

DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES FOR THE APPLICATION OF DIGITAL BOOKS IN CLASS IN THE FOURTH GRADE, SCHOOL YEAR 2021-2022

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Abstract

The world in general in all segments undergoes rapid changes, changes which do not exclude education and the educational process as well. The trends of change in education also refer to the benefits that it brings. In order to respond to the demands, teachers make efforts to train and develop appropriate competencies for teaching. Today, the application of technology in learning is considered indispensable as it helps, facilitates, stimulates, motivates, concretizes, demonstrates, informs, guides, and visualizes... The insufficient knowledge of the function and pedagogical power of modern technology causes constant resistance from teachers. The new technology in learning has a stimulating function, enriches the learning process, affects the modernization of work forms, expands the sources of knowledge, dictates new evaluation methods, enables individual adaptation of students, and various others. The above-mentioned benefits are incentives that are set as imperative for planning and implementing contemporary learning today. This study has the primary purpose of presenting the level of professional competence of teachers for the application of the digital book in teaching in the school year 2021-2022. Data which will be analyzed with statistical procedures of 50 teachers of the 4th grades surveyed by means of questionnaires in Google forms.

Keywords: Digital book, teacher competencies, printed book, motivation.

Introduction

The world in general in all segments undergoes rapid changes which also affects the changes in the educational process all around the world. With the technology revolution, young people, but also all the humanity, quickly and easily reach to the right information, as they grow, develop, progress with it. So education tries to realize changes at all levels, also referring to technology in education. The changes start from the most powerful economic states, slowly extending to the less developed ones.

In order to respond to the mentioned demands, the teachers still make efforts to train and develop the appropriate competencies for the realization of the lesson together with the students. Today, the application of technology in learning is considered indispensable as it helps, facilitates, stimulates, motivates, concretizes, demonstrates, informs, guides, visualizes.

Challenges in modern social and ecological spheres require other creative, scientific and technological approaches. Lack of sufficient knowledge of the function and pedagogical power of modern technology causes the constant resistance encountered by teachers. The new technology in learning has a stimulating function, enriches the learning process, affects the modernization of work forms, expands the sources of knowledge, dictates new evaluation methods, enables individual adaptation of students, and various others. It lies in the fact that the use of technology is the main prerequisite for the progress and modernization of teaching, education and teaching in general in its pedagogical function. With the level of scientific and technological development we are in, when qualitative and quantitative increases in scientific results have been noted, which have progressed in processes of integration of scientific knowledge, educational

technology facilitates the process of acquiring new knowledge in scientific fields, namely learning contents. Those lessons are organized in such a way that the students are independent, try and know in order to establish a more accurate pedagogical relationship between the lesson and the student as a creative and active subject in the lesson.

Traditional and contemporary learning

Traditional teaching focuses only on verbal stimulus and abstract perspectives and emphasizes mostly the activity of the teacher in the classroom rather than ways to actively involve students in building their own learning system. They have often been criticized for establishing a one-way communication in the classroom, for a more passive participation of students in the learning process and for a teacher- and subject-oriented didactics. The philosophy on which more traditional teaching and learning methods are built refers to teachers as knowing more than students and as the main (sometimes only) source of learning for them.

Synchronization aims to promote social learning through the interactive organization of student activities, such as peer work or group/team work. They also aim to better connect theory and practice, through practical activities or exercises, such as design work, which draw on students' experience and their personal participation in solving problems and carrying out tasks individually or as a team.

Contemporary learning, which is said to be creative, is learning that as its important definition has taken the creativity affirmations from the students and teachers in the educational process. Contemporary learning does not tolerate templates, but asks for openness to innovations, interesting things, to new methods, forms and tools that encourage, the development of creative skills of students and towards a more creative role in communication with students. (Havziu-Ismaili, 2019:28)

Through moderate teaching technology, with the help of technical teaching tools, the teacher, depending on the level of his pedagogical and technical culture, plans the implementation of different sources of knowledge. He always looks for new ways to advance work, looks for efficient sources of knowledge, efficient teaching methods, didactic systems, etc. It becomes an intermediary between the sources of knowledge and the students, so that the students relate directly to the sources of knowledge (Murati, 2019:62).

