

Education in the Information Society

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Abstract

This article approaches the fundamental role which education has in the information society. The continuous evolution of information and communication technologies requires that all citizens have the necessary skills have to use these technologies and to access information for efficient individual functioning in the information society. In this context, the information literacy programmes have a growing importance.

Key words: *The Information Society, Education, Information Literacy, Information and Communication Technologies*

A favourite theme of researchers in the last years and a starting point for many studies and debates which analyse the impact of the new information and communication technologies on all aspects of our life, the information society is often associated with the notion of information literacy. In the library and information science field the most frequent approaches address the changes that affect the profession of librarian and information specialist and user needs and behaviour.

The most visible transformations are in the education area because the process of lifelong education and training in school, at the workplace and at home has become an essential aspect of our existence in the information society which is perceived most often as a learning society.

In the context of the contemporary economy and society based on knowledge and of the key role of the human capital we need a new approach to education and training. In a global economy, an increase in competitiveness depends on the investment in the education and training area.

Access to information and knowledge is not the only aspect that counts in the information society, also key is the generation of new knowledge and its transfer. It is important how every country succeeds in educating and training its citizens. So there are more and more changes in education which are no longer centred on information transfer, but that becomes a process in which individuals learn how to learn, how to access, analyse and exploit information and transform it into new knowledge.

Every opportunity brought by the new information and communication technologies and especially by Internet-based technologies must be exploited as they have a significant role in extending the education and training process among the population. This is a goal towards which national and international efforts should be directed – the use of technologies as learning tools – in this way the effect of the digital divide which new technologies can generate will be diminished as much as possible.

Efficient functioning in the information society supposes skills in accessing information with a view of using it in a creative way individually but also institutionally.

Information and communication technologies evolve permanently so that the necessity of national policies and programmes to ensure adequate training of the population concerning the use of these technologies becomes crucial also.

A population armed with a good education, knowledge, information literacy, technology-related skills, with a lifelong learning literacy will be the basis of the economic and social development of a country and of a competitive economy on the global market.

Information literacy is a fundamental part of the information society as it refers to the capabilities associated with effective functioning in this society. Depending on the country, the importance which is given to information literacy varies. The concept also has different interpretations which refer to the inclusion, or not, of the technology-related skills together with those concerning information. (Town, 2003)

Conditions for the creation of a successful information society are citizens trained from the perspective of information literacy. At a national level, performance and competitiveness will be possible only following the elaboration of coherent policies for encouraging permanent learning and the

creation of information literacy programmes for all citizens. These issues have been understood in some countries which took rapid measures and allotted resources in this area.

In the USA the understanding of the importance of information literacy led to the creation in 1989 of a National Forum and then of an Institute for Information Literacy and to the construction of a set of competency standards for higher education. At present there are information literacy programmes for all levels of education.

In Australia and New Zealand too a joint Institute for Information Literacy was set up, the set of skills which this Institute developed being considered essential for citizens in the information age. Information gathering, analysis, organization and communication, the use of information and communication technologies are some of the skills which citizens must have in an information society.

In the UK a national set of key skills for learning was identified, for careers and personal life. These refer to communication, information technology, working with others, problem solving etc., a significant activity in the information literacy area being detected in the higher education sector. An Information Skills Task Force was created and it established the SCONUL model (which includes seven skills) for the training of competent persons in that which concerns information literacy.

In all the above mentioned countries the importance of information literacy is recognized and there is a focus on involving librarians and information specialists in these programmes and initiatives.

It is also important to go beyond aspects which concern just technology-related skills and access to information and to have in sight too those that imply information formats, content, variety, origin and validity.

In Romania the role of information as a source of value and economic competitiveness and performance based on knowledge and permanent learning at the level of citizens and organizations are also recognized as main issues in the information society.

In the context of the development of a vision about the information society in Romania there is mentioned the convergence of cultural institutions' evolution (libraries, museums, archives) with information and communication technologies, a process which is supposed to have an impact on many fields amongst which are education and research. (Filip, 2001)

The promotion of access to information and knowledge is at the base of information society development, but in our country issues such as equipment

endowment, access to the Internet, curricula content, the management of education institutions, the evaluation, the certification process of knowledge, learning quality and competitiveness are still entirely unsolved. (Perț, 2004) If the education system is convergent by and large with the systems in the other EU countries, in Romania we can't yet talk of a national strategy concerning information literacy programmes. So a new approach about education and training from the perspective of an effective individual functioning in the information society is necessary in our country too, with a special attention given to information literacy.

The policies and programmes of initial and continuous education centred on gaining the skills necessary to live and work in the digital age are those that will make the difference among countries and which will provide the basis for economic and social development, for innovation and generation of new knowledge.

The future and progress of every country including Romania in the information society will depend on the importance which the competent organisms will give to education and training and on the value of the investments in this area because education and training forewarn the social divide, contribute to the inclusion of more people in the economic and social life and promote the continuous development and innovation, creativity and quality.

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