

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TEACHING METHODS AND THE REALIZED OUTCOMES OF MOTHER TONGUE TEACHING DURING LOCKDOWN

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Abstract The past pandemic provoked completely new educational approaches and forced all teachers in the Republic of Croatia to embark on a completely new way of teaching and evaluating students. This paper will highlight the specifics of Croatian language teaching during distance learning in the spring of 2020; from 16 March 2020 until the end of the school year. A questionnaire on distance learning of the Croatian language was conducted (n = 170). A qualitative analysis of the responses and a descriptive analysis of attitudes were performed, and a one-way analysis of ANOVA variance was used for correlations. The ways in which teachers conducted teaching and the methods used to evaluate the achievement of educational outcomes are presented. Furthermore, the teachers expressed their views on whether the students completed learning tasks independently and whether they had contact and good communication with the students and parents. The position on the realization of educational outcomes during online teaching was compared with the similar position during direct teaching in school. The results showed that the teachers were less satisfied with the results achieved during emergency remote teaching, and they were dissatisfied with the level of cooperation with parents and the students' level of independence.

Keywords:

Croatian language classes,
Croatian language teaching,
emergency remote teaching,
distance teaching methods,
teachers' satisfaction

1 Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has caused changes in all areas of human activity, even the educational process. Thanks to the fast reaction of educators and the conscientious behaviour of students, a complete interruption of the educational process was avoided. In the search for new solutions, and with the hope that the new situation would pass as soon as possible, many changes have taken place. The complete closure in early 2020 forced almost all teachers and professors to adapt extremely quickly, for the most part, to untested tools, methods, and strategies in emergency remote teaching. It should be emphasized that this was not the typical distance learning that had previously been conducted in certain areas of education. Given that the entire education system was unprepared, and that many teachers had not mastered the methods and techniques of this way of teaching, this time was very challenging. Teachers had to teach at a distance and educate themselves on a number of tools. This was reflected in the subject of Croatian language at all levels of education from primary to secondary school, as well as in all types of schools in the Republic of Croatia. The teaching of all subjects was conducted in Croatian, since it is the mother tongue of most students, and the content of Croatian language teaching in schools is aligned with the level of education with the obligation to meet certain educational outcomes. Given that the nature of the Croatian language as a subject is very complex, and that this subject is very demanding and layered in relation to the outcomes associated with different educational levels, the time of complete closure or isolation affected communication in knowledge transfer, in achieving basic outcomes, in monitoring and in evaluating students. Communication is the most important human activity, and the challenge of gaining students' initial literacy or encouraging basic communication skills at the beginning of formal education were the most difficult to achieve through distance learning, especially through this form of emergency distance learning. Croatian language teachers had to overcome numerous obstacles in teaching. Much qualitative research was conducted in order to contribute to the educational science of distance learning. Various data on teaching at that time are presented, which can be a solid foundation for improving future teaching. Among other things, the attitudes of Croatian language teachers towards the achievement of educational goals were examined. Achieving teaching goals is the task of every teacher. Furthermore, data on job satisfaction at that time for mother tongue teachers were collected and presented. The method of evaluation in the Republic of Croatia, similar to that in other

countries, had to adapt to the situation, and evaluation was entrusted to teachers. That is why it is important to analyse how teachers evaluated students.

2 The Time of the Pandemic and Teaching the Croatian Language

The coronavirus pandemic initiated a number of changes in the educational process, requiring teachers to respond quickly and apply completely new methodological concepts. Teachers around the world have faced challenges that have made their mark on the history of education. Contact teaching has been replaced by teaching supported by information and communication technology, so the digital competences of teachers and professors have come to the fore for the organization and implementation of this type of teaching. Digital literacy, as one of the core competences, has been at the centre of interest for many years. Digital literacy has become necessary not only for the modern teacher, but for modern man in general. Numerous authors have conducted studies on the digital literacy of teachers. A study conducted by Ružić Baf, Radetić-Paić and Zarevski (2012) showed that the students of teacher training colleges believed that future teachers did not need education in the field of informatics, which at that time was not considered to be the foundation of modern and quality teaching. However, today many teachers are aware that they need additional education to use information and communication technologies, given that during the pandemic, digital competences were the basis for the implementation of the teaching process. Teachers point out that many of them were left to fend for themselves during online classes. On the other hand, in order for teaching supported by information technology to really achieve its purpose, the students also need to be digitally literate. Lovrić and Bjeliš (2021) conducted a survey among 101 high school students in which they explored students' coping abilities in the digital environment and their satisfaction with distance learning. The study showed that most students do very well with the necessary technology (57.40%), but that some students do not cope at all (4%). The study also showed that most students have the necessary IT equipment (54.5%), but that there are students who do not (4%). According to previous research on the quality of teaching during the pandemic, it can be concluded that at that time the educational process was burdened with a number of difficulties. Lovrić and Bjeliš (2021) point out that students believe that teachers do not afford enough time for teaching homework (56.4%), or for sufficiently explaining new teaching content (44.6%). Only 5.9% of students agreed that they would adopt the new teaching content well during distance