Contemporary thinking is based on the assumption that students learn best when they learn by doing, that is, when they are challenged to commit to approaching learning actively and creatively. Accordingly, students and teachers are partners in the pursuit of learning, and the teacher's role is primarily to guide, help and support students' efforts to acquire and develop knowledge, skills and attitudes. Contemporary teaching also aims to promote shared learning, stimulating progress based on mutual interaction and division of tasks in the learning group. Contemporary methods can also mean the use of contemporary information and communication technologies, as well as the use of some contemporary teaching tools, such as cinema projectors and transparencies, magnetic boards, computer programs (software), smart boards and recently digital books, etc.

Teachers should not resist changes, on the contrary, they should use the new technology to make teaching more qualitative and interesting. The use of technology will positively increase the results of both teachers and students. The teacher must carefully plan the use and integration of technology in the lesson. The way technology will be integrated in learning mostly depends on how many computers the school has at its disposal, i.e. how many computers the classroom has (Murati, 2019:53).

Professional preparation of teachers for curricular changes

Continuous professional development is a simultaneous right and obligation of everyone in the educational system and aims at acquiring and transferring new knowledge related to the practical aspect of work, knowing the details of the profession and realizing the quality standards of the educational process according to European trends. Continuous professional development has a particular importance if we consider that the competencies of all profiles involved in the educational process are not static, but they change according to new scientific knowledge in the field of education and the needs for development and modernization of education ("New concept for primary education", 2021:39).

A good teacher always has knowledge about the cognitive, socio-emotional and psycho-motor development of his students. He uses this knowledge to plan and adapt the lesson according to their needs, protect their mental and physical health and enable them optimal development (Macedonian Center for Civic Education, 2016:19).

Examples of professional practice

- Compiles planning of different levels [weekly, thematic, daily plans, etc.].
- Plans clear, achievable goals and goals that are a challenge for students.
- Plans the expected results from the activities.
- Plans teaching forms, methods and strategies.
- Plans teaching tools and work materials needed for the realization of teaching contents, including ICT.
- Creates a database of employers with whom it can cooperate.
- Defines goals from the curriculum that can be realized at the employer.
- Harmonizes learning goals and activities with employer needs.
- Together with other teachers, he plans the correlation and integration of his subject with other subjects and teaching contents.
- During planning, takes into account the available time and resources.
- During planning, it also takes into account the features of the local environment.
- Plans methods, procedures and instruments for determining students' prior knowledge and for observing their achievements.
- Plans teacher and student activities.
- Makes a reflection which contains a review of the achievements of the goals, the difficulties encountered and directions for improvement during future planning (Macedonian Center for Civic Education, 2016:20).

In every profession, professional preparation is needed in the relevant profile, as well as teachers must be trained from the beginning of their career and onwards. They must be trained before entering the classroom and must receive continuous professional training even while working as teachers. All professional training is provided to new teachers for the greatest opportunity for success, as well as to experienced teachers as they face new challenges in education. When the training does not happen, there is a risk that the teachers will feel a lot of difficulty in adapting to the changes or reforms that occur and will have difficulty supporting them. However, it happens that the training is insufficient and the teachers will encounter difficulties in adapting, performing work according to the requirements, compiling, planning and realizing the lesson as needed.

Every school reform starts from the curriculum and continues. For the implementation of the curricula, the key factor is the teacher, if he is equipped, trained, prepared for the reform that will be applied, then everything from difficult goes to easy. As in any reform, also in these reforms, in June the teachers attended two modules, the first and the second module, while in August the third module was realized, where through

this seminar the teachers were informed, prepared and facilitated the work of the teachers who would have applied the new reforms at the beginning of the school year.

