PSYCHOLOGY IN THE FUNCTION OF THE WELL-BEING OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

International Thematic Proceedia

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EQUITY OF EMERGENCY REMOTE EDUCATION IN SERBIA: A CASE STUDY OF A ROMA STUDENT'S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES[2]

Abstract

The aim of the study is to provide a particular portrayal of emergency remote education (ERE) in Serbia from the perspective of its most disadvantaged partakers. The study applied a single-case study design. The participant was an 11-year-old Roma boy, attending the 5th grade of elementary school in Belgrade. Since October 2019, a group of university students and teaching staff have been providing learning support for the student twice a week. For approximately two and a half years, the researchers continuously produced and/or collected participant-observations, anecdotal notes, the content of the Viber group, artefacts from the learning/teaching process, and notes from interviews with the pupil and his parents. The data from these multiple sources were merged and analysed using event structure analysis. From the analysed data the researchers reconstructed how the Roma student experienced ERE and which factors influenced the process. The analysis acknowledges that ERE policy and practice in interaction with the disadvantaged positions of certain students exacerbate inequity in education. The findings suggest that achieving equity of ERE requires educational decision-making which highlights the perspectives of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their families, purposefully approaches ERE to disrupt potential inequities, and develops the capacities of schools and teachers to address educational inequities in an emergency context.

Keywords: equity, emergency remote education, Roma, education

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Emergency Remote Education

Efforts to slow down and prevent the spread of COVID-19 involved closing schools, universities and other educational institutions. More than 1.5 billion learners of all ages from around the globe are reported to have been affected by school and university closures due to the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020). The continuity of education was provided through different remote learning models (e.g., synchronous and asynchronous online learning/teaching, hybrid learning/teaching[3], TV instruction). The different models reflected the course of the virus and each country's unique geographical, economic, social, and political features, as well as the organisational factors at the level of each region/municipality or school.

Due to the pervasive influence of the pandemic on the education process, some authors make a distinction between emergency remote education (ERE) and remote education. ERE can be distinguished from remote teaching in that ERE reflects a sudden and unplanned shift of classroom-based courses to a remote education model (Shim & Lee, 2020). Therefore, moving all students and all teachers to distance education at the same time in an emergency situation is different from organising it for interested students and well-prepared teachers. Moreover, remote education has always been an alternative and flexible option for learners, while ERE has become an obligation (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Educators should also take into account the affective aspect of ERE. Namely, ERE emerged from the context of the pandemic, characterised by anxiety about an unknown situation and the shared experience of "emergency" (Green et al., 2020). Therefore, even greater efforts were called for in meeting the social-emotional needs of children and implementing trauma- and healing-informed practice (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020).

However, the pandemic has not only affected the mode of education; it has caused disruption to all aspects of the educational process by changing the learning environment, introducing new tools, changing the roles of educational participants and expanding the education community (Jovanović et al., 2021). Moreover, pandemic-related experiences have changed over time, both in content and valence. For example, a study by Sokal et al. (2020) demonstrated that while teachers in Canada had positive attitudes towards COVID-induced changes in education in the early stage of the pandemic, in the following months such attitudes became less optimistic. Mićić et al. (2021) showed that in the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers' concerns in Serbia were mostly related to immediate health dangers, frustration, and pressure, while in the later stages concerns related to the quality of education became predominant. This intensive dynamic of the educational landscape during the pandemic was recognized as one of the key features of ERE.

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[3]Combination of classroom-based and online learning/teaching (ZVKOV, Centar za obrazovnu tehnologiju i Centar za ispite, 2021, p. 2).

Equity in Emergency Remote Education

Despite attempts to frame COVID-19 as the "great equalizer," it is becoming increasingly clear that historically marginalized communities are being disproportionately impacted by this crisis (Azavedo et al., 2022). Namely, although remote education has the potential to contribute to reducing some of the financial costs for students, improving the availability of content, and responding to students' preferences by introducing different materials and ways of communication, current research suggests that not only do these approaches fail to address inequity, but they may even worsen it (Mehta & Aguilera, 2020).

