

UDC: 37.018.3:303.62-055.52(497.761):616-036.21
373.3.018.43:004]:37.064.1(497.761)}616-036.21
Original scientific paper

PARENTAL CHALLENGES DURING DISTANCE LEARNING

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Abstract

The theory of education has not addressed the problem of distance learning to a proper extent. The pandemic caused by Covid-19, forced governments to cut back on schooling and organize distance learning. Among the main factors on which this process would largely depend were the parents of school children. For the needs of this paper, we compiled some questions for parents, and the same questions were used for interviewing them, when the teaching process had been going on for two months and there were still two weeks left until the end of the school year. The aim was to gather information about the question: How prepared were parents to deal with the situation in materialistic, software, and pedagogical terms? Five parents of primary school children from Kicevo were involved in the research. The results showed a lack of communication between teachers and parents. Parents feel more prepared if the same situation were to be repeated.

Keywords: distance learning, online learning, parent preparation.

Introduction

The regular educational process is carried out in special facilities, established to meet the requirements arising from the goals of the curriculum. Each state works according to an educational system for which it finds that it is more suitable for the realization of social expectations and requirements. Pedagogical practice, in terms of primary education, has proven that it is impossible to identify curricula that would be appropriate for all cultures and feasible in all countries. The common denominator of all educational systems is the organization of teaching in other forms and teaching and extracurricular modalities. In the didactic methodological aspect, in addition to regular teaching in schools, have been shown successful forms of extracurricular work, which can be accomplished both in ordinary conditions and in special circumstances.

The conditions and the situation that is created, as a result of the global pandemic, forced the authorities to take an extraordinary step. Decisions were made quickly and in many places, without adequate preparation. Educational systems were forced to close schools, but not to interrupt the educational process. From a pedagogical point of view, various theories have been developed about the development of a teaching process in specific conditions and circumstances, created as a result of natural disasters, emergencies, war and other causes that make it impossible to continue the teaching process in schools. When this process is interrupted for a certain period of time and it begins again, a shortened education process is organized, which means the realization of the most important important contents. From the economic and sociological point of view, theories are also known which oppose the development of the teaching process in schools. Views on such a theory known as the "Deschooling Society" were revealed in 1972, in the work *Deschooling*, a term used in Ivan Illich's agreements on school and education which presents a deviation from education,

school and traditional public (government) pedagogy for a type of education, school and pedagogy with fewer limitations in the learning process which focuses more on the educational value of natural curiosity. In this work, Illich argues that schools have been developed to cope with three main tasks: allocating people in professional activities, teaching prevailing values, and acquiring skills and knowledge adopted by society (Gidens, 2002: 412). These views of Illich were dismissed as unfounded and that they could only be referred to higher levels of education, where those interested would have acquired sufficient experience for self-study.

Attempts for organizing a teaching process without attending schools have happened before. Rare settlements in Australia and elsewhere have imposed the need for the development of learning through telecommunication, which means communication between two or more people who are not in the same place and cannot communicate directly with each other. According to Matijevic, telecommunication also means the use of written letters, television and telephone as intermediaries (Bognar, Matijevic 1996: 259).

Didactics the distance learning treats as an indirect way of organizing a teaching process. The advancement of telecommunication tools and networks, the creation of digital platforms, largely advance the successful realization of distance learning, but they are not the only factors. This form of teaching is preferable for high school students, as well as for workers who are educated without leaving work. For students of lower grades in primary schools, distance learning can be achieved only with the prior preparation of the parents. Indirect learning is based mainly on the independent way of learning and mastering the learning content, based on the prior training of students for such a learning and teaching process, which preparation is a basic condition for distance learning. (Zylfiu, 2001: 335)

It should be noted that the training of students for independent work and the preparation of parents, represent the basic factors for the successful organization and realization of distance learning.

Distance learning has a diverse history. It exists in many parts of the world and is aimed at adults who want to gain knowledge and qualifications on time management. In the educational process of primary school students, distance learning has served as a complement and expansion of the knowledge acquired during regular teaching in schools. Radio and TV shows are well-known, and in coordination with school schedules, students have had the opportunity to follow them from their homes.