From the impact of some reforms that our country has gone through, we suggest that in the ongoing reforms, great importance to be given to the trainings and practical work of teachers for the realization of curricula, weekly outlines, daily outlines. To realize any reform with success, only the teacher is the guide and implementer, so more work should be done on this part as well. Not being entirely based on the trainings, it is worth noting that the teacher in his activity must manifest the highest degree of professional and pedagogical skills, creating fair relations with the students in the spirit of cooperation and mutual help. Professional attitudes and values are acquired and changed during teacher studies, through professional development and through practice (Murati, 2019:30/31).

Educator - user of technologies

One of the main roles of teachers is to apply learning activities and provide experiences with learning strategies to their students, in order to ensure that the goals and objectives of education are achieved and that the personal development of students is progressing in a continuous way. Teachers must be able to display the intellectual and affective skills to motivate students to approach learning with love, seriousness, etc. They should be able to explain to students why learning is important and make them aware of learning goals and objectives, understand them and actively contribute to their implementation. The teacher's ability to deliver clear and precise messages and balance theory with practice will be reflected through their personal example of being civilized and professional, with particular emphasis on the use of various technologies, through which it can organize differentiated, laboratory, individual, and even distance learning.

In order to organize the work in the classroom, the teacher acts in accordance with the specific differences in the n classroom, with the content of the subject, the age group, the space and the available teaching materials. Teachers must be able to plan students' activities from the point of view of different teaching and learning strategies, which, in addition to the above-mentioned differences, also include specific philosophies about making learning as effective as possible (e.g. .inductive, deductive or combined approaches; algorithmic learning or learning by creatively tracing new threads; learning focused more on the use of verbal stimuli or learning focused more on the use of the senses).

Various reasons have been given as to why this technology is so underutilized in schools, including the following:

- Teachers do not know the equipment well and there is neither time nor resources for comprehensive and continuous training (Frid, 2001);
- There is not enough budget to provide the right number of personal computers, to make programs, to pay the technicians who make the connections to the network or to maintain it (Cradler and Britdforth, 2004);
- Teachers do not have sufficient prior preparation to use computer technology (Norton and Wiburg, 2003) and teacher students show anxiety in using computers (Orlich et al., 1998);
- There is no overwhelming research evidence that teachers can be more effective in computer-based teaching than in non-computer-based teaching (Russell and Bradley, 1996);
- Financial problems for schools with limited funds can be highlighted;
- Computer technology "threatens" teachers - there is a possibility that they will increasingly lose control over the work they do (Bigun, 1997);
- Computer technology is not a neutral force in the classroom—it focuses on speed and power, and underestimates the importance of reflection and ethics for students (Schwartz, 1996);
- There is growing evidence that it can discourage social action and lead to isolating behaviour;
- There are reports of significant risks for the health of teachers (eye strain, joint and shoulder pain) and students (as a result of carrying portable computers from home to school and vice versa) (Norton and Wiburg, 2003);

- There is an increase in the number of students who copy (cyber cheating) at all levels of learning (Varbaham, 2001; Franek, 2006; Poole, 2004);
- Considerable daily use of the computer by young children can remove them from important social and physical experiences (Monke, 2006) (Marsh, 2009: 61-62).

Relations between technology and curriculum in the fourth grade

Today's teachers need to have extensive professional knowledge of teaching, learning, assessment and strategies of student behavior management, be confident in aspects of the curriculum in the subject or subject areas they teach, and be able to highlight the needs for professional development. This knowledge enables them to do good planning, to develop the lesson with quality and, then, to evaluate the achievements of the students (Musai, 2003:69).

The use of information and computer technology in education modernizes teaching - strengthens competences for lifelong learning, expands the range of learning resources, increases the availability of teaching tools, brings learning and teaching methods closer to the needs and interests of students and facilitates those evaluation of teachers. Adequate school and classroom infrastructure is necessary for the realization of such teaching: secured internet, equipment with computers and smart boards, availability of content and digital teaching tools and other relevant electronic tools for teaching and learning. The same infrastructure allows the use of electronic tools for monitoring and evaluating students (such as an electronic portfolio) ("New concept for primary education", 2021:29).