Children from Roma communities are particularly at risk when it comes to quality education. For example, in Ukraine, 20% of Roma students compared to 1% of students from the general population did not take part in remote education (UNESCO, 2021). Korunovska and Jovanović (2020) estimate that distance learning measures leave more than half of Roma children out of school and will likely lead to an increase in the already high dropout rates among Roma students, since many distance learning activities rely on supplies Roma children do not usually have access to at home. The low socio-economic status of the major part of Roma families is an obstacle to the e-learning readiness of Roma students, including a lack of equipment and poor internet connection, low digital literacy, and limited school supplies (Bešter & Pirc, 2020; Ezra et al., 2021). Moreover, certain aspects of the home learning environment, such as overcrowded housing, might influence home-schooling efforts in times of school closure (Dietrich et al., 2021). Limited access to devices and the internet among Roma families has resulted in less frequent communication between schools and Roma families during the pandemic (Korunovska & Jovanović, 2020). The fact that Roma students are frequently not fluent in the language in which they are taught further adds to the communication barrier. Moreover, ERE relies heavily on student's learning regulation skills and/or parental involvement in education, which is frequently an obstacle in less educated families (Csonka-Stambekova, 2021). These factors resulted in lower participation in ERE, less frequent contact with teachers and greater learning loss among Roma students in comparison to their non-Roma peers (Bešter & Pirc, 2020).

The presented data indicate the need, now more than ever, to understand the reality of students affected by existing inequalities in education, and to focus on how these students are affected by sudden transitions to ERE (Ezra et al., 2021).

Emergency Remote Education in Serbia

School closures in Serbia were introduced in mid-March 2020 along with restrictive lockdown measures. Pre-recorded lectures for each grade were broadcast via public TV each day, according to a predetermined schedule and with rotating teachers for each subject. The quality of TV instruction varied among teachers (Đorđić et al., 2021), including different levels of support for non-cognitive aspects of students' learning (Plazinić, 2021). TV instruction was

complemented by teacher-led instruction via distance learning platforms or social media, chosen and organized according to teachers' decisions (MoESTD, 2020).

According to the Ministry of Education in Serbia (2020), 99% of primary and secondary school students were included in some mode of ERE. However, a significant percentage of students from marginalized groups were reportedly left out of ERE (Institute of Psychology, 2020). Roma students proved to be at the highest risk of exclusion from ERE, with 56% of Roma students following TV instructions, 27% receiving alternative modes of education, and 17% without any mode of education. The most prevalent obstacles were limited technical resources, low levels of digital literacy among students and parents, and poor learning motivation (Institute of Psychology, 2020). Starting from the 2020/21 school year, education was mainly in-person or via a hybrid mode, with classes split in two in order to reduce the spread of the virus. Teaching modes changed at national, school district or school level depending on the epidemiological course of COVID-19.

Method

The Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to provide a portrayal of emergency remote education (ERE) in Serbia from the perspective of the most disadvantaged students.

Study Design

The study applied a single-case study design aiming to explore the experiences of a Roma boy and his family in the context of emergency shifts in educational policy and practice. A qualitative case study design was combined with ethnographic approaches to data collection and analysis (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Yin, 2003).

The Case Study Background

Since October 2019, a group of psychology and pedagogy university students and teachers from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade (support team) have been providing learning support to a Roma boy – Bekim.[4] At that time, Bekim was attending the 5th grade of an elementary school in Belgrade. Bekim is shy and quiet; likes playing football and dreams of becoming a football player. Although he has poor working habits, and low levels of reading literacy, he is persistent, hardworking and responsive to educational support. Feelings of success and accomplishment are important drivers for Bekim.

> *I feel proud if I receive a good grade, if I try hard, if I solve a task or give an answer to a difficult question*. (Interview with Bekim, July 2021)

Bekim lives with his parents in a flat set in a dilapidated building, without essential living conditions (e.g. hot water). Extreme poverty is linked to inadequate food intake and poor

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[4] The name was changed to preserve the anonymity of the participant.

dietary quality, as well as to a shortage of clothes and school supplies. The boy's mother works at a flea market, selling second-hand goods, and collecting recyclables. Since they do not receive social benefits, there is no stable source of income.

> *I manage with my own resources. I haven't received anything from anybody. Once I asked for financial support from the social welfare office, and only after a few months did I receive a one-time aid of ten thousand [dinars]. We don't have child allowance or social assistance, because we don't have papers [documents].* (Interview with the mother, January 2022)

The mother's ill-health is affected by poor living conditions and inconsistent health care. Due to her lack of education, the mother is not able to support Bekim's learning.

> *I cannot understand his schoolwork. When he encounters a problem, we [parents] are not able to help him.* (Phone conversation with the mother, September 2020)

The father is supportive of Bekim's learning, but he is frequently absent due to work arrangements in different cities.