Methodology

Distance learning began to be implemented as a result of the interruption of the regular education process. Governments, curriculum compilers, school management, teachers, parents, and students were faced with a new and unplanned situation. This situation forced the organization of distance learning through online learning mode. Everyone faced problems of different natures. It was largely the parents of the students who were charged with the role of mediator and teacher. How they managed the situation created, what problems they faced the most, was the purpose of the research. We interviewed 5 parents of students from different grades of primary schools in Kicevo, to minimize possible prejudice and to verify the information gathered. The interview was conducted via Skype, in which case the responses were recorded on the smartphone and transcribed into text.

Results

In the following paragraphs, we are presenting the results gathered throughout the interview.

1.

I have two children. Both are students in primary education. The girl/daughter is in fifth grade and the boy/son in eighth grade. I am a user of social networks; I also have an email. At home we have both a telephone and a computer; we also have a permanent network without limit.

The girl was told that she would attend the lesson on Viber, and that's what happened, and the boy had to have an email address to be able to join classes in the Classroom.

Teaching was not followed in time, according to a predetermined schedule. To my daughter was given tasks and commitments at any time, as well as to my son. Lessons and assignments were posted by the teachers; the children were committed to doing them. Then I'm not sure how the teachers corrected them. I have not heard any complaints from my child that the tasks were or were not proper.

About two or three weeks after starting classes like this, my daughter's teacher wrote to us and told us create a Skype connection and send her the registration name. Then they had a Skype – meeting, on the other hand eighth graders, continued in the same way. There was no change.

Yes, we needed help many times, for both of my children. As far as I know, other family members as well, have never turned to the teachers for help and such. The children have communicated and consulted with friends on various tasks.

We did not communicate with other teachers except once with our child's head teacher. At year quarter, we were informed about our children's success in writing.

Yes of course. Every beginning is difficult. We overcame it in the beginning. Very few of us were aware of these classes, of the groups. And to be honest until it started working, we all felt some kind of uncertainty.

2.

I have a third-grader and a younger one. We had no problem with technical and material issues. We easily adapted to the situation.

My child attended school in Viber. They never had verbal communication with the teacher. She sent them assignments to the Viber group every day and asked them to complete the assignments by tomorrow. They had to photograph it and send it to them.

On Viber, the teacher sent us the grading papers. She informed us in writing about the achievements. We had no other communication.

We needed help. There were situations and moments when we were unsure. Sometimes the task or question from the teacher seemed ambiguous to us, but we did not contact her. Otherwise, the tasks from the book were not a problem. We helped our child as much as we could.

I hope this situation never repeats itself. Yes, I have heard that some have had problems. They did not have permanent network connections, without which other work could not be done. I had no problem with my child. But as a situation that lasted a little longer than we expected, we are afflicted by the uncertainty of how much we helped our child. Maybe we could have done more. As for how much and what third graders need to know I am not completely sure. And I've always had a problem with that.

3.

I have three children, two of whom are in primary and one in high school.

My son who is in high school had a phone. We also had a computer at home. The situation initially mobilized us to buy another device to complete the children. Even so, owning one is still beyond

the reach of the average person. We connected to the Internet because we firstly weren't. At first, we didn't know what was going on for a couple of weeks, then we heard that the lessons would be followed from home, and we had to buy another phone and connect to the network.

My eldest child is a sophomore in high school, while my daughter is in ninth grade and my youngest is in sixth grade.

I don't know which of the platforms, that you are implying, they use to carry on with their school work. I see them writing, doing homework. I am not aware of the schedules, but I have not noticed that they have a set time when they learn and when they write.

We had no communication with teachers, professors.

I never went anywhere for help. Children help each other.

I pray that this situation is never repeated. We as people are prepared, and we have gone through many different situations. And if need be, we are human. What is certain to happen will be overcome.

4.

I am the parent of a child, a seventh-grader.

We had a computer, a telephone, and a permanent network before the pandemic began.

He attended classes on the Google Classroom platform.

The lesson did not have a set schedule. In some subjects once a week, if I'm not overdoing it, but in some subjects even once every two weeks, teachers posted assignments and commitments (lesson title, a page so and so, these assignments) and required that until a certain date the assignments should be finished, photographed and sent to them. Only the Albanian language teacher has spent two hours online on Skype. Others have completed all the lessons without much explanation.

We did not contact the teachers about the lessons, although we needed help in many subjects. The way they taught the lesson did not seem right to me at all. We did not know where to turn or who to consult. We thought we were the first to complain. And so this process has been going on like this for almost two months.

