

ONLINE NON-FORMAL EDUCATION-PERSPECTIVES FOR ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract: *Non-formal education has a special role, integrated at the level of the educational system, gained normative and theoretical outlines in the second half of the twentieth century. The crisis of classical education in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic has contributed to the creation of means, resources, including the creation of non-formal education institutions, to complement, replace or replace some forms of conventional education. Non-formal education puts the student at the center of the educational process, contributing to the identification and development of his personal talents and abilities and to the completion with new ones in a continuous learning process. The main objective of this study is to determine the results regarding the perception of teachers in pre-university education regarding the ways of conducting non-formal online education. The research occurred in February-May 2021 and was carried out through the socio-pedagogical survey, using as a research tool the questionnaire designed through the google forms platform and distributed to a sample of 251 pre-university teachers in the South Muntenia region by whatsapp and mail. Through the results of this study, we want to obtain information on the knowledge and use of methods and platforms that facilitate online non-formal education, even if non-formal education is largely based on human interactions.*

Keywords: non-formal education, methods, platforms, educational process.

1. Introduction

The 21st century is considered a century of knowledge, especially non-formal knowledge, with an emphasis on self-learning, relevant, and conscious learning. “Non-formal education (non-curricular education, but certified education) is an organized and systematic educational activity, carried out outside the official framework of the school, to facilitate the learning of both children and adults.” (Coombs, 2006: 14)

Compared to formal education, the content and methodology of non-formal education is characterized by more flexibility and openness in the process of design-organization-evaluation of teaching: “a) informal pedagogical design, with programs open to interdisciplinarity and continuing education - in general human, professional, sports, aesthetic, etc. ; b) the organization, optional, non-formalized, with profiling dependent on the options of students and of the school and local communities, with special openings to experiment and innovation; c) the optional, non-formalized evaluation, with psychological accents, priority stimulants, without official grades or qualifications.” (Postan, 2019: 17)

The value of learning experiences for students in non-formal education contexts (from a learning perspective) is more motivational in the first place: “They feel valued, they gain confidence, they learn to communicate better with others, about a certain topic, if they find that there is an interest on the part of the teacher or the class toward their experiences outside school and thus have the opportunity to learn from several perspectives.” (Căpiță, 2011: 7)

Globalization and computerization, the dominant features of the contemporary society in which we live, have constantly generated new educational paradigms and challenges that load the work agenda in the field of education and implicitly require the school and teachers, from all pre-university education cycles, openness and adaptability. The extension of experimentation and the use of technology in conducting non-formal education activities is beneficial and welcome for Romanian education. Education must be rethought in relation to the

evolution of technologies on the one hand, and according to the requirements of society, on the other.

The results of research in the field of online education provide important clues in relation to several dimensions: the importance and state of the technical infrastructure in which the online learning formula is built, the skills of use or exploitation for the benefit of learning, from the perspective of teachers, these equipment, the position and involvement of education factors in the development of this way of activating education (teachers, students, parents, decision makers, etc.), the degree of coverage of the purposes of education through the new technical framework. (Botnaciuc et al., 2020: 47) Also, conducting non-formal education activities in an online environment with students requires more responsibility, initiative and effort than in the case of face-to-face activities.

Against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic, which has led to the closure of several schools around the world for quite some time, teachers have been challenged to adapt quickly and send an important message to students: formal and non-formal education activities in and out of school. or other organizational frameworks, but with online realization tools accessible to all. These have been achieved effectively only with great determination, and significant progress has been made.

2. Problem statement

In the context of the Covid 19 pandemic, school activities have been carried out for the most part and for long periods in the online environment in pre-university education. Thus, the teaching-learning-assessment methods had to be adapted for developing teaching activities carried out in accordance with the curriculum, but also with the specific online learning environment. However, school activities and school life are not limited to the organization and development of curricular teaching activities. Non-formal education and specific activities contribute to the development of students' knowledge, attitudes and skills alongside formal education, playing an important role in the development of their specific skills. It would be interesting to know whether effective means and strategies of work have been found and used for non-formal education activities in the online environment, and pre-university education units could continue to use them.