learning. Ćurković, Krašić and Katavić (2020) conducted research during the coronavirus pandemic in Croatia and examined the attitudes of teachers and parents towards various aspects of distance learning. The results of the study showed that parents and teachers have different perceptions of work, effort, stress and tension – teachers show a higher level of anxiety than parents and students. However, parents and students pointed out that during distance learning they felt an increased level of stress and anxiety, compared to the time of contact teaching. Parents believe that teachers sent a much larger number of assignments to students during distance learning, while teachers felt that their students did the same amount of work as before distance learning. Also, the parents pointed out that the tasks that the students received from the teachers were quite vague. The parents emphasized good communication between students and teachers, and they were more satisfied with the final grades than the teachers were.

3 Distance Learning

The coronavirus pandemic almost managed to bring the whole world to a standstill for a while, and the challenges it has posed to humanity have also been reflected in the field of education. Experts in this field have realized that dropping out of education is not the solution. Therefore, teachers and professors at all levels of education were forced to find new methods and strategies for teaching their students. Čubrić (2021) calls education during the pandemic an e-education system and points out a number of new concepts that emerged during that time: e-education, e-learning, distance teaching, distance learning, online teaching, online education, etc. Information and communication technologies are used in different ways in the teaching process – with regard to the manner and intensity of use, we can distinguish between teaching in the classroom, accompanied by information and communication technologies; hybrid or mixed teaching, which includes a combination of classic teaching and e-learning, and online teaching, i.e., teaching that is fully organized at a distance and is based on digital technologies (Divjak & Begičević, 2010, according to Mikša, 2011). Thus, terms that are frequently used in the same context do often not have exactly the same meaning. According to the e-Learning Strategies (Strategije e-učenja, 2007, p. 5) at the University of Zagreb, e-learning is: “The process of education (learning and teaching process) with the use of information and communication technology, which contributes to improving the quality of this process and the quality of education outcomes.” E-education is any

form of teaching process in which technology is used. Distance learning implies the acquisition of knowledge and skills with the help of the materials and instructions delivered and with the help of technologies (Šain, 2017). In this paper, it is called “emergency remote teaching” because of the influence of pandemic circumstances in which teachers applied distance learning in a sudden and unplanned way, using untested methods, strategies and teaching materials, in particular the method of evaluation.

Upon analysing the educational system throughout history, one can conclude that distance education is nothing new or unknown. The roots of this kind of teaching can be found in the advent of correspondence schools. In the last century, they were based on materials and books sent by mail, and today modern technologies are used to exchange materials and to take exams. With the advent of the Internet, distance education is gaining new dimensions and, in this context, is considered a new educational phenomenon (Pokorni, 2009; Ćukušić & Jadrić 2012; Clark & Mayer, 2016). Education in which the teacher and student are physically distant, and this is part of the definition of distance learning today, was first recorded in 1904 at today's Aberystwyth University (Kalamković, Halaši & Kalamković, 2013). In the search for the definition and outcome of distance learning, Čubrić (2021) points out the advantages and disadvantages of distance teaching. Some advantages mentioned by the author are the flexibility of work in the teachers' own rhythm and time, less travel, the development of personal responsibility for learning, the development of information processing skills, lectures can be recorded and watched again, and all students can participate, thus reducing absenteeism. Čubrić finds shortcomings in the fact that live contact cannot be replaced by anything else, in poor technical equipment, technical difficulties, poor motivation, the reduction of the educational role of teachers while teaching in the classroom, technology costs, the difficulty of committing time to each student, the constant need for additional training, and the initial years of school education, when the implementation of distance learning is almost impossible. Other authors also note the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning, emphasizing as the greatest advantages the possibility of continuous learning and professional development, further learning according to the students' own capabilities, cheaper education, but they also point out the disadvantages found in the mandatory use of appropriate technology, which is sometimes very demanding but also expensive. The scholars notice a lack of motivation in students because of the lack of face-to-face interaction, as well as