The combination of technology and adaptation to new curricula with the reproduction of scientific experiments, interviews with important people, stimulations, excursions with students all over the country, museums and libraries, led to the establishment of qualification centers in universities that offer numerous opportunities for the use of electronic media in the teaching and student process. Although technology began to be introduced little by little in education, because technology in the learning process is a distinctive feature in recent years, and especially from this year where the book is also digital and innovative, which is necessary for the use of technology as a cause of educational reforms, more specifically the new concept where students must also have tablets for working with the digital book. The new elements of technology and their use in electronic communication give a new structure to the curriculum and have increased the pace and quality of the education process. But the question arises, how ready are schools and teachers for the implementation of innovative technology in it?

Although it is proclaimed that the schools fulfill the conditions for the realization of the curricula, we are skeptical that they are partially equipped with technological tools and other school resources, but the teachers are not sufficiently trained and motivated for their application. The combination of computers/tablets and other technological advantages, manipulation in the digital book, tests, quizzes, various techniques, photographs, videos, projections, etc., in the digital and technological books adapts and can be realized satisfactorily what needs to be achieved for the realization of standards for assessment even though the digital book is an auxiliary tool and not mandatory. Curricula for the fourth grade thanks to the development of technology and the ability of students can be realized if the schools meet the conditions with digital devices and the students own tablets that are new or manufactured in the last year or are Apple brand. During the research, they can determine how much the curriculum and its interweaving correspond to the technology for the necessary achievement, even though, as I pointed out above, the digital book is an auxiliary tool, therefore, for the realization of the standard, teachers and students can use projections or different web pages /projections, quizzes, etc. for the realization of the foreseen standards.

Methods

The research subject in this research is the development of professional competences of teachers, for the application of digital books in teaching. The development of teachers' professional competences is an appropriate and continuous component for moving on with time and the changes that follow from graduation onwards. Therefore, our goal in this research is to examine the opinions and attitudes of teachers regarding the development of professional competencies of teachers, for the application of digital books in teaching during the application of digital books in the fourth grade in the school year 2021-2022. Based on the validation of the topic that we will research, this general hypothesis is presented:

H. We assume that teachers prefer professional training from informatics teachers (exact subjects) to develop sufficient competencies for the full application of digital books in teaching

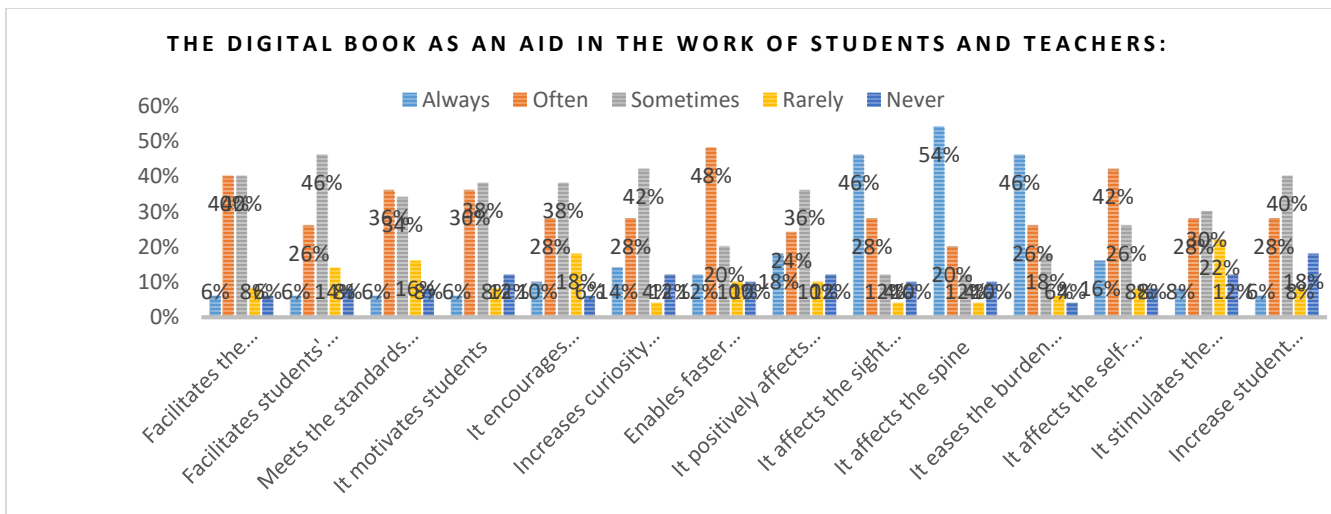
H.1 We assume that the digital book motivates, reinforces critical thinking, increases success at students.