3. Research questions

Non-formal education can be conceived as a set of actions that are carried out outside the school and through which bridges are made between the knowledge taught by teachers in school and their implementation. Through this type of education, a new approach to learning is achieved through pleasant or motivating activities. The key question is whether non-formal education can be achieved by online educational platforms. Then, we would like to investigate the teachers' perception of this aspect and whether they know and use educational platforms in conducting non-formal education activities; if they have information on the use of IT programs for conducting educational activities; if they consider that the online environment is difficult for non-formal education and consider that it would be an advantage of conducting non-formal education activities for students and teachers online. We also considered it necessary to determine the opinion of teachers about the interest shown by students and the skills they can develop or develop in them non-formal online education activities.

4. Purpose of the study

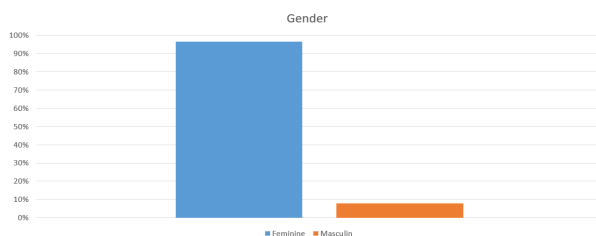
The study determines whether non-formal education has successfully accompanied formal education in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic, both forms of education being necessary to occur in certain periods, during the more than two years of a pandemic, the online environment and whether optimal options have been found. We also investigate if, in general, certain ways of achieving non-formal online education could be preserved. Specific to non-formal education is the fact that students can participate voluntarily and involve more the

practical component of learning. Even if this form of activity occurs in an organized setting, students can participate voluntarily, without waiting for the specific rewards of formal education, grades and grades. Also, absence may not apply to students who do not participate. However, even in non-formal education activities, there are clear learning objectives set for the types of school activities that occur in a non-formal setting, the only difference is that the achievement of these objectives is achieved differently from teaching-learning-assessment. formal. The crisis in education caused by the Covid 19 pandemic greatly influenced both the organization and method of conducting teaching activities and contributed to the development of attitudes and skills in both teachers and students. Thus, by using mobile devices, a way of collaborative learning was found. Of course, non-formal online education activities and online education platforms should not be used exclusively, but in certain sequences of an activity or in activities that offer the opportunity “learning by doing” it would be good to retain it. These working tools encourage participation, collaboration and provide immediate feedback on the achievement of the objectives set in non-formal school activities.

5. Research methods

Through the socio-pedagogical survey, we used the questionnaire as a research tool using the google forms platform. Because in a pandemic context, its distribution and completion could not be done otherwise, we distributed them via WhatsApp in groups consisting of teachers in pre-university education, on e-mail addresses, or with the help of social networks. Numerous 251 teachers, primary, secondary and high school teachers from the South Muntenia region, Romania, expressed their interest in the topic of the questionnaire, and the answers were confidential. Using the questions in the questionnaire, we obtained answers regarding the possibility of conducting non-formal school activities in an online environment, the educational platforms they use, the IT programs used in these activities, the difficulties and advantages of non-formal online education, the students’ interest and attitudes. types of activities, assessments of methods that would be effective for online non-formal education, the role of non-formal education in the training of skills in students. 96.4% of respondents are female. It is obvious that in the Romanian pre-university system more women work as it results from the data obtained from previous research conducted at the country level. According to them, “At the levels of education, most female teachers work in preschool education, where they have a share of 99.6% and mass primary 88.6% as well as in special primary and special secondary education (89.6%, respectively 82.4%). In primary, high school and post-secondary education, women represent about 70% of the total teaching staff. The lowest share is registered in vocational education 63.4% In the case of post-secondary education we notice a slight increase in the share of female staff, up to the value of 76.4%.” (Otilia Apostu end al. 2015: 14-15).