Generally speaking, the school management is supportive and oriented toward providing both educational and material support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. On the other hand, the teachers differ in their readiness to adjust the teaching process.

> *Only the English teacher gave me adjusted homework assignments to do for a mark, while the others [pupils] did something else.* (Interview with Bekim, January 2022)

Bekim is now attending the 7th grade, and has not yet decided which high school he will enrol in.
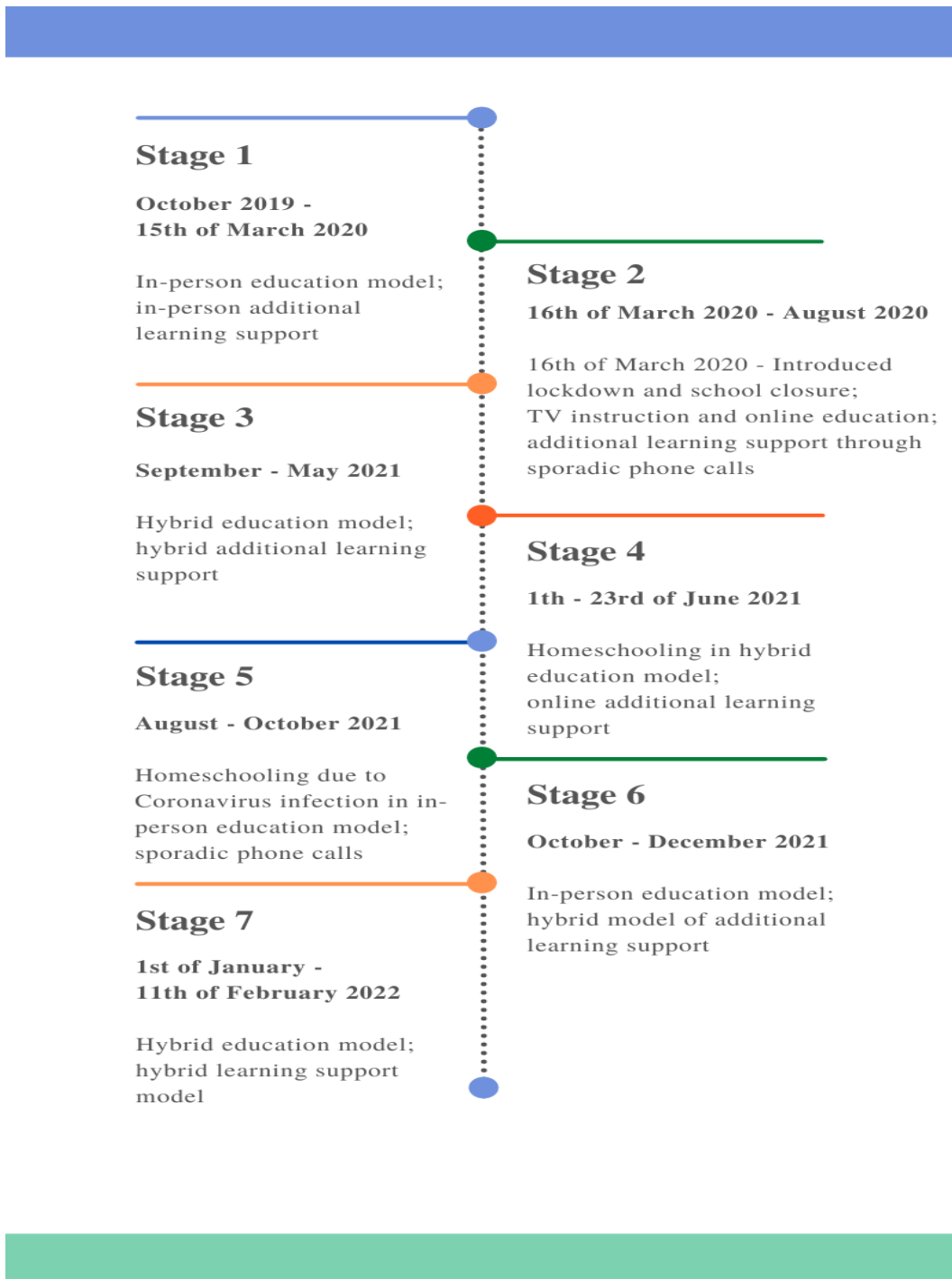
Data Collection and Analysis

