

NOTES ABOUT DIGITAL EDUCATION IN DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract

Digitalization can be defined as a socio-technical process of applying digitalization techniques in social and institutional contexts that make digital technologies infrastructural. The context of increasing digitalization and connection of the real world to the digital world has led to changes in people everyday lives, markets, business relationships and value chains. Education accompanies and adapts to the new digital age. Digital education is a political intention. But is it already a reality?

The pandemic situation outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 came, suddenly, to put the use of technologies at an immediate and high level, but perhaps without full preparation. This unexpected use demonstrates the imperative need for concerted action to guarantee conscious and democratic access.

If education values digital, another question arises as how to use the new ways to achieve a priority for the European Union: education about the European Union. It seems so obvious and simple and it is still so fragile and scattered. European literacy is still a skill to be acquired at a minimum level for most of the population in the Member States, as known by the Commission.

In this context, it is intended to debate the valuation of the European Union's intentions in achieving access to digital media for education.

This study, based on the literature review methodology, intends to look at the legislative and preparatory documents and cases presented in the literature that consecrate the issue of digital education. For this purpose, an integrative literature review will be used. Theoretical-academic, it is consolidated through systematic and methodologically selected normative interpretation of national, international legal texts and European Union law.

Keywords: digital education, democracy, European Union.

1 INTRODUCTION

Digitalization can be defined as a socio-technical process of applying digitalization techniques in social and institutional contexts that make digital technologies infrastructural. The context of increasing digitalization and connection of the real world to the digital world has led to changes in people everyday lives, markets, business relationships and value chains. Education accompanies and adapts to the new digital age. Digital education is a political intention. But is it already a reality? The whole transition to the digital age raises new challenges and opportunities [1], but also risks of misinformation and exclusion.

The holistic intention of digital education is inserted in one of the priorities of action of the recent European Commission, which places the digital strategy in an intention to build a digital future for Europe [2] and that includes education through the construction of skills and jobs [3]. But education is really present in all the Commission's six priorities for 2019-2024 [4]. The pandemic situation outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 came, suddenly, to put the use of technologies at an immediate and high level, but perhaps without full preparation. This unexpected use demonstrates the imperative need for concerted action [1] to guarantee conscious and democratic access [5].

If education values digital, another question arises as how to use the new ways to achieve a priority for the European Union: education about the European Union. It seems so obvious and simple and it is still so fragile and scattered. Only 65% of European citizens feel familiar with the reality of the EU [6, p. 9]. And European literacy is still a skill to be acquired at a minimum level for most of the population in the Member States, as known by the Commission [7, pp. 68–73]. It is intended to discuss the extent of digital education as already a reality. In this context, it is intended to debate the valuation of the European Union's intentions in achieving access to digital media for education.

This study, based on the literature review methodology, intends to look at the legislative and preparatory documents and cases presented in the literature that consecrate the issue of digital education. For this purpose, an integrative literature review will be used. Theoretical-academic, it is consolidated through systematic and methodologically selected normative interpretation of national, international legal texts and European Union law. Without presenting quantitative data, the aim is to bring to discussion and debate the role, value and capacity of access to digital education as intended by current legislative intentions.

The analysis of the progress achieved historically towards the objectives of consolidating the right to digital education leads to the recommendation to States, in its internal aspect and as members of international organizations, to value education as a vehicle for the realization of democratic values. To this end, citizens' access to new technologies will be paramount if and to the extent that public policies value and promote it.

2 DIGITAL EDUCATION

As previously mentioned, digital technologies and their use are currently impacting the transformation of society and the economy more profound and more widespread than any other transformation occurred in history [8].

Digitalization can be defined as a disruptive change of organizations supported by digital technologies. As disruptive forces transform the different sectors of activity, including education, many institutions move towards digitalization and embody a more innovative mindset to thrive in this new era. Organizations which do not take advantage of this moment to evolve and transform themselves, are in danger of disappearing or being absorbed by more agile organizations [9].

According to [10], digital is intangible. For this reason, it is often difficult to identify and understand the different needs, perspectives and skills gaps of people who must change along with technology. Thus, it can be assumed that education is an imperative of society where education can be seen as the process of identifying and implementing skills made possible by new scientific and technological knowledge and implemented within a teaching context to respond to new needs [11].

In addition to the implicit and explicit implications of digitization, the world is experiencing the pandemic situation - COVID-19 - with implications for society, namely in education. The pandemic had and has a significant impact on online education. Schools and universities have been forced to switch to a 100% online or hybrid mode (a combination of face-to-face and online teaching). This represents an opportunity to investigate best practices in pedagogy, technology, and assessments of the different disciplines taught to maintain the level of involvement, personal connection, and presence as one would expect within a classroom in the environment [12].

In addition to adopting the referred virtual education (on_line), through the Internet, other alternatives have emerged, namely courses, webinars, videoconferences, online conferences, television programs, e-mail and telecommunications. The objective of these alternatives is to keep the continuous professional development accessible and adaptable in these restrictive conditions [13].

3 THE EDUCATION ISSUE

The digital age is definitely present. It was already thought, discussed and programmed, but imposed itself in a way never imagined for the worst reasons and with a speed that it would not be possible to believe. Education accompanies and adapts to the new digital age. Digital education is a political intention.

In the European Union, education is a contributing factor to fundamental values. These values are presented in the instituting Treaty of the Union, in accordance with its Preamble and Article 2 thereof. They are peace, security, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, solidarity and mutual respect, sustainable economic growth and social inclusion and justice, respecting and enriching cultural diversity. And the right to education emerges as a fundamental right in Article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union [14, p. 195].