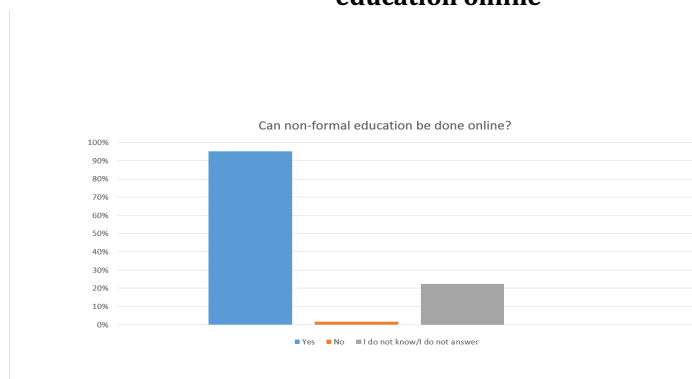
Figure 1. Students representation related to gender



Other research shows that in 2020, at the levels of education, most female teachers work in preschool (99.7%) and primary education (91.1%). In secondary education, in general,

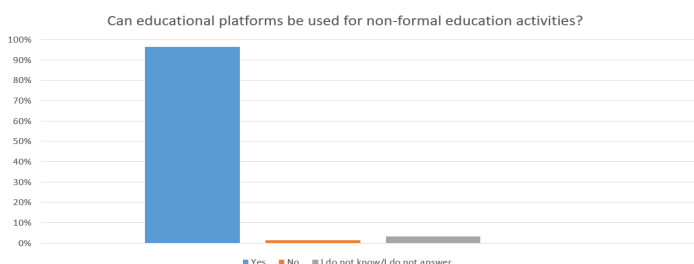
73.5% of teachers are women... . . . In high school, the number of female teachers is higher in urban schools (72.3%) than in schools rural (67.8%).” (ME, 2021: 49). A special advantage of non-formal education is that it is possible to choose how students can learn. Non-formal education can considerably use diverse, dynamic and interactive activities that also play a role in developing creativity. With the help of innovative methods and means, a flexible learning environment can be facilitated. Although apparently non-formal education is largely based on human interactions and is more difficult to achieve online, 95.2% of teachers appreciated that non-formal school activities can be carried out online.

Figure 2. Perception of teachers regarding the possibility of completing non-formal education online



Educational platforms support the learning process and can be accessed by sources of information or online media on various topics. The use of educational platforms and portals, new generation technologies and applications of the Internet, social media networks and social media creates new environments for formal or non-formal learning. 96.4% of the teachers participating in this study positively appreciated these aspects. Educational platforms improve the quality of non-formal activities, contribute to the acquisition of active and autonomous learning processes, individually and in groups. In this regard, the computer skills of students can be used constructively, especially since the current generation are accustomed to using the computer frequently and thus can spend their free time with specific non-formal education activities.

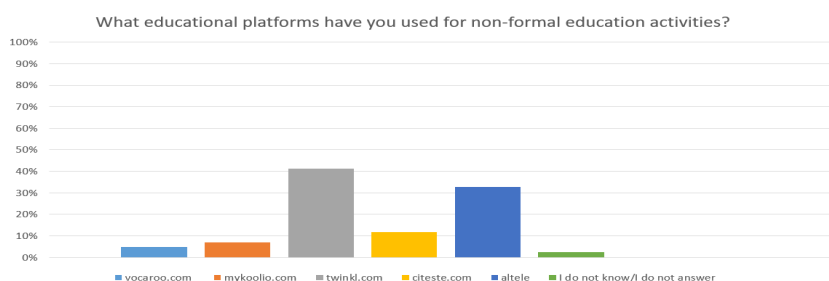
Figure 3. Graphic representation of the use of educational platforms in non-formal education activities



An educational platform must meet numerous requirements, the most important of which would be: to use a friendly interface adaptable to the dynamics of the educational process, to use a logical support of synchronous and asynchronous communication,