Ethnography is often portrayed as multi-stranded, thereby providing for triangulation across different data sources. To this end, we combined different data collection techniques: interviewing the participants - both Bekim and his mother, prolonged observations of Bekim in a natural setting, and artefacts which were continuously produced or collected across the time-span. The collection of the artefacts included participant-observations, anecdotal notes, the content of the support team's Viber group, and artefacts from the learning/teaching process (e.g. homework, assignments on Google Classroom). We collected the data from October 2019 to February 2022, which we then consolidated to develop a narrative account of Bekim's education-related experiences during the pandemic. The data analysis was inspired by event structure analysis (Corsaro &Heise, 1990; Griffin, 1993; Heise, 1989). In the first step of the analysis, critical events were identified and sequenced in chronological order, allowing us to discuss possible causal connections between them. We interpreted the constructed chronological sequence of the events in the next step of the analysis in order to infer causality.

Obtaining a wide range of data greatly facilitated the analysis. It enabled us to validate some interpretations, and to gain a broader and a more in-depth account of Bekim's experiences of education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings

Based on the narrative data, we identified critical events and organised them chronologically. Since the identified critical events (e.g.Bekim lacking the devices and internet connection to access online teaching) reflected the effects of the official measures and recommendations regarding the pandemic, we have interpreted them in the context of ERE stages (Figure 1), emphasizing the key challenges and the support the student needed at that time.

Figure 1. *Stages of ERE and learning support provided to the student.*

Stage 1

**October 2019 -
15th of March 2020**

In-person education model;
in-person additional
learning support

Stage 2

16th of March 2020 - August 2020

16th of March 2020 - Introduced
lockdown and school closure;
TV instruction and online education;
additional learning support through
sporadic phone calls

Stage 3

September - May 2021

Hybrid education model;
hybrid additional learning
support

Stage 4

1th - 23rd of June 2021

Homeschooling in hybrid
education model;
online additional learning
support

Stage 5

August - October 2021

Homeschooling due to
Coronavirus infection in in-
person education model;
sporadic phone calls

Stage 6

October - December 2021

In-person education model;
hybrid model of additional
learning support

Stage 7

**1st of January -
11th of February 2022**

Hybrid education model;
hybrid learning support
model

Building Rapport (October 2019 - 15ᵗʰ of March 2020)

The researchers started working with Bekim in October 2019. At the time, he had just started the 5ᵗʰ grade, was assigned a new form teacher, and faced more demanding subjects and new teachers with different conceptions of teaching. Bekim described this as a *tough period*, in which he felt that he *cannot fulfil teachers' expectations.* At this stage, his form teacher described Bekim as a *kind student who has poor study habits and lacks motivation for learning*.

We organised learning support twice a week in the faculty premises, initially aiming at building a rapport and understanding his strengths and support needs. Access to school supplies was ensured, and learning sessions would always start with a meal (a practice which remained throughout the course of the support).

Due to his focus on tasks, cooperativeness and readiness to make an effort to master the materials at hand, the university students described Bekim as someone who was *easy to work with*. Based on his regular attendance at the sessions, and the feedback received from his form teacher and mother, Bekim enjoyed the learning support sessions. By the end of this stage, the striking incompatibility between the school's demands and Bekim's competencies had become obvious - while the school expected Bekim to learn the same content and do the same assignments at the same pace as his classmates, he was struggling with basic skills (e.g. reading and writing) which caused him to lag behind his classmates. Awareness of one's own poor performance in comparison to others may result in loss of self-esteem, and even disengagement from school. Namely, research shows that students from marginalized groups often "disidentify" with school, i.e. detach their self-esteem from their school performance in order to protect their global self-esteem, which results in impaired school performance (Osborne, 1995). For Roma students, poor performance additionally threatens to confirm the negative stereotypes teachers have about them (Jovanović, 2018).

Distance (in) Learning (16th of March - August 2020)

School closures on March 15, 2020 meant that remote education was predominantly organised through TV instruction broadcast on national television, andsupplementary information and materials provided by teachers via online platforms, Viber groups or phones. Due to the lack of internet and device access at home, during this stage Bekim was not participating in ERE. Moreover, a communication breakdown between his family and the school had left Bekim completely cut off from ERE.

No one from the school asked if I had the necessary preconditions for remote education. (Interview with Bekim, January 2022)

Bekim's mother described how tense family members were during the lockdown due to the novelty and uncertainty of the situation. She had hoped for encouragement and reassurance from school staff:

It would have meant a great deal to me if I had received any support, even if it was just to overcome fear. I would have appreciated any kind of support at that time - advice, presence, to have someone to talk to - since I had to do everything on my own, for myself and for Bekim. (Interview with the mother, January 2022)

The sudden loss of the structure and routine previously rooted in schooling resulted in disruptions to Bekim's bed and wake-up times. Moreover, he described experiencing a myriad of negative emotions during this period.