H.2 We assume that teachers prefer to work in parallel with both digital and physical books.

In order to investigate these issues, we will realize the questions through qualitative and quantitative research. The questionnaire prepared for teachers will be used to elaborate the issues. The research in question includes 50 fourth grade teachers. The questionnaire will be realized online with Google Forms in different groups for primary education teachers. The questionnaire was sent to various school groups and social media. After collecting the questionnaires, the collected data were presented with SSPS statistical methods.

Results

From the question no.1. Regarding that the digital book as an aid in the work of students and teachers, we have reached the following results:



Graph1. The digital book as an aid in the work of students and teachers

From the notes above of graph no. 2, different determinations are observed in the given judgments. While only 6% of teachers with always affirm the influence of the book in facilitating the work of teachers, the largest numbers of teachers, respectively 40%, think that this influence is frequent. 40% answered sometimes, rarely 8% and never 6%. From the results of the diagram, we can conclude that the majority of teachers answered that often and sometimes the digital book facilitates their work.

In the following, the attitudes of the teachers regarding the influence of books in facilitating the students' work are presented. According to them, we have the following definitions: always 6%, often 26%, sometimes 46%, rarely 14% and never 8%. The given results refer to the fact that the influence of books sometimes makes the students' work easier. According to the data related to the issue of whether the digital book as an aid meets the standards for assessment, teachers answered always 6%, often 36%, sometimes 34%, rarely 16% and never 8%. From their answers, the majority, respectively 36% have declared that the book often meets the standards for assessment.

Regarding the question that the digital book as an aid affects the motivation of students, the teachers declared with always 6%, often 36%, sometimes 38%, rarely 8% and never 12%. According to the attitudes of the teachers, we can conclude that 38% of them think that the book sometimes motivates the students. About how much the digital book helps in students' critical thinking, teachers with the attitude always declared 10%, often 28%, sometimes 38%, rarely 18% and never 6%. According to the attitudes of the teachers, 38% of them think that sometimes the digital book encourages students in critical thinking. The digital book as an aid increases the curiosity for innovations was the next question regarding which we obtained these attitudes: in the judgment, 14% of them were always, often 28%, sometimes 42%, rarely 4% and never 12% of the teachers. From their answers, where 42% of teachers have a strong attitude, we can conclude that sometimes the book is presented as a factor in increasing curiosity for innovations. The level of influence of the digital book on the speed of giving answers to teachers was determined as follows: always 12%, often 48%, sometimes 20%, rarely 10% and never 10%. From the answers of the teachers, in which clearly, broadly, almost half of them emphasize influence, we can affirm the doubt about the influence of the book on the speed of students' answers. How much the digital book as an aid positively affects mental health according to the data, the teachers answered with: always 18%, often 24%, sometimes 36%, rarely 10% and never 12%. From the answers of the teachers, where the positive influence dominates, we can prove that the book has a positive influence on the mental health of the students. However, according to the attitudes of the teachers, how much the digital book as a helping tool affects the vision (eyes) of the students, we have attitudes from which we ascertain the negative impact they have on the vision of the students with always 46%, often 28%, sometimes 12%, rarely 4% and never 10%. Approximately the same attitudes, namely with the attitude that always with 54%, often 20%, sometimes 12%, rarely 4% and never 10%, the negative impact of the digital book as a helping tool to the spine in students is proven. Another fact is revealed below regarding the already positive impact that the books in question have on the overload of carrying a school bag on the back. Here are the following attitudes: 46% always declare, often 26%, sometimes 18%, rarely 6% and never 4%. The mentioned frequency, also with 46% of the teachers, asserts the influence of books in relieving overload. The digital book as an aid affects the self-assessment of the knowledge acquired by the students, according to the data, the teachers answered always 16%, often 42%, sometimes 26%, rarely 8% and never 8%. From the answers where 42% of them were declared with the judgment often, we find that the digital book as an aid often affects the self-evaluation of the acquired knowledge. The digital book as an aid stimulates the reading of additional literature, according to the data teachers answered always 8%, often 28%, sometimes 30%, rarely 22% and never 12%. In this case, we cannot draw any significant frequency, even though 30% declare that sometimes the digital book as a helping tool affects the reading of additional literature among students. The digital book as a helping tool increases the success of students, according to the data teachers answered always 6%, often 28%, sometimes 40%, rarely 8% and never 18%. From their responses, where more were declared i.e. 40% of teachers, it is confirmed that sometimes the digital book as a helping tool increases the success of the students.