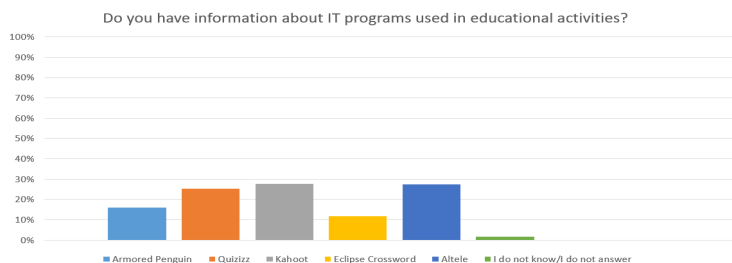
information must be monitored, to provide the possibility of management accessible content of the educational content, to use educational content editing modules, to may record feedback on the quality of the educational services offered, as well as the quality of the educational platform, etc. Educational platforms used for both non-formal and formal education school activities are diverse and are used depending on the specifics of the activity carried out, at a certain time (organization, planning, development). I chose to examine the use of some of them by teachers: vocaroo.com (for making audio recordings), mykoolio.com (for interactive educational games), twinkl.com (for teaching materials), citeste.ro. 41.2% of respondents used the educational platform twinkl.com (for teaching materials), 32.8% use other educational platforms than those mentioned in the question, 11.6% use citeste.ro (for ebooks or audiobooks in Romanian).

Figure 4. Graphic representation of the use of educational platforms by teachers



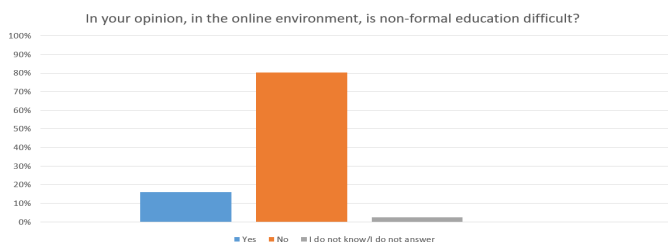
The digital transformation has changed society, with an increasing impact on everyday life. However, before the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on education and training was much more limited. The pandemic has shown that it is essential to have an education and training system ready for the digital age. Creative, useful and safe use of the internet by students is essential. Attention, critical thinking, discrimination, desire, will, creativity, identification, expression and management of true feelings or needs are severely affected and affect his or her entire life, including how he or she will behave as a teenager or adult. Given the opportunities that the Internet offers in accessing knowledge, communication and participation, the benefits that accessing it can have in developing the skills needed for the 21st century, but also the wide range of risks and dangers to which children can be exposed, we consider it essential that decisions that we take for the younger generation to be based on real needs and current data. Among the IT programs that can be used to conduct non-formal education activities, the respondent teachers know Kahoot (27.8%), 27.4% know various other programs that were not specified in the question, Quizizz (25.4%), 16.1% are unaware of this type of program.

Figure 5. Graphic representation regarding the knowledge of some IT programs that can be used in educational activities



Regarding the difficulties of conducting non-formal education activities in the online environment, these could be determined by the impossibility of some teachers to use the technology, the lack of the necessary skills, or the lack of concerns in this regard. There are also issues related to the habits that children acquire in the family regarding the use of the Internet, the need for child safety, the latter process being part of the responsibility of educational institutions. It is also essential to find the most appropriate implementation strategies and to use appropriate methods to achieve non-formal education in an online environment. 80.4% of the teachers who answered the questions the questionnaire considered that it is not difficult to conduct non-formal education in the online environment while 16% considered it difficult, the others not being ready to answer. Among the advantages of non-formal education we can list the following: it is focused on the learning process, not in the teaching process, demands students differently; has a curriculum of choice, flexible and varied for diverse and attractive activities, depending on the interests of students, special skills and their aspirations; contributes to the broadening and enrichment of the general and specialized culture of the students, offering activities to complete the knowledge; ensures a quick updating of information in various fields, being interested in maintaining the interest of the public, offering flexible alternatives emphasizing the immediate applicability of knowledge and not their memorization, etc. In the opinion of teachers, the online environment is advantageous for non-formal education, 79.6% answered in the affirmative based on these general characteristics of non-formal education. 14% considered the online environment to be unfavorable for this type of education.

