against a backdrop of chronic institutional instability, a profound structural fragility. The frequent rotation of education ministers, discontinuous reforms, and the lack of a coherent long-term vision have produced cracks that have never been repaired with sustainable solutions. This instability is not just a statistical reality, but one experienced daily by students, teachers, and parents. The picture of Romanian education paints a bland, colorless image, even though the intentions were good, but the lack of skill has led to the current result. While these dysfunctions affect the education system in general, they are much more intense in the case of a category that is often marginalized in public discourse: students with special educational needs (SEN - special education needs). For them, the discrepancy between norms and reality is perceived with their own senses.

While the last century was marked by contrasts and laid the foundations for rapid change, the current century tends to complete the processes that were started. The last decade has been characterized by major technological discoveries and a continuous wave of innovations that have changed individuals' lifestyles and, implicitly, social expectations. This transformation has also reshaped the education sector. It is worth noting that when development is not gradual but rapid, gaps, insufficiently regulated areas, and aspects that are difficult to anticipate at the time of implementation inevitably arise. Any construction carried out in a hurry, with structural gaps tolerated, becomes vulnerable. Education is not immune to such risks. The accelerated pace of digitization is forcing the education system to align itself with unrealistic time standards. The educational process cannot be compressed without significant losses: the transmission of knowledge, understanding, and evaluation require time and reflection [21].

The educational reforms promoted in recent years have largely functioned as superficial interventions, as band-aids, and not even good quality ones at that. Legislative measures in a system as important as education require a particularly delicate approach, not to mention the allocation of major financial resources. Under these circumstances, these revolutionary measures (as presented by the authors) have temporarily covered up the dysfunctions without actually remedying them. In the absence of an honest assessment of the reality in schools, these reforms have paradoxically contributed to accentuating existing imbalances. In other words, the imperfections were "covered up" through a process of cosmetic change that was intended not to remove them, but to hide them.

3. Inclusive Education in the Vise Between Law and Implementation

At present, it is clear that the education system is at a decisive moment, marked by technological and social transformations. Change cannot be reduced to the mechanical implementation of external models, which has been attempted in various forms over time. Romania does not have the coherence of established educational systems (such as the Finnish one), but it has the capacity to build its own plans, adapted to the national context. Without this adaptation, any reform risks remaining a formal exercise, out of touch with reality.

We note that recent measures, such as the abolition of school competitions at the middle school level, remove the recognition of performance and diminish student motivation. Other measures with the same negative impact, such as the reduction or elimination of school scholarships, indicate that policies to prevent school dropouts are losing sight of the reality criterion. These decisions affect the entire system, but their impact is much more severe in the case of vulnerable students, especially those with special education needs (SEN) [10].

Without resorting to prophetic statements, it can be said that the current moment is a decisive one for action. Postponing concrete measures risks having irreversible effects on the education system, since, in the absence of organized collective efforts, the way in which time and evolution shape education can lead to imbalances that are difficult to remedy. Change is inevitable. However, responsibility for their direction lies with those who are directly or indirectly at the helm of decision-making, provided that they identify and capitalize on favorable "currents."

Although desegregation and school inclusion are enshrined in law, in practice they remain mere aspirations. A report by the Ministry of Education indicates a percentage of 23.2% as a warning sign of segregation in classrooms. Organizing students according to seemingly functional criteria actually leads to isolation and exclusion.

A common example is the placement of students with disabilities in the back rows, a practice that contravenes Framework Order No. 6.134/21.12.2016 [22], which explicitly prohibits any form of segregation, including on the basis of disability. Although the methodological norms classify this practice as school segregation, it persists in many educational institutions, without sanctions or real control mechanisms.

School inclusion is often only formal. [14] Support teachers are insufficient and, in many cases, only present occasionally. Human resources are limited, and personalized educational intervention, which is essential for children with SEN, is fragmented or non-existent.

Making school premises accessible is a legal obligation, but the reality on the ground proves otherwise. In rural and peri-urban areas, many schools do not have the financial resources necessary to adapt their premises, and responsibility is often transferred to the child's legal representatives, with parents often having to contribute from their own budget to make educational facilities accessible.

A study conducted by the organization Save the Children reveals that in 54.7% of schools with students with special educational needs, the school counselor is present only weekly or occasionally, and 27.1% of the units analyzed do not have physical adaptations for children with disabilities. [23] These data confirm the significant discrepancy between the regulatory framework and its practical implementation. The removal of certain financial facilities for people with disabilities, through the amendments introduced by Government Emergency Ordinance No. 89/2025, constitutes further evidence of the withdrawal of institutional support. Instead of strengthening inclusion, recent policies risk increasing the vulnerability of these children.