For tasks that we didn't know how to solve, we had help from other students. Children talked between themselves.

If the same situation will be repeated, we as parents would not know how to help our children. We felt a burden, we were aware that in many subjects we were unable to help. But I also understand the fact that this situation caught us all by surprise.

5.

I have three children: my daughter is a freshman in high school, my son is in the sixth grade, and my youngest girl has not started yet at school. So, out of all of my children, only one attends in the primary school. We had a laptop and three smartphones connected to relatively quick network and of unlimited capacity. However, we also needed at least one more computer. Smartphones did not prove effective for distance learning, especially for subjects which required tasks and projects that could be performed only on Microsoft Office Word, Excel, and PowerPoint software packages. I am a social media user, I have a Facebook account created 10 years ago and an email address opened 15 years ago. For distance learning needs, I had to open an email in gmail to use google's services. My daughter (who's in her first year of highschool), mainly attended distance learning on the Google Classroom platform, then Edmodo and Zoom. Email communications have been used also. My son - student in primary school- attended distance learning in Google Classroom, Edmodo and the Viber application and via email. The teaching schedule for both children has been dynamic but also problematic. However, the teaching schedule has only recently

stabilized and continues as such, stabilizing over time. The children have conducted online lessons every day while on weekends they have been busy with homeworks. The subjects that were most accurately taught by high school teachers were Mathematics, Physics, Albanian Language and English, then Chemistry, Biology, Macedonian Language, Informatics, Figurative Art, Musical Art and History. The subjects Physical Education and Health, Geography and French Language have been taught less or even not at all. Mathematics, English, Macedonian, Knowledge of Religions, Natural Sciences, Figurative Education and Informatics were most accurately taught in primary school. The curricula for subjects Albanian Language, Geography and Technical Education have been realized on an average level; less and not at all, French language, Physical and health education and Music. For help I mainly communicated with teachers who have been very advanced in communication competence. I communicated at least once a week with one of the two children's teachers. If the same situation is repeated, I feel more prepared to support the children but also the distance learning teacher.

Discussion

With the declaration of the pandemic by the World Health Organization, governments were forced to close the schools. They intensively set out in search of a solution, and after ten days they put into operation distance learning. Teachers during their didactic methodological preparation had heard of this form of teaching, but in practical terms they had never faced it. Parents were most affected ones by this situation. They had to provide the material base for their children so they could attend the lessons at home without interruption, but they also had to use software support so that the children could be included in the classes created or the groups created by the teachers. During the development of the learning process, parents in many situations had to take on the role of educator, to help children to master the teaching material as successfully as possible. In interviews with parents, we found that most families had a material base and were easily involved in the process. During the lessons, most parents were not happy with the way the lesson was carried out. In most cases without explanations and without the possibility of verbal discussion with teachers. Unspecified schedules kept their children waiting for teachers to send them assignments and homework, which often needed help to be accomplished. Parents' verbal communication with teachers was lacking. The parents stated that they never thought that one day they would be asked to take the place of the teachers. To solve tasks and problems, especially in the mathematics, they had never searched on Google or Youtube, where for many problems of different natures solutions are offered.

According to the statements of the parents, it can be concluded that they lack the necessary preparation for the realization of distance learning. Parents need pedagogical tact. The lack of contact with teachers put them in different dilemmas. Sometimes they interpreted the silence as if everything was going well, sometimes that everything is not going well. At the time of the surveys, almost all parents asked the question: What about the assessments, how will students be graded? This seems to have been the biggest concern as the school year was coming to an end.

The interview

1. Number of children in the family.
2. Number of children attending primary education.
3. Did you have the tools and access to the network to teach your children distance learning?
4. Are you a user of social networks (facebook or other), do you have an e-mail address, and for how long?
5. On which digital platform did your children attend classes?
6. Did they follow the lesson on a regular and unchanging schedule every day?
7. How many times during this period have children completed online learning (on Skype, Zoom or other platform) and in which subjects?
8. Where did you turn for help when they needed it? Teachers, students or looking for solutions and clarifications on Google or Youtube?
9. How many times have you communicated with teachers and for what reason?
10. If the same condition were repeated, do you feel better prepared to deal with it more successfully?

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