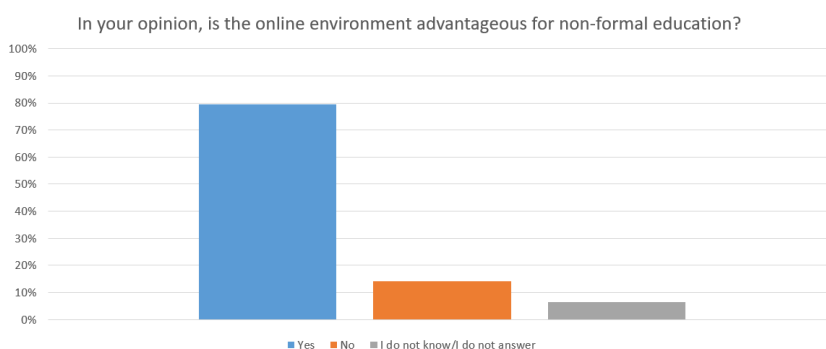
Figure 6. Graphic representation of the online environment as advantageous for non-formal education



59.6% of teachers considered that students participate with more interest in non-formal education activities online than on site, 30.5% denied the existence of this interest of

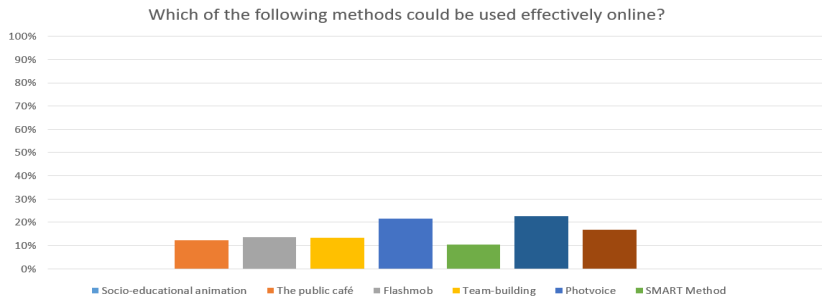
students, and 10.4% did not respond. As the information from outside the school is organized on criteria other than academic and/or didactic, the teacher must be prepared to reorganize his own approach according to what is beyond the school gate and textbooks, so that students participate curiously. It must adapt to an informational and organizational universe according to other rules that it does not establish in the activity of designing formal education activities. The teacher must identify ways to integrate all learning opportunities outside the school into his own teaching approach to provide both a maximum educational offer, unified logic of what is to be explored and the interest and motivation of students to participate.

Figure 7. Opinion on students' interest in participating in online or on site non-formal education activities



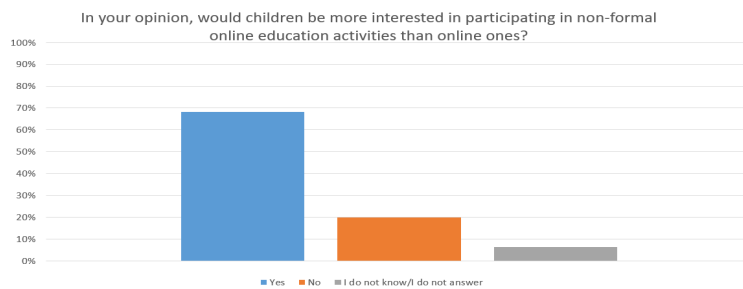
In the context of a modern school, the role of the teacher is to design and organize non-formal education activities to contribute to the development of skills needed in students, skills that overlap and intertwine to form their profile anchored in the social and cultural reality of which they are part. The purpose of integrating technology into non-formal education activities determines the methods and techniques of working with students. Unlike previous generations, current generations of students are much more independent in their thinking. Students use digital resources and relate differently to society. Teachers must create a stimulating learning environment, based on the development of skills, abilities and attitudes that consider both their personal interests and the demands of the society in which they live. Regarding the methods used effectively in non-formal online education, we first listed several methods: socio-educational animation, public cafe, flashmob, team-building, photovoce, SMART method, open space technology-OST, educational theater. From these methods, they had a choice that they can use in the non-formal education activities carried out online. Among the most appreciated methods that can be used were socio-educational animation (45.4%), 16.9% chose open space technology-OST, team-building (13.3%), SMART method (10.4 %).

Figure 8. Graphic representation of the use of efficient methods in non-formal education activities online



Non-formal education provides students with a better understanding of society and the environment. The social competence of non-formal education includes the ability to judge and act in various social situations. It is based on the ability and willingness to relate to an empathic and responsible manner and the formation of student behavior in this way is based on relationships and values. It is done to train students in the ability to cooperate and communicate, the ability to work in a team and manage conflicts, as well as to understand the concepts of democracy and interculturality. 68.2% of teachers positively appreciate these values of non-formal education.