unclear evaluation criteria. Ultimately, they point out that e-learning cannot replace the traditional school environment (Shipside, 2002; Janeska & Taleska, 2011; Kalamaković, Halaši & Kalamaković, 2013; Lovrić & Bjeliš, 2021). Bastl (2021) discusses the benefits of distance learning during the pandemic that have made it easier for teachers to work, some of which are flexibility and self-organization of work time, saving money and time instead of traveling to work, additional and easily accessible education, etc. However, the author concludes that these advantages were not realized in concrete work and points out that teachers' working hours often stretched throughout the day, they often depended on students and their parents, and many teachers did not have the necessary equipment for distance learning in real time or the necessary space for their work to be unhindered by external factors, etc. This resulted in problems with reconciling work and private life; the teachers felt pressure, stress, etc.

4 The Complexity of Croatian Language Teaching

In almost all countries, the teaching of each national language is allotted the largest number of teaching hours. The Croatian language as a subject is very complex and rich in diverse curricula containing the basic tasks needed to follow all subjects. The Croatian language, as a school subject, could previously be viewed in light of several program-methodological components, namely initial reading and writing, literature, the Croatian language, linguistic expression, and media culture (Mendeš, 2009). The basic area as of today in the first two grades of primary school is initial reading and writing because it is the basis for mastering the content of the Croatian language, as well as all other subjects. Bežen (2002) points out that through initial reading and writing, the foundations are built for the acquisition of knowledge, abilities, and the skills necessary for functional and creative engagement with language and literature in later life, and for the development of expressive-communicative, literary and media literacy. Since the Croatian Language Curriculum is the basic document that regulates modern Croatian language teaching, a short analysis of the document will be presented in order to identify the purpose and expected educational outcomes that will be achieved after the completion of Croatian language teaching in a particular class. According to the curriculum, the Croatian language is divided into three interrelated areas: Croatian language and communication, literature and creativity, and culture and media. Outcomes are achieved in accordance with these

areas; thus, the goal of the Croatian language and communication domain is to master the possibilities in all language activities and to acquire communicative language competence. The field of literature and creativity is based on literature, i.e., understanding literature as art, where students develop personal, national, cultural, social and aesthetic value, and critical thinking. The field of culture and media teaches students about various social, cultural and intercultural contexts. All areas are upgraded during primary and secondary education, which means that they complement and expand the student's knowledge in accordance with their age and abilities, but also in accordance with their previously acquired knowledge (Curriculum, 2019). Teachers also achieved the prescribed educational outcomes during emergency remote teaching, and in the end, they had the task of achieving the goal for the Croatian language subject in each class. Whether this new form of teaching has opened new job opportunities for teachers or not, whether it has affected the achievement of outcomes and the purpose of learning and teaching, and whether grades are realistic indicators of student knowledge are questions that the educational system will deal with for some time. Krumes et al. (2021) conducted a study on the ways of teaching Croatian language in relation to the teaching areas of literature, language, media culture, and initial reading and writing. Most of the respondents pointed out that they conducted classes using the appropriate tools and programs, creating virtual classrooms. Of the digital classrooms, Yammer, MS Teams, and Google Classroom were used the most, and Loomen, Merlin, and Google sites were used slightly less. Zoom, Google meet and Viber platforms were used to process teaching content via video calls. However, some teachers replaced real-time video calling with teaching programs and tools and sent them to students in the form of prepared written teaching materials. In distance learning the teachers used the following digital tools the most: PowerPoint, Word, Wizzer, Wordwall, Kahoot, Canva, Genially, Testmoz, Edmodo, Webex and others. In this paper, the form of distance learning that had to be utilized because of the pandemic is called emergency remote teaching to indicate the period in which teachers could not realize all learning outcomes, and they were not prepared, so teaching took place on many different platforms and in many different ways.