Curriculum adaptation and differentiated assessment are provided more as recommendations, and therapeutic services remain outsourced, not integrated into the education system. Although there are special places reserved for students with SEN upon admission to high school, their integration into mainstream education remains problematic. The rigidity of

the curriculum and the reluctance of teachers to adapt the educational process mean that the principle of equality is only formally respected.

Education will fulfill its purpose only when the focus is no longer exclusively on top performance, but truly includes all categories of students. [24] Currently, inclusion and desegregation remain largely normative concepts, with no substantial reflection in the reality of schools. The problem is not a lack of principles or legal framework, but a lack of commitment and concrete mechanisms for implementation. As long as the rights of students with special educational needs remain declarative, the education system will continue to produce subtle forms of exclusion. The responsibility for change lies with those who decide the direction of education, but also with society, which must transform inclusion from an ideal into current practice.

4. The Pillars of Inclusive Education

The achievement of inclusive education is based on three essential pillars which, in our view, have the capacity to lead to the desired outcome. The goal of effectively integrating children with special educational needs (SEN) into the classroom can be achieved through the combined involvement of the following factors: the educational institution, which must provide the teacher with the necessary material and human resources; the teacher, who has the obligation to adapt the curriculum and develop a personalized educational program; institutions that are interdependent with the school; and the community as a whole [25].

It is essential to emphasize that the responsibility for inclusion cannot be placed solely on the classroom teacher, even if they demonstrate good faith and willingness. Genuine integration requires social collaboration, involving classmates, parents, and other members of the community [6]. Only by understanding each other's needs can we formulate an educational response that is appropriate and proportionate to those needs.

Technological systems can be a valuable tool for students with SEN, as digital resources are often built on visual and auditory support, with a multisensory character that facilitates the assimilation of information. However, given that some of these students are also diagnosed with disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), technological devices must be used with caution to avoid distracting them in a way that could affect the teaching and learning process.

Although the use of digital systems can be distracting for some students, in the case of children with SEN, they can help simplify the process of understanding and filtering information. Without minimizing the benefits of technology for other students, it can be argued that the appropriate selection and dosage of digital platforms and materials particularly benefits students with special educational needs, as the specific nature of these difficulties requires the use of clear, structured tools adapted to the individual level of development.

5. Conclusions

The normative framework must exist and must be continuously adapted to social and educational transformations [5]. However, beyond the mere existence of legal norms, the real implementation of inclusive education depends essentially on human willingness to engage, on compassion, and on the understanding of the specific needs of children with special educational needs [2].

Teachers represent the primary role models to whom students direct their attention, and the way in which they relate to students with such needs directly influences the behavior and attitudes of the other pupils. Therefore, the attitude of the teacher becomes an essential factor in building an educational environment based on respect, solidarity, and acceptance.

In the context of the accelerated development of technology [12], society appears, in certain situations, to have lost part of its human dimension. The excessive use of digital tools and the strong emphasis placed on performance may lead to a distancing from the concrete reality of the educational process and from the individual needs of students.

In this context, perfection cannot be evaluated uniformly. In the case of children with special educational needs, standards of progress must be related to the real possibilities of each student, to the particularities of their development, and to the individual factors that influence the learning process. Inclusive education does not imply uniformity, but rather the recognition and valorization of human diversity [3].

In other words, for inclusive education to become a reality and not merely a normative aspiration, it is necessary to implement pedagogical strategies adapted to the needs of children with special educational needs. First and foremost, a fundamental objective is the individualization of the educational process, through the development of personalized educational plans that take into account each student's pace of development, cognitive abilities, and emotional particularities [8].

Another important strategy involves adapting the curriculum and assessment methods, so that a student's progress is evaluated in relation to their own level of development rather than exclusively against the general standards of the class [4]. In this sense, assessment should have a formative character, aiming to support the gradual development of competencies and the consolidation of the student's autonomy.

Furthermore, the use of interactive and multisensory teaching methods can facilitate the understanding of information and support the learning process. Digital tools, visual materials, and practical activities can help structure knowledge in a manner that is more accessible for students with learning difficulties [11].

Another essential objective is the development of social and emotional competencies, through the creation of an educational climate based on cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect. The genuine integration of children with special educational needs cannot be achieved solely through administrative measures, but through the cultivation of a culture of inclusion

at the level of the entire school community [9].

Finally, collaboration between the school, the family, and specialists (psychologists, school counselors, speech therapists, or support teachers) represents a fundamental condition for the success of educational intervention. Only through an interdisciplinary approach and through constant dialogue between all the actors involved can the authentic integration of children with special educational needs into the school environment be ensured.

Abbreviations

SEN	Special Education Needs
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Author Contributions

Ghita Darius-Alexandru: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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