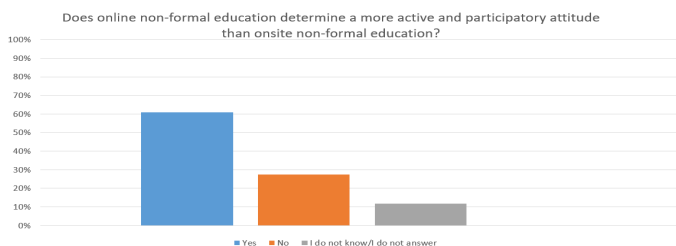
Figure 9. Graphic representation on the role of non-formal education in understanding society and the environment



The online environment must not be devoid of non-formal education, it helps students learn how to be present online safely and be able to identify sources of danger, how to use their own knowledge gained from math, computer and online classes. In addition, how to capitalize on their passion for photo-video in a world dominated by visuals, and the traditional setting offers limited opportunities to explore these talents. They can learn how to film, edit, even use a green screen for spectacular results, etc. Non-formal education provides an environment in which the student can discover new things about himself and the world around him, live unique experiences, develop new skills and outline a set of values that will help him evolve personally and professionally. The advantages of online non-formal education activities were appreciated

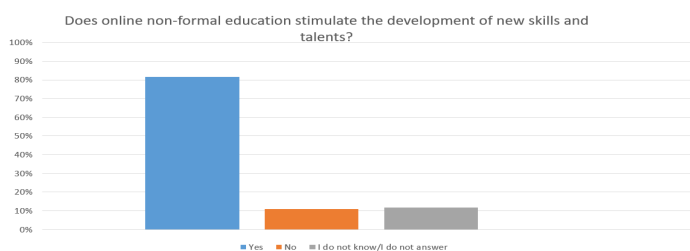
by 61% of the teachers, who considered that the activities carried out in this way help form a more active and participatory attitude than those carried out on site.

Figure 10. Graphic representation of the teachers' perception of active and participatory attitude forming through non-formal educational activities online



Through non-formal education programs, students can get to know each other better and explore and share their experiences with others, based on their own learning needs. Students are the center of the learning process, a process through which they shape their attitudes, develop new skills, cultivate their own value system. All online non-formal education programs invite reflection, self-analysis, processes through which personal qualities are revealed, all through interaction and knowledge sharing. Driving new communication technologies, considering the technical-scientific progress, capitalizing on the opportunities offered by the Internet, television, computers, and non-formal education carried out in the online environment is, continues, meeting the requirements and needs of lifelong learning. Generally, non-formal education provides a set of necessary experiences, useful for each student, complements the other forms of education through the practice and cultivation of different inclinations, skills and abilities, the manifestation of talents in art, culture, music, sports, painting, IT etc. 81.5% of teachers appreciate that online non-formal education develops new skills and talents.

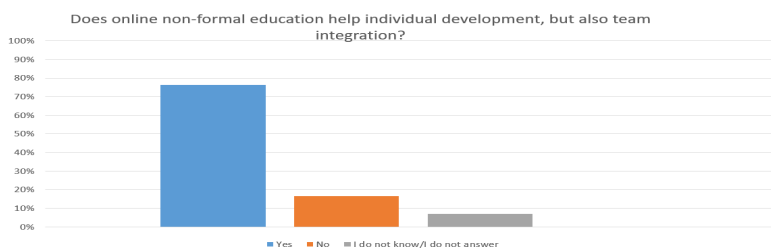
Figure11. Teachers' perception of the role of non-formal online education in the development of new skills and talents



Teamwork in non-formal education activities generally provides an opportunity to learn new things through collaboration. It involves cooperation, negotiation, active listening and understanding the needs of the other members of the team, with a common goal: success! In the team, each member has his role clearly and none of is less important than the others. The