Although education is not a common policy, i.e. it is not an exclusive competence of the European Union, it emerges as an area in which the European Union is taking action to support, coordinate or supplement member states' action (see Article 6 TFEU) [15, p. 216].

In this way, the Union's recent priority, enshrined in the construction of the European Pillar of Social Rights [16], aims to transform education into a right for all in Europe. However, there are still students without internet access and employers find it difficult to recruit workers with the necessary digital qualifications. The path is not yet effective.

The holistic intention of digital education is part of the recent European Commission's priorities for action, which puts the digital strategy in an intention to build a digital future for Europe and includes education through skills building and jobs [3]. In reality, education is present in all six priorities of the Commission [17] to 2019-2024 [4].

Interesting to see, it is possible to find the connection of digital education with the most varied policies, such as the protection of the elderly. As for some older persons digitalization can also be an obstacle, there is a need to improve digital skills and the accessibility of digital services [18, p. 8].

4 EDUCATION ABOUT EUROPEAN UNION

If education, as a whole, values digital, another question arises on how to use the new means to achieve a priority for the European Union: education over the European Union. The information on the European Union seems so obvious, simple and available but it is still so fragile and scattered. In fact, only 65% of European citizens are familiar with the reality of the EU [6, p. 9]. And European literacy is still a competence to be acquired at a minimum level for the majority of the population of the Member States, as the Commission sees [7, pp. 68–73] for effective citizenship.

This is because the vitality of the European Union (EU) depends to a large extent on a strong European identity and on the identification of citizens with the EU, while preserving national identity. The success of the European project is based on its values. It is therefore important to strengthen citizens' knowledge and understanding of the union's history and culture, their fundamental values and rights, essential principles and decisions, as well as decision-making processes at EU level [7, p. 68]. This will result in the promotion of global citizenship and the role of the EU as a global player.

This identification has not yet been reached. Sixty years after the Treaty of Rome, EU citizens have not yet fully defined their European identity. Only 56% of EU citizens feel connected to the EU, of which only 14% feel very connected [19]. These 2018 figures prove that there is still a path of insistence on education on the EU for the ordinary citizen, however redundant it may seem to those who work on these matters. It is true that they have advanced in a very positive sense over the years, it is still not enough.

In 2020, ignorance of the fundamental rights of the European citizen lies in those same values indicated (57% only know their rights of European citizenship), when the 20th anniversary of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights was celebrated in 2021. This instrument appeared in 2001 with the value of a declaration and corresponds to a way of creation by the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union. It was established and acquired a legally binding value with the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, which entered into force in December 2009. It would be desirable that 20 years later it would already constitute a basic level of knowledge for ordinary European citizens. It is still not true. This means that there is a necessary path to be followed, insisting on the transmission of knowledge about the construction that is the European Union. The more democratic a system of government is, the more inclusive and just the real society will be. Not a mere academic discussion of a doctrine, but a daily work together has continued to bring to all the inhabitants what European history and the Union's legal outcome mean.

Learning about the EU allows for an impact on democracy (including participation, democratic politics and democratic society) and tolerance (including interpersonal relationships, tolerance of different social and cultural groups, and an inclusive society) [7, p. 70] by achieving another vital area that is human rights education. So, education on the EU and on European identity in all its diversity will be considered as new core skills and competences, in particular European literacy, for defining a set of common learning outcomes in this area, such as a minimum level of knowledge, skills and attitudes towards the EU. To this end, stronger data on the situation in the Member States are still needed [7, p. 68].

5 EDUCATION ISSUE AT COVID-19 TIMES

The situation of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 has abruptly put the use of technologies at an immediate and high level but perhaps without complete preparation. This unexpected use

demonstrates the imperative need for concerted action [1] to ensure conscious and democratic access [5]. Digital media have become essential for the whole educational process but access to these means is not yet universal and calls for concrete and urgent action by governments.

The Ministers responsible for higher education in European Higher Education Area (EHEA) recognized that the societies are facing unprecedented challenges connected with the worldwide spread of COVID-19 and its consequences [20]. Digitalisation has allowed most of educational systems to continue to function during the COVID-19 pandemic, although the intensified use of digital means has brought to light certain limits. With its consolidated experience of transnational and international cooperation and research, higher education must take a leading role in exploring and advising on how to address and overcome these limitations [20]. The digital transformation is especially important for the quality of teaching and learning [21].

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected education and training systems around the world and across the Union, putting unprecedented pressure on them [22, p. 9], by providing a huge and unexpected real learning about the use of technologies in immediate time. Still, while the transition to digital teaching and learning has played a key role in enabling the continuity of the learning process, digital education cannot and will not fully replace quality face-to-face teaching and learning [22, p. 10].

6 CONCLUSIONS

The European Union is really valued at achieving access to digital means for education. This is visible in the most varied documents.

Digitization in general, and digital education in particular, is a reality identified in recent literature, emphasized by the current pandemic situation. Digital education goes far beyond online education and is characterized by the use of digital means and aims to empower people with technical and behavioral skills.

In this context, the use of digital media to promote education about the European Union stands out, as it is a factor in promoting democracy. A society more informed about its rights will be a more democratic society. A citizen who is aware of the European Union's values and objectives will be a more participative and attentive citizen to the world.

The study presented leads to the recommendation that states, in their internal aspect and as members of international organizations and, specially, as member of the European Union, value education as a vehicle for the realization of democratic values. Strengthen the right to digital education. Citizens' access to new technologies must be preponderant and in such a way that public policies value and promote it.

It is democracy itself that is strengthened by education through digital media. And the new digital media in use to strengthen education will build knowledge for citizens who live better in democracy.

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