I felt awkward, but in a negative sense. It is hard for me to explain. (Interview with Bekim, January 2022)

At this stage, the mandatory lockdown measures led to the flea market closing, leaving Bekim and his mother without any earnings and, consequently, without some of life's necessities. Having to prioritise what their scarce resources should be spent on meant that the possibility for Bekim and his family to acquire the needed equipment for him to participate in ERE was further diminished:

At that time, everything was closed and I did not have the possibility to work, but we needed money for food and other essentials. I couldn't work and I could hardly provide him with anything. (Interview with the mother, January 2022)

We needed some time to adapt to the new circumstances, therefore the support we provided Bekim with at this stage was only sporadic, via the phone. Our aim was to maintain communication with Bekim, but also to support him emotionally in coping with the situation. Being left out of ERE and without additional learning support negatively influenced the continuation of his skills' development and his integration into the class, resulting in a widening of the gap between his knowledge and that of his classmates.

Between Two Worlds (September 2020 – May 2021)

With the beginning of the new school year classes were split in two, with students shifting between in-person and online instruction on a weekly basis. After 6 months out of school, Bekim had difficulties re-establishing daily routines and adapting to the changing schedule. As a consequence, he was not attending classes regularly.

Sometimes I overslept online classes because I didn't have to go to school [facility]. (Interview with Bekim, January 2022)

Re-establishing daily routines, but also gaining access to learning resources, a more adequate learning environment, and teacher support during learning, were the reasons why the support team advocated for Bekim to attend in-person classes all the time. This request was declined by the school, due to the class size policy.

At the beginning of the second semester, the university staff provided Bekim with a computer and internet access, but he still had difficulties participating in online teaching activities due to low digital competencies and an unconducive learning environment at home.

I like it more when it is in-person. If I have difficulties grasping the content, I can ask the teacher to help me. I can't hear the teacher very well during online classes because of the noise in the room. Sometimes the lecture is interrupted due to poor internet access. This really made me mad. (Interview with Bekim, January 2022)

It was really hard for me to follow [online], the hardest thing for me was to do the tasks because they didn't explain them. (Interview with Bekim, September 2021)

To ensure continuity of learning for the whole class, at the beginning of the school year, the school had introduced Google Classroom as a comprehensive communication platform and repository of learning materials. However, due to lack of access to digital devices and the internet, coupled with low digital competencies, Bekim only started using Google Classroom at the beginning of the second semester. Therefore, during the first semester, he did not have access to online classes, online materials, or information on online homework assignments. With help of the support team, he installed the required applications and started learning how to access and use Google Classroom. The amount of content and number of activities he had skipped became visible when we started his Gmail account (Figure 2), resulting in him being overwhelmed with the number of new materials which needed to be mastered. With different modes of communication, changes in the mode of education on a weekly basis, and the lack of structure in Google Classroom, Bekim and his parents had difficulties finding the relevant information and planning his learning, which exerted an additional negative impact on his learning motivation.

Figure 2. *Google Classroom notifications on Bekim's Gmail account.*

During this period, the team provided Bekim with in-person learning support, as well as online (hybrid mode) twice a week, and that was the only time Bekim was learning. Since he was lagging behind even more in basic reading, writing and computing skills, the learning sessions alone were not sufficient to mitigate the learning loss. Although he invested effort during the learning sessions, this was not always recognized through his grades, which made him dissatisfied and unmotivated. He needed support in maintaining regular school attendance, study planning and ensuring basic school supplies and textbooks. Because of the pandemic, we also brought up issues related to health, such as the importance of hand washing. Bekim refused to wear a winter jacket as the one he had *was too big for him*, resultingin frequent colds. Each time he became ill, that kept him away from school and the support sessions for a few days, and he thus fell even further behind. As the second semester progressed, the support team mentioned his hard work, persistence and commitment during sessions more often.

Communication with his parents became more frequent at this stage. Since his father was more present at home, he actively supported Bekim's learning. The family's scarce financial resources were still a major problem, leading to food insecurity.

Due to the lack of internet access, for a long time Bekim had only intermittent contact with his peers via the phone. With the hybrid mode of education, these social ties remained weak leaving him without social and emotional support from classmates. Moreover, the support team and his family became important parts of his social support network.