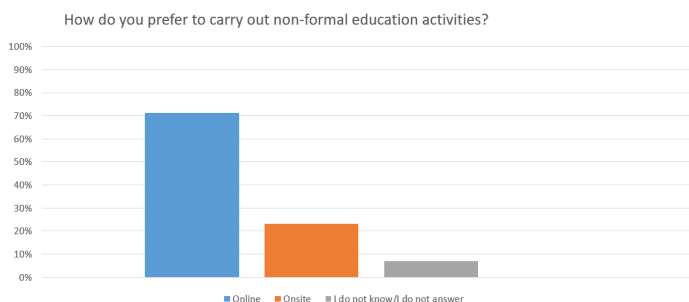
qualities of each one lead to the success of the team and of each one. Teamwork has a formidable opponent, namely, competitiveness. Competing with others is not always beneficial and should not become a goal of the child’s activity. Constructive competition is with itself, trying with each new project to push its limits, to learn new things and, finally, to have the satisfaction of doing well with its own strengths and its evolution. 76.4% of respondents consider that the online environment for conducting non-formal education activities offers opportunities for students to develop individually, but also to integrate into the team, and 16.8% believe that conducting these types of activities does not create skills this kind.

Figure 11. Teachers’ perception of non-formal education, intellectual development and teamwork



71.2% of teachers prefer to conduct non-formal education activities online, and 23.2% online. The pandemic coronavirus has fundamentally changed the way we live. In the context of significant social transformations, life imposes the need for involving new knowledge, skills and/or additional skills for all individuals. The common problem of teachers in Romania is to capture the student's attention using digital material during non-formal education activities. In recent decades, humans have discovered new methods of communication and information, such as the telephone, television, and the Internet. So communication came to a hard line 100 years ago. No matter how much we want non-formal online education to work in the same way for all students, we must consider the different ways in which students can best acquire knowledge and develop attitudes and skills.

Figure 12. Graphic representation regarding teachers’ objection on the conduct of non-formal education activities online or on site



6. Findings

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a major shift in the use of “digital” technologies in education, and the main question is whether this change is only temporary or whether it will be perpetuated and further developed in formal and non-formal education activities. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on digitalization in education has been significant. The response to the changes caused by the pandemic has been generally positive on the part of teachers, accepting the change and considering that certain practices of conducting activities in the online environment should be maintained or refined. Digital tools have been little used in face-to-face non-formal education, being only partially used in teaching and learning practices or in the assessment processes related to the formal learning process. Generally, it seems that teachers are more willing to use digital tools. However, teachers do not have fully extended digital skills, and this aspect would require a more in-depth analysis. This analysis would also consider aspects related to the use of certain platforms, IT programs, teaching strategies that can be used in the online environment. We live in an age where digitization continues, and online education is a consequence of digitization. This may be the beginning of the change in the education system we are used to, and the involvement of teachers could ensure the stimulation and guidance of students for sustainable education and through the non-formal education activities thus carried out.

7. Conclusions

In the case of non-formal education, the emphasis is on action-based learning, peer learning and voluntary work. “The skills and attitudes developed by students in non-formal learning include interpersonal skills, teamwork, self-confidence, discipline, responsibility, planning skills, coordination and organization/project management skills, the ability to solve practical problems.” (Costea et al., 2009: 53)

The activities of non-formal education must be based on a methodology focused on action, operation, so on the promotion of interactive methods that require the mechanisms of thinking, intelligence, imagination and creativity. The framework, space and time of learning is characterized by diversity and flexibility, involves the identification of learning needs, thus ensuring the appropriate adaptation to the learning process and are characterized by setting learning objectives, being well structured, resources being organized efficiently. Of course, learning through non-formal education involves acquiring new knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as learning through the other two types of education. Personal development is essential in the context of non-formal education. Non-formal education is carried out through and for personal development, ie for improving one's own skills.

A modern education system must be open to accepting, promoting and improving digitization and combining different teaching methods so that it can give the student, as a future citizen, the ability to understand the world. Thus, by analyzing certain aspects of the realization of non-formal education and digital tools for organizing online learning, it was shown that the traditional education system should be radically reset, being largely too rigid. During the quarantine, if we look at the effectiveness of non-formal education, it was a real challenge. Teachers have started to get involved in various activities, webinars, online exchange of good practices, have studied new ways of organizing interactive activities of non-formal education, have developed various methodological guides, etc. Thus, the students' intelligence was better used, the skills were developed. Most teachers expressed the opinion that the ability to adapt to the new is essential, showing creativity and originality.

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