Regarding the achieved learning outcomes, the teachers of the first and second grade of primary school consider that the least achieved outcomes were in the field of initial reading and writing, and most teachers think that the least achieved outcomes are in the field of language – spelling and grammar. Furthermore, teachers believe

that students mostly fulfil their tasks independently, and in a somewhat smaller form with the help of their parents. Regarding the organization of Croatian language teaching, primary school teachers pointed out that during emergency remote teaching they often taught reading and literature, and much less language and media culture. Teachers of the first and second grade of primary school devoted most of their time to the teaching of initial reading and writing, which was challenging owing to the age and inexperience of the students because of their independent work from home.

5 Evaluation of Learning Outcomes

To find out teachers' opinions on the achieved learning outcomes after emergency remote teaching, one must look at student evaluations. The evaluation carried out by the teachers showed how successfully the students achieved their learning outcomes. Evaluation during emergency remote teaching was an additional challenge for teachers. Evaluation in the teaching process is regulated by a curricular approach, where it refers not only to summative evaluation, but to evaluation from three points of view: evaluation for learning, evaluation as learning, and evaluation of what has been learned. Marin (2019) points out that the emphasis is on formative evaluation, which implies systematic monitoring of student progress. Marin (2019) conducted a study the results of which showed the great potential of the Loomen platform for evaluation, according to all three mentioned approaches. However, the author points out that the approach of "valuing what has been learned" depends on the teaching content, educational outcomes and individual subjects. However, the platform offers some solutions for evaluating what has been learned – a simple direct assessment, an assessment form, and a rubrics for monitoring grades. The approaches "evaluation for learning" and "evaluation as learning" can be implemented because the platform enables the monitoring of a large number of activities for each student. When evaluating students, it is easier for the teacher if they implement the following fundamental questions stated by Mrkonjić & Vlahović (2008): who and what is evaluated, what is the starting point and content of evaluation, who is the bearer of evaluation, and what is the goal of evaluation?

The Ministry of Science and Education is announcing guidelines for evaluating the process and achievement of educational outcomes in primary and secondary education (2019), according to which emphasis is placed on the learning process,

achieving progress, improving learning and cooperation, strengthening the responsibility of all participants in the educational process, and ensuring equal opportunities for all students. Numerical assessment is determined as the ultimate goal of evaluation, but evaluation in itself has a far deeper meaning in the process of upbringing and education in the development of student competences. In addition, the purpose of the evaluation is to inform parents and students about the extent to which educational outcomes have been adopted and what needs to be worked on further. Precisely for these reasons, regardless of whether the teaching process takes place in person or at a distance, evaluation needs to be carried out systematically and thus guide students and develop skills of self-assessment, assessment, monitoring and management of the learning process. A prominent challenge for teachers was to assess whether students perform their tasks independently, and thus whether the evaluation is objective and whether the concluded grades accurately exhibit the students' level of knowledge. During distance learning, many teachers concluded that students did not work independently, and one way to avoid this lies in cooperation between teachers and parents, or schools and parents. The task of teachers is, among other things, to convey to parents the meaning of fulfilling school assignments, homework, and other school obligations, in order for parents to realize that participating in the teaching process in the wrong way can harm their children, and thus disrupt the basic tasks of school – objective assessment, and the acquisition of skills and abilities.

6 Methodology

6.1 Research Goal and Research Questions

The study is focused on teachers' opinions and attitudes, as well as the self-evaluation of teachers during emergency remote teaching and the specific circumstances in which the teacher found themselves. Torn between the learning outcomes to be met and the specific circumstances of distance learning, the Croatian language teacher had to sacrifice some of the learning outcomes that they had to omit. Given the circumstances, the authors believe that the teacher therefore had to change their way of teaching. The negative circumstances also affected the quality of assessment, wherein it was no longer clear who the teacher was assessing: the student or the parent who had to help the student with distance learning. However, learning would not have been possible if teachers in the lower grades of primary

school had not had to cooperate with the parents, on whom they had to rely completely. The authors therefore believe that all these circumstances greatly influenced the attitudes and dissatisfaction of teachers at varying levels of education. The goal of this study was to examine the opinions and attitudes of teachers who organized emergency remote teaching and learning of the mother tongue in primary and secondary schools. The study raises several fundamental research issues: to establish the teachers' assessment of their students' independence when working at home; to examine the teachers' the opinions on the quality of cooperation with parents during distance learning; to assess the level of goal achievement and the outcomes of mother tongue teaching during distance learning; and the self-assessment of attitudes surrounding satisfaction with the quality of one's own teaching of the mother tongue at a distance.