> *As far as I understand the form teacher, he is not a member of the class Viber group, which would also be of great benefit to him, to keep up to date with events because, for example, today and the other day he did not show up at school for scheduled written examinations in the Serbian language and Mathematics, and when it was already too late, his mother called the form teacher confused about whether he should go to school or not.* (School associate-support team communication, email, April 2021)

> *Bekim was worried that you had forgotten about him, since you did not call last week.* (Phone call with the mother, April 2021)

The support team was in contact with the school associate during this period. The school associate had been informing the teachers of Bekim's needs, and advocated for learning adjustments. However, individualised school support in this period was non-existent, limiting Bekim's ability to exercise his right to quality education and participation.

Bedschooling (1st - 23rd of June 2021)

The hybrid education model was in place until the end of the school year, but throughout June Bekim was homeschooled since his leg was immobilized due to a fracture. The problem of access to medical care arose, since his mother did not have the means to take Bekim to the doctor. The communication between the support team and school was more intense in this period, with the aim of aligning efforts towards his completion of the 6th grade.

Although the teachers were willing to adapt schoolwork to the current situation, some of the adjustments did not fully take into account Bekim's digital competences and his living conditions (e.g. making a 3-D paper model for a final assignment). Additionally, online support was challenging for some of these tasks (e.g. making drawings of agricultural machines). Therefore, at this stage the support team was predominantly involved in clarifying instructions, helping Bekim to plan his learning, and supporting the use of online tools. The team also encouraged the family to support Bekim's persistence by acknowledging his efforts. Despite making every effort during the sessions, the pain in his leg, coupled with missing classes, further contributed to his lagging behind the class. After three weeks of intensive additional support, Bekim completed the 6th grade. However, this period highlighted the challenges of providing adequate scaffolding mechanisms which facilitate online socialisation and deep learning during remote education (Bryceson, 2007). This is particularly important in the case of students from disadvantaged groups, since a highly challenging learning environment, such as the school environment, coupled with a lack of support due to homeschooling, is likely to result in failure and loss of motivation (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

Homeschooling, again (August - October 2021)

Aiming to acknowledge Bekim's persistence and effort at the end of the 6th grade, the support team organised a one-day trip to the zoo in August. At the beginning of the 7th grade, the school developed an individual education plan (IEP) for Bekim. Having an IEP, he was entitled to free textbooks, while the support team provided other needed resources (e.g. school supplies, clothes, shoes). Due to the coordinated actions of the school staff and support team, Bekim had all the resources needed for learning and attending classes. As Bekim broke his arm in late August, the beginning of the school year was characterized by his irregular attendance. The team supported active parental encouragement of Bekim's study habits and school attendance. However, contracting the coronavirus led to another bout of homeschooling, and learning support again shifted to the phone and online mode. The support team ensured an internet connection and helped Bekim to sign up for the year's subjects, so this time he had all the requirements for homeschooling. Nevertheless, the aforementioned health conditions contributed to him, once again, losing pace with his classmates. Since his mother also contracted the virus, the family relied on a support team to supply food, medications and dietary supplements, thus underlining the need of families from vulnerable groups for integrated support by educational, health and social welfare systems.

Trying to catch up with the class (October - December 2021)

In the 7th grade, Bekim was assigned a new form teacher and, according to his mother, *they hadn't established good communicationand he preferred missing classes*. The teachers shared information with the support team on the requirements he had to fulfil. Although Bekim was receiving education according to IEP1, no adaptations were visible.

Due to huge learning loss in comparison to his peers, Bekim lacked motivation for learning. He showed more difficulties concentrating and got tired easily, therefore the learning sessions became considerably shorter. These factors caused Bekim to fall further behind his peers. He was still relying on the support team for information on upcoming activities and the organisation of his studies. To support Bekim's self-regulation, the team encouraged him to set goals for his learning, plan how to achieve those goals, monitor his learning progress, and to evaluate what was achieved. The support team continuously nurtured Bekim's functional attribution style as an important predictor of student achievements (Weiner, 1985). Consequently, in the self-evaluation at the end of the first term Bekim mainly attributed his academic progress to internally controllable and unstable factors, i.e. invested effort, which leads to higher expectations of future success and higher levels of persistence behaviour (Higgins & LaPointe, 2012).

His mother was proud of him since she had noticed that he was putting more effort into school learning, his skills in using technology had improved, and in certain aspects he had become more independent (e.g. waking up and getting ready for school).