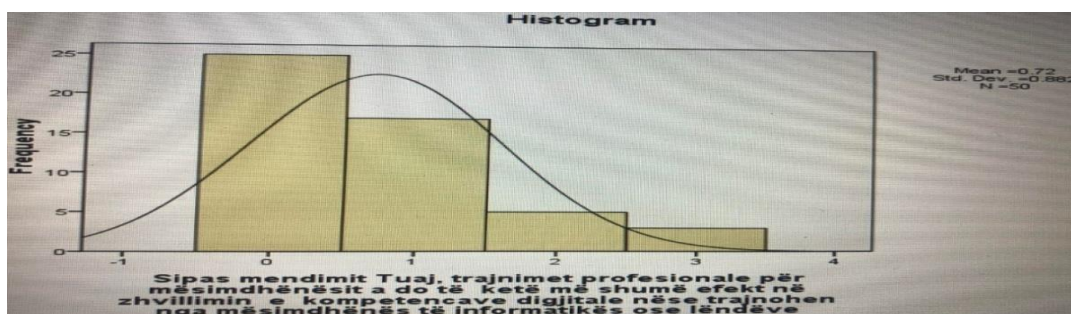
From the first question. In your opinion, will professional training for teachers have more effect on the development of digital competences if they are trained by teachers of informatics or exact subjects? Regarding whether the professional training for teachers will have more effect on the development of digital

competences if they are trained by teachers of informatics or exact subjects, we have reached the following results:

In your opinion, will professional training for teachers have more effect on the development of digital competences if they are trained by teachers of informatics or exact subjects?

Table 1. Professional training for teachers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid I don't know	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
I do not agree	5	10.0	10.0	16.0
I partially agree	17	34.0	34.0	50.0
I agree	25	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	



Graph 2. Professional training for teachers

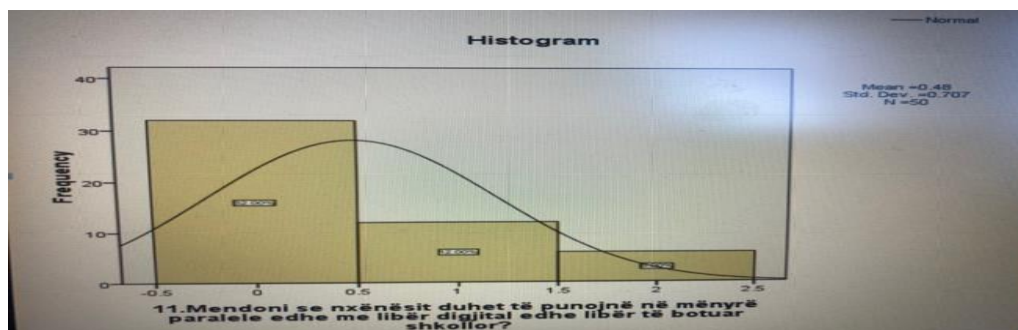
According to the results collected by the teachers based on the table from the data worked in relation to the question, will professional training for teachers have more effect on the development of digital competences if they are trained by teachers of informatics or exact subjects, 50% of teachers declare that they agree, 34% partially agree, 10% disagree and 6% don't know. According to the frequencies presented and processed with statistical methods, a high standard deviation of 0.882 appears.