6.2 Respondents

A total of 170 teachers participated in this study; of which 54 were primary school teachers, 69 were Croatian language teachers in primary schools, and 47 were Croatian language teachers in secondary schools.

6.3 Instrument

For the purpose of this study, an online questionnaire for teachers of the Croatian language was constructed. The questionnaire was uploaded onto Google Drive and filled in remotely. The respondents answered the questions by self-assessing their attitudes on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents the lowest rank.

6.4 Conducting Research and Data Processing

The questionnaire was available in early 2021. It was posted online, and its implementation was anonymous and transversal. The data were processed in the SPSS Statistics v21 statistical data processing program for Windows. The results included all participants who completed the questionnaire.

7 Results and Discussion

7.1 Student Independence

The teachers' attitudes surrounding their students' independence during their work at home showed the following results: mean = 2.75; M = 3.00; SD = 0.9; skew. = 0.2; min = 1.00; max = 5.00 (Figure 1). These results show the very low level of positive attitudes and the high heterogeneity of the group in the assessments. The teachers estimated that the students were rarely independent in their work and that their parents helped them more than they should. There is also a fairly large dispersion of results, which indicates very different assessments of independence depending on the level of education, i.e., the students' age and the class they attend.

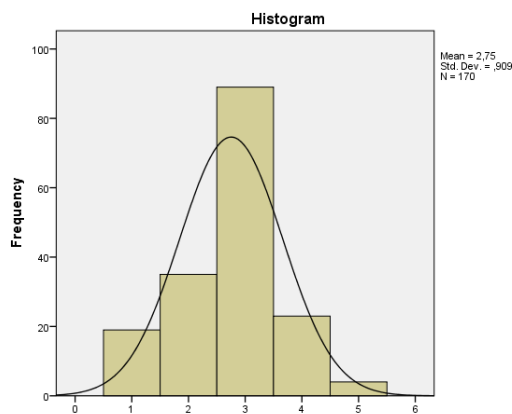


Figure 1: I think that the students did their Croatian language homework and their other homework on their own

Source: Own

It is important to start with the analysis of the satisfaction of the mother tongue teacher at different levels of education. Therefore, the analysis was made and the results show that the attitudes of Croatian language teachers at primary schools indicated the greatest dissatisfaction with the achievement of teaching [2] (mean = 2.67 and SD = 0.92), the attitudes of high school teachers can be classified as secondary satisfaction [3] (mean = 2.79 and SD = 0.93), while the highest grade is seen in primary school teachers [1] (mean = 2.83 and SD = 0.88). The question that arises is whether there is a correlation between different levels of teacher education

in the answers, and a one-way analysis of ANOVA variance ($F = 0.55$; $p > 0.05$) (Figure 2) was conducted, which showed that there is no significant relationship between education levels.

Most teachers concluded, regardless of their level of education, that parents were involved in the performance of student duties. This greatly disrupted the students' independence. Considering that the parents participated in the fulfilment of the teaching tasks, a satisfactory level of achievement of the teaching goals was not met. The students were thus deprived of the knowledge, skills and abilities that had been envisioned at the time.

In considering these data, it is important to investigate how the evaluation of students was conducted and whether the grades from that period are objective indicators of the adoption of outcomes and teaching content.

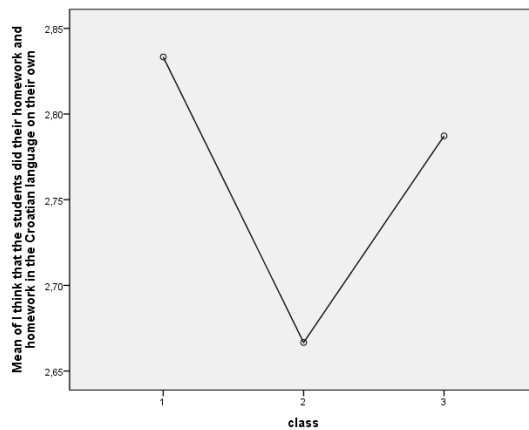


Figure 2: Correlation between the variables of attitude level and education level¹
Source: Own

7.2 Cooperation with Parents

When asked about the satisfaction and level of cooperation between teachers and parents, the following results were obtained: mean = 2.6; M = 3.00; SD = 1.14; lean. = 0.003; min = 1.00; max = 5.00 (Figure 3). This data shows extreme dissatisfaction

¹ Variable class in histogram refers to the level of education, where 1 represents class teaching, 2 represents subject teaching and 3 represents secondary school.

with parents during emergency distance learning. The parents participated in large numbers in the performance of student obligations, thus preventing the objective and real achievement of educational outcomes in one of the most complex subjects –the Croatian language. This confirms the fact that 22.9% of teachers working with parents rated this statement with a grade of 1, which indicates the lowest grade and extreme dissatisfaction. Still, the results are very scattered. The high level of standard deviation indicates that there were large differences in the teachers' assessment of parental cooperation, mostly in a negative direction.