> *I see that he is doing his best, more than before the pandemic started.* (Interview with the mother, January 2022)

However, Bekim's relations with his classmates were weakened due to his irregular school attendance.

> *Bekim has no friends, neither at school nor outside of it. If he needs something for school, he has no one to ask.* (Interview with the mother, January 2022)

Since he did not feel a sense of belonging to the classroom community, he had become more oriented towards the support team where he felt accepted and positively valued, and therefore more motivated for in-person learning sessions. Poor connectivity and the unconducive learning environment at home had also contributed to his preference for faculty facilities. The financial hardships at this stage were amplified due to the health needs of other family members, i.e. his brother.

Adjusting to the New Normal (1ˢᵗ of January - 11ᵗʰ of February 2022)

During the winter break, Bekim contracted COVID-19 for the second time, so he was once again unable to keep up with his peers. Communication between the family and support team took place on a daily basis. The issue of the family's financial resources came into focus again, and his parents relied on the support team to provide food and clothes for Bekim. After his recovery, Bekim was motivated to attend learning sessions.

During the second term, both hybrid education and hybrid learning support were in place. Bekim still relied on the support team to organise his learning (e.g. inform him of upcoming activities, or remind him of tasks and deadlines). Once again, the question of sleeping routines arose, since his sleepiness affected his engagement during the sessions.

However, he was motivated to learn and attended school classes and learning sessions regularly. At this stage the support team strategically focused on Bekim's functional skills, particularly reading comprehension, since it had the most potential for progress in all subjects.

Discussion

In light of the social complexity and diversity of the contemporary era, equity in education is recognized as a key objective of educational systems across the world (Ainscow, 2020). The central role in the enactment of equity policy is assigned to the school (Keddie & Niesche, 2012). Based on the data collected, we argue that the school's rolein supporting equity was significantly disrupted during the pandemic, leaving students from disadvantaged groups on the outskirts of ERE.The findings suggest that the pandemic had a substantial negative effect on the school's role in meeting learners' basic needs, supporting students' learning, structuring students' everyday activities, and engaging students in positive social interactions.

One of the equity-related roles of a school is to support students' learning through continuous monitoring and individualised adjustments of the educational process, thus ensuring each students' progress in mastering the required competencies. This role was severely disrupted during the pandemic due to a communication breakdown between schools and students from disadvantaged groups (Korunovska & Jovanović, 2020). In Bekim's case, not only was he not provided with additional support for distance learning, but neither the administrative staff nor the teachers were aware that he had no access to online education. Due to Bekim's exclusion from ERE in the first stage, and the lack of an individualised approach in the later stages, he fell behind.

In addition to institutional support, the pandemic also highlighted the importance of school as the place for students' mutual support through peer communication and collaboration. Research shows that children derive social capital from both their families and their schools and that the capital from each context promotes achievement (Dufur et al., 2012). Having no access to devices and the internet meant that Bekim was excluded not just from online education, but also from his peer community, affecting his sense of belonging, leisure time, but also his access to information about schooling. Even in the later stages, online teaching was dominated by frontal teaching and individual assignments, limiting opportunities for peer interactions.

Schooling also plays a role in developing students' daily routines and habits. However, ERE led to the discontinuity of students' daily experiences, the evaporation of peers who serve as models of identity development, and the absence of compulsory time within the school institution. This had a negative impact on Bekim's daily routines, particularly since Bekim's parents exhibit low levels of structure and demandingness within the family context.

Finally, schools play a role in recognizing students' unsatisfied basic needs and providing support. This support may have different forms, such as crowdsourcing, advocating

for students, or even signalling risk situations to child services. In the context of the pandemic, the school's role in responding to the social, economic and labour needs of local families became prominent (Costa et al., 2022). Since Bekim's parents derived their income from the informal sector, which was disproportionately affected by the pandemic (Azavedo et al., 2022), this led to food insecurity in Bekim's family. The disruption in the school's provision of material support (e.g. clothes, food, school supplies), further exacerbated their material insecurity.

This study offers further evidence to support scholars' claims that the pandemic has negatively affected the equity of education (Azavedo et al., 2022; Mehta & Aguilera, 2020). The findings suggest that, particularly in the initial stages of ERE, those who needed additional support were, paradoxically, left without any support. As a result, these students experienced accumulated educational disadvantages during ERE, affecting their progress in skills and knowledge, building relationships and developing a positive self-concept. Therefore, instead of the role of facilitator of the social inclusion of students from disadvantaged groups, the role of education became one where stratification between students was amplified.