From question 3. Regarding how teachers think, that students should work in parallel with both a digital book and a published textbook, we reached the following results:

Table 2. Digital book and published textbook

Do you think that students should work in parallel with digital textbooks and printed textbooks?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid I agree	32	64.0	64.0	64.0
I partially agree	12	24.0	24.0	88.0
I do not agree	6	12.0	12.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	



Graph 3. Digital book and published textbook

In the questionnaire with the teachers on the question that students should work in parallel with both a digital book and a published textbook, the teachers answered, 64% agree, 24% partially agree, 12% disagree. The frequency of teachers' attitudes processed with a histogram in which the curve that leans towards the positive appears, also with 0.48 and the high standard deviation, 0.707, allows us to conclude that teachers express the opinion that students should work in parallel with a digital book also published book.

Qualitative analysis of the results obtained

For the verification of hypothesis 1, the obtained results of questions 1 and 2 from the questionnaire for teachers were analyzed. The data obtained show that the respondents think that based on these answers we can conclude that 42% of teachers affirmed that the digital books visually are attractive, the digital books often contain good illustrations, diagrams and tables, in the digital book often the topics are based on the educational programs, digital books often contain a lot of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, listening, research, reading and writing, often in the digital book the units are suitable for the students, often the digital book matches their needs, often the digital book matches with their expectations, often in the digital book the topics are important and interesting, sometimes in the digital book the information is clearly given for reference (eg for science), often in digital books there are summary sections, often in the digital book there are many opportunities for useful exercises (eg communication activities), sometimes it motivates students, sometimes the digital book encourages students in critical thinking and by questioning, often the digital book as a helping tool affects the self-evaluation of the acquired knowledge, sometimes the digital book as a helping tool increases the success of students, often brings curiosity to expand knowledge, often the digital book as a helping tool enables easier self-assessment from the side of tests. Data obtained for: H.1 "We assume that the digital book motivates, reinforces critical thinking, increases the success among students" hence hypothesis 1 is partially confirmed.

For the verification of the 2nd hypothesis, the results obtained from the questions for the teachers were analyzed. From the data obtained and based on these answers, we can conclude that teachers agree that professional training for teachers will have more effect on the development of digital competences if they are trained by teachers of informatics or exact subjects. In the next question, according to the histogram, the variable is positive, the average is 0.48 and the standard deviation is 0.707. According to the attitudes of the teachers, it is concluded that the students should work in parallel with both the digital book and the published school book. The data obtained for: H.2 "We assume that teachers prefer to work in parallel with both digital and physical books." With what the hypothesis is confirmed.

Verification of the general hypothesis

With the verification of hypothesis 1 and 2 separately, which also confirms the general hypothesis in this research, which is: "H. "We assume that teachers prefer professional training from informatics teachers (exact subjects) to develop sufficient competencies for the application of digital books in teaching".

Conclusion

The professional development of teachers has been, is and will remain one of the segments that must be systematically developed and the professional competencies of teachers are also related to it. In the school year 2021-2022, in primary schools, i.e. in the 4th grade, books were launched for use on digital platforms. Therefore, in this paper we elaborated on the topic of the development of the digital competences of teachers, for the application of the digital book in the fourth grade, where from this paper we extracted and researched some of the segments for the digital book that was in use in the fourth grades. Since the topic has to do with the development of the digital competences of teachers for the use of digital books in the fourth grades, which system comes from years of strengthening and applying them, then I would suggest the Ministry of Education and Science, the Bureau for Education Development, the teachers, to continue with the digital book and in parallel with the physical book because it encourages, motivates, increases critical thinking among students. Also, teachers are approached by professional training because it will have more effect on the development of digital competences if they are trained by teachers of informatics or exact subjects. One of the powerful assertions during the research was the parallel use of the digital book and textbooks, so I suggest the bodies to continue with the digital book, adapting to the standards for assessment, but at the same time with the same textbooks, since the students will only use the digital book it damages the eyes, the spine, etc., for use in the two variants, this will help the students in maintaining their health.

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