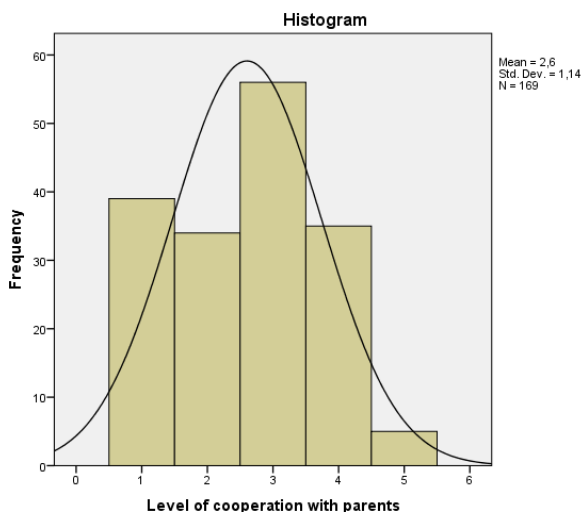


Figure 3: The satisfaction and level of cooperation between teachers and parents
Source: Own

In the analysis of the difference in satisfaction between primary school teachers, Croatian language teachers, and Croatian language secondary school teachers, the most dissatisfied were primary school teachers (mean = 2.5 and SD = 1.3), subject teachers were less satisfied (mean = 2.64) and SD = 0.94), while the highest score, albeit with a small difference, was among high school teachers (mean = 2.67 and SD = 1.23) (Figure 4). These results raise the question of what caused the satisfaction of primary school teachers, given that primary school students are the youngest and need the physical presence of teachers most. At this age, students rely heavily on a teacher who fully manages the teaching process and constantly guides them. Teachers are expected to support learning and directly develop independence in learning. This is especially evident in the teaching of initial reading and writing, which

was, based on the opinion of the teachers, the most difficult to perform. Teachers in this area relied on the cooperation and assistance of parents, who were often forced to follow the teacher’s instructions and guide their children, and often to take on the role of teacher. If these facts are considered, then the primary school teachers’ satisfaction makes sense, because they asked for and received help from parents. This challenging situation was also reflected in evaluation, which was a significant methodological problem for teachers in the field of initial reading and writing. Considering that primary school students are still in the process of developing work habits and learning, the question arises of whether these habits are realized and developed in older students. From the (dis)satisfaction of teachers, it can be assumed that the habit of learning and working has not been realized. This raises the question of whether the quality of direct teaching has indeed achieved its educational tasks to any great extent.

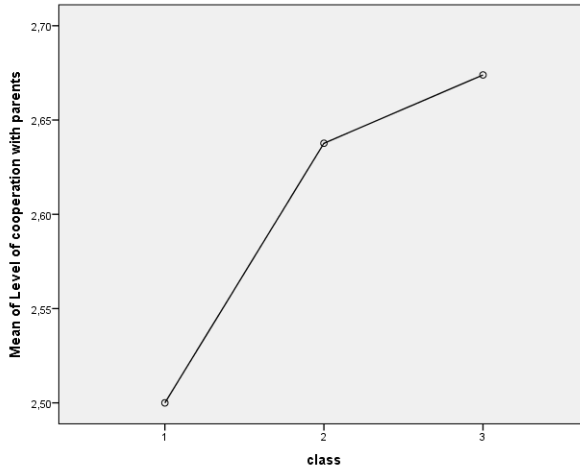


Figure 4. The level of cooperation between teachers and parents at different levels of education²
Source: Own

7.3 Achieving Goals and Outcomes

This research question referred to the assessment of the achievement of goals and outcomes in distance learning of the Croatian language, according to the opinion of

² Variable class in histogram refers to the level of education, where 1 represents class teaching, 2 represents subject teaching and 3 represents secondary school.