The interruption of schooling highlighted how important teachers and schools are in offering learning support, and to what extent equity of education depends on the ability of schools to carry out their roles effectively. Several recommendations for policy and practice can be drawn from the results.

Since the pandemic had social, political, economic, and health implications, we need to acknowledge that educational support is necessary, but not sufficient, to ensure continuity in the learning of students from disadvantaged backgrounds during ERE. Joint efforts on the part of the education system, and social and health protection services are needed to ensure equitable outcomes of disadvantaged groups of students (Azavedo et al., 2022).

This case-study shows that the shift from school-based to home-based education led to a change in the social, emotional, physical and cognitive context in which school learning took place, resulting in major differences in educational progress caused by inequalities. Children from homes with fewer resources and opportunities for parental support risk falling behind (Thomas & Rogers, 2020). This case clearly illustrates that universal policy solutions in the emergency context do not respond to the needs of all students, particularly those of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their families. Therefore, as we move beyond the survival phase of remote education, it is now critical to purposefully approach the transition to a thriving phase of remote education with such inequities in mind (Hartshorne et al., 2020). It is also vital to recognize that this group of students will need further support to reintegrate into schools once the learning process is fully normalised.

Although this study offers some insight into the educational experiences of disadvantaged students during ERE, it is not without its limitations. As with all case studies, the findings from this research cannot be generalized to other cases and contexts, but the observed concepts and processes can (Popadić et al., 2018; Vilig, 2013/2016; Yin, 2014). The

findings represent one Roma student's experience of ERE, which was shaped by contextual factors, including available learning support. Given this limitation, it would be desirable to conduct similar studies with several distinct cases (Vilig, 2013/2016).

Another limitation stems from the emergency nature of the study, with the researchers motivated to capture the uniqueness of the moment. The timely and comprehensive data collection was, however, affected by the uncertainty regarding the flow of the study. The project initially aimed at providing additional educational support for students from marginalized groups. As a response to the sudden shift towards ERE, the support team decided to reframe the goals to reflect the complexities of the new context and to produce actionable findings. Due to the lack of a specified theoretical framework and/or research aim at the beginning of the study, the approach to data collection was inductive and iterative, hence sometimes insufficiently systematic.

Final remarks

Our aim was to gain in-depth analysis and understanding of the educational aspirations and experiences of marginalized students during the pandemic, but at the same time to highlight learning and living in disadvantaged contexts. However, when we interviewed Bekim, we were surprised by the stark contrast between his impoverished statements to the wealth of experience he brought to the learning sessions:

> *It was surprising, he gave poor answers, sometimes even contradictory ones, he would omit to mention some situations we had previously discussed ...* (Support team, email, September 2021)

> *He has difficulty describing his own feelings, or describing which aspects of the situation were positive and which were negative. He was prone to give general answers, with positive valence ("everything is fine"), although previously in conversations he had mentioned how the unstable internet connection made him angry, how he felt angry when the teacher didn't recognize his efforts, how sad he was because his peers excluded him...* (Anecdotal note, January 2022)

His experiences translated into a restricted language code (Bernstain, 1964; Payne, 2019), becoming impoverished and impersonal. Additionally, the experience of being marginalized through multiple minority identities – a child, Roma boy, socially deprived boy – has not empowered Bekim and his family to challenge the system. On the contrary, we could even recognize system justification tendencies in their answers (Jost et al., 2004).

> *What could we do to support you?*

> *Nothing, school and you have done everything great, it is up to me, I have to be better, to invest more effort.* (Interview with Bekim, January 2022)

Therefore, the ethnographic data we collected during prolonged observation in everyday living activities became even more important, going beyond what was observed, incorporating subjective meanings, values and perceptions (Danaher et al., 2013). Consequently, we were able to describe (a small part of) the experiences of Bekim's family during COVID-19, to analyse them in the context of different ecosystems, and to understand them through the lens of educational science and policy. Moreover, we were able to communicate these insights to others who are interested in education, particularly that of marginalized groups, and they had the capacity to listen to us and understand us – since we talk the same language and have the same position. Hence, this approach allows the researcher to mediate between marginalized groups and institutional stakeholders. Moreover, we hope that through developing more general, functional skills and through encouraging their active engagement in education, children from marginalized groups will also recognize and challenge the roles power and privilege play in systems (Bell, 1997).

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