

Educational Engagement in the Digital Transition: Evidence from Romanian Students During COVID-19

Wednesday, 11 March 2026 14:00 (20 minutes)

The COVID-19 pandemic produced major disruptions in educational systems worldwide, with significant implications for students' learning experiences and psychological well-being. The rapid shift toward digital forms of instruction raised important concerns regarding the extent to which students remained academically engaged during extended periods of remote learning. This study explores students' levels of engagement in the context of repeated school closures and home-based education.

The research involved 1,276 pupils (mean age = 15.5 years) enrolled in different educational programs in public schools located in central Romania. To assess students' engagement in the specific context of learning from home, an adapted version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale for Students (UWES-9S) (Schaufeli et al., 2002) was employed. Psychometric evaluation of the instrument revealed a two-factor structure emerging as the principal dimensions of engagement. Furthermore, the study analyzed varying levels of academic involvement according to predefined identification criteria. Beyond the quantitative results, qualitative data derived from students' narratives offered additional insights into their personal experiences with online learning. These reflections highlight how pupils interpreted their educational circumstances through emotional reactions, decreased motivation, digital fatigue, and fluctuating patterns of engagement and disengagement, which may either foster or undermine resilience. The discussion emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing both visible and subtle disruptions affecting the learning process during periods of large-scale educational transformation.

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Session Classification: Green, Safe & Digital Laboratories

Track Classification: General sessions: Green, Safe & Digital Laboratories