Croatian language teachers. The results show the following: mean = 2.26; M = 3.00; SD = 1.09; lean. = 0.51; min = 1.00; max = 5.00 (Figure 5). In other words, the teachers expressed the greatest dissatisfaction in their answers to this research question. The teachers showed a very high level of dissatisfaction with the achieved goals and outcomes in distance learning of the Croatian language. The fact that as many as a third of the respondents (30.6%) rated the achievement of goals and outcomes as 1, i.e., that they were completely dissatisfied with the achievements, also contributes to this. The causes of dissatisfaction need to be investigated, and a partial answer can be found in the previous facts, given that parents played a large role in fulfilling the students' educational obligations.

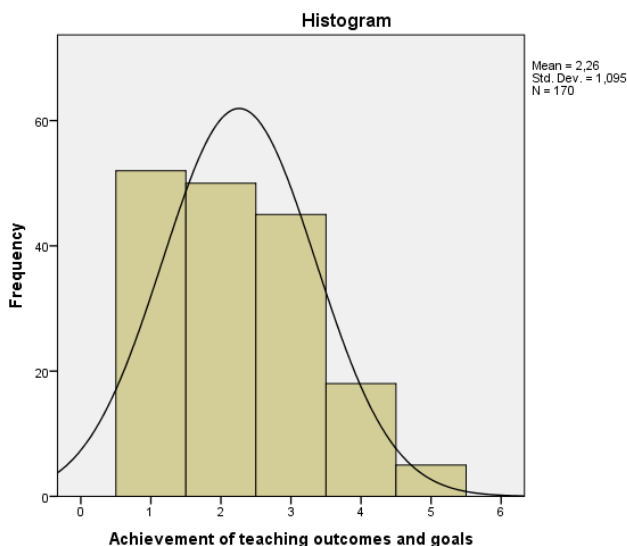


Figure 5: The assessment of the achievement of the goals and outcomes of Croatian language distance learning
Source: Own

When observing the assessment of the achievement of goals and outcomes according to the levels of education, the following results were obtained: the highest assessment was by primary school teachers (mean = 2.44 and SD = 1.13), followed by secondary school teachers (mean = 2.4 and SD = 1.03) and the lowest were subject teachers (mean = 2.01 and SD = 1.08). A one-way analysis of ANOVA variance was performed ($F = 2.97$; $p = .05$ (Figure 6), which shows the existence of a boundary correlation between the variables for assessing the achievement of goals

and outcomes with the level of education. A T-test was also conducted ($F = 1.3$; $t = 2.15$; $p < .05$), which shows a statistically significant difference between the assessment of primary and secondary school teachers' lower satisfaction. Moreover, assessment of the achievement of outcome goals leads to the conclusion that these were the least achieved. This is in line with the low results in terms of student independence and cooperation with parents, which are certainly related to these negative assessments.

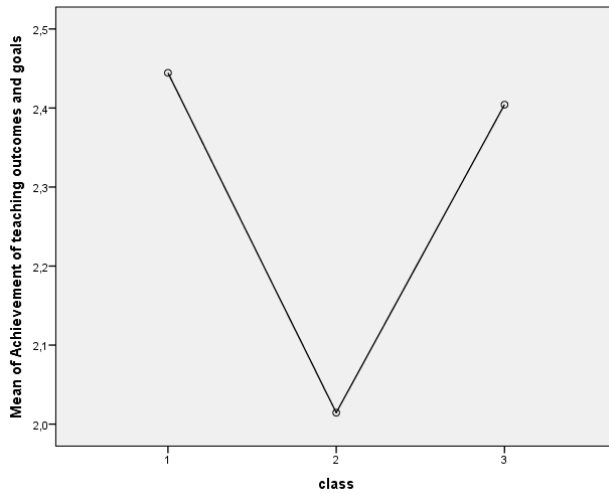


Figure 6: The assessment of the achievement of goals and outcomes according to level of education³
Source: Own

7.4 Assessments of the Quality of the Teachers' Own Teaching

In this part of the study, the teachers had to assess the quality of their teaching. The evaluation results show the following: mean = 3.63; $M = 4.00$; $SD = 0.73$; skew. = 0.32; min = 1.00; max = 5.00 (Figure 7). Here one can see a deviation from the results of previous research in which the work of teachers was assessed. They now assess the quality of their work as significantly higher than the previous results related to the student and cooperation with parents. This means that the teachers invested

³ Variable class in histogram refers to the level of education, where 1 represents primary school teaching, 2 represents subject teaching, and 3 represents secondary school.

effort into teaching the Croatian language. Thus, one can conclude that teachers do not consider their work to be the cause of poor performance. Also, despite their unpreparedness for this form of teaching, teachers believe that they have made a sufficient contribution to the quality transmission and adoption of new content.

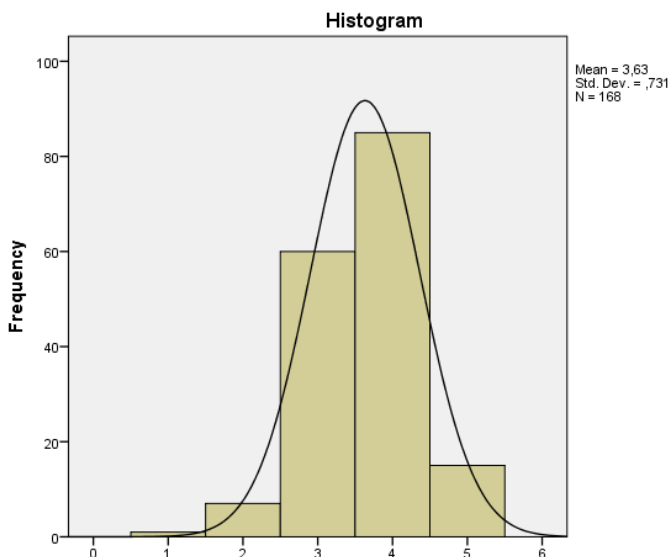


Figure 7: Quality of distance teaching the Croatian language
Source: Own

According to the level of education, the lowest self-assessment results were shown by subject teachers (mean = 3.48 and SD = 0.65), in the middle were high school teachers (mean = 3.62 and SD = 0.75) and the highest were primary school teachers (mean = 3.83 and SD = 0.77). The teachers' self-assessment as a whole did not correspond to the results that showed that primary school teachers exhibit the most dissatisfaction with cooperation with parents and doubts about their students' independence. However, it coincides with their assessment that they achieved the required educational outcomes. Given that teachers emphasized the cooperation of parents and the lack of independence of students, it can be asked on what base the teachers assessed their performance. There are many other questions that need to be explored. For example, what are the consequences of this approach to student evaluation, especially for the youngest students who had just become familiar with their school obligations, but also for students in the final grades of primary and secondary schools who enrolled in higher education in the coming period. First of

all, it is important to find answers on how teaching could be improved and what needs to be done in educating teachers and preparing teachers for new methodological challenges. Special attention should be paid to students who gained knowledge of initial reading and writing during the pandemic, because literacy (fully achieved) is the most important task of Croatian language education in general.

8 Conclusion

The implementation of teaching the Croatian language at a distance was a challenge for all teachers. It was especially challenging to prepare and conduct initial reading and writing classes – according to some, this is still almost impossible today. Despite all the challenges, the classes were conducted. Here, one may question whether teaching during complete lockdown fulfilled its purpose and whether it was successful. The digital competences of teachers were crucial for this type of teaching.

A total of 170 teachers participated in the study presented in this paper. The teachers believed the students were very dependent and that they mainly relied on their parents when performing their school assignments. It is worrying that the communication between teachers and parents was quite disrupted, a fact that was emphasized by the primary school teachers. Furthermore, the teachers stated that there was an extremely low level of achievement of outcomes and teaching objectives, which was also highlighted by primary school teachers, although they believed that they had achieved the expected outcomes to a greater extent than the subject teachers themselves estimated. Thus, despite achieving disappointing outcomes, the teachers estimated that the quality of their work was higher than that of other teachers at other educational levels. This study also raises certain questions that should be explored. One of these is certainly to explore the ways in which teachers evaluate students during distance learning and to conduct a deeper analysis of the working methods used during this time.

This period has prompted many methodological questions that will surely be explored for many years to come; what can be done to make grades in the digital environment real indicators of knowledge, how can classroom communication be improved through digital tools, how does one attract parents to the teaching process through ICT? All this for the sake of developing a responsible, conscientious, but also independent society, even through computers. On the other hand, the question

arises as to whether distance learning can replace contact teaching, while keeping the quality of the teaching process the same, and what needs to be done to achieve this.

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