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“I WILL GIVE YOU SOME SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO IMPROVE TEACHING/LEARNING DURING THE PANDEMIC” – A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE ANSWERS OF 5TH GRADE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUPILS

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A B S T R A C T

The present paper is part of some broader research, which aimed at examining the perceptions of pupils, teachers, parents, and undergraduate students related to online and combined (online and classroom) teaching/learning in the Republic of Serbia during the pandemic. Methodology: The topic analyzed in this paper related to suggestions put forward by students' and intended for their teachers or the school, on how to make teaching/learning during the pandemic better. Data were collected in the form of narratives. A thematic analysis of the responses of 5th-grade elementary school pupils in the Republic of Serbia was used. Responses were collected during the first half of 2020. The students' suggestions concerned the organization of classes and compliance with protection measures. The pupils wanted their schools and teachers to organize classes as before the start of the pandemic. The teachers instructed the pupils to keep track of TV/online lessons and complete additional tasks that they sent them during the combined classes. Most of the surveyed pupils prefer classroom teaching/learning. The obtained findings can be considered as a modest contribution to a better understanding of this issue, which is still relevant, due to the current pandemic conditions.

Key words:

education, online teaching/learning, combined teaching/learning, pandemic.

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■ INTRODUCTION

In an effort to understand the social circumstances under which the process of education took place in the Republic of Serbia during the pandemic and its effects on students, we proceeded based on the idea that the participation of students in the educational process is highly significant and that it is important to take their opinion on various aspects of schooling into consideration. It is precisely the student voice theory that emphasizes the importance of the possibility of consulting students about learning in order to increase their level of achievement with a better understanding of student values and also to raise standards (Robinson & Taylor, 2007).

Student voice theory is vital for involving students in their educational process. Student voice can be a useful method for getting feedback on the educational process and its actors, but also as a way for students to express their own opinions about teaching and learning (Gomez-Arizaga et al., 2016; Logan & Skamp, 2008). These authors argue that participation and inclusiveness are the basic values of the student voice theory. Accordingly, Mitra (2018) defines student voice as the ways in which students influence or participate in educational decision-making. Cook Sather (2006, pp. 363) defines student voice as “a term that asks us to connect the sound of a student speaking not only with those students experiencing meaningful, acknowledged presence, but also with their having the power to influence analyses of, decisions about, and practices in school”. Furman and Calabrese Barton (2006, pp. 669) define student voice as “a dynamic construct, closely related to how one learns or constructs new identities within a context.”

Having a voice means that the student has the power to speak his/her mind, and the power to be heard by others and thus influence the outcome (Cook Sather, 2006). A qualitative study has indicated that the student voice approach can contribute to promoting greater student participation in improving teaching practices (Mitra, 2018) with the importance of including students from marginalized groups (Silverman, 2021). By presenting students’ opinions about what is (not) working in their school and within the classroom, teachers gain insight into how students’ needs can be better met (Conner, 2022) and how student-teacher relationships can be improved. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for the importance of the student’s voice in the desire to improve education was emphasized again, because students had objections to the changed forms of teaching (Conner et al., 2022).

The pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus has brought about changes to the lifestyle of people around the globe. The measures that ensued to prevent the virus from spreading, affected the population of all age groups (Velez, 2021), including various spheres of people’s activities, including the organization of teaching at all levels. Complete or partial lockdown, as well as the return to normal schoolwork, was based on avoiding the risk of the spread of the COVID-19 virus, while taking care

to ensure, in addition to health as a priority, the educational well-being of students, teachers, and other actors of the educational process.¹

The global scale of the effects of the pandemic on the education of students around the world is indicated by the data of UNESCO (2020)², as well as the findings of research from different countries around the world (Reimers, 2022). Problems in education existed prior to the pandemic, such as the education of migrants and refugees (Kovač-Cerović & Vulić, 2016), and children from different socially vulnerable groups. In addition to earlier problems in education, the pandemic exacerbated the problems of students who were excluded from the educational process, as well as those students who were denied adequate support (Kuzmanović, 2022). The problems exacerbated for poor students and students with developmental disabilities (Reimers, 2022), as well as those students who, in addition to their usual school obligations, also have commitments related to work and/or family, as well as those students having limited technological resources (Ramos-Morcillo et al., 2020).

The pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus has directly affected the education of 90% of students worldwide, or over 1.57 billion students³, which indicates the massive scale of the crisis, but also its effects on the educational process as a whole. Also, the above-mentioned figures indicate the necessity of reforming educational systems around the world, so that it could be able to cope adequately with significantly changed ways of organizing teaching and new requirements that include all actors of the teaching process (students, teachers, parents). The organization of classes in pandemic conditions affected the heads of institutions, as well as the wider community of which the education system is an integral part (Braslauskienė et al., 2022). Due to the pandemic, the way one learns, teaches, and communicates has changed, but the way one cooperates within teaching communities and within the educational system itself has also altered (Braslauskienė et al., 2022). The reports indicate that many of the results that have been achieved so far in education have been annulled and that it is important that the focus of all actors in the educational process and state systems be directed towards finding ways to mitigate the negative consequences for education caused by the pandemic.⁴

An in-depth review of the extensive literature on the subject in question shows that there is an increasing number of articles that focus on the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of children and young people, as well as on their well-being (Pečjak & Pirc, 2022). Numerous research works that were conducted sought to provide answers to the most diverse questions concerning all aspects of the life of an individual, family, and society. Furthermore, there are many articles examining

¹ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-schools>

² <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718>

³ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373338/PDF/373338eng.pdf.multi>

⁴ <https://www.unesco.org/en/covid-19/education-response>

the effects of the state of emergency and the pandemic on the educational process at different levels (Arsenijević, 2021), and on different actors of the educational process (Rajović et al., 2021). The most common effects of the state of emergency on the educational process are the low effectiveness of the transfer of social, cultural, and academic values during the changed schooling conditions (Arsenijević, 2021), missing parts of the established curriculum, homeschooling, canceled classes ((Scott et al., 2021), loss of routine and social interactions with peers (Prodović Milojković, 2021), experiences of different emotions and states, lack of decisive action by the administration, time management difficulties and organization difficulties (Braslauskienė et al., 2022). In summary, the educational process during the pandemic was marked by numerous challenges: technical, pedagogical, psychological, health, organizational, and ethical (Kuzmanović, 2022).

A review of the literature also shows that there is less focus on the collection of qualitative data (Scott et al., 2021), which can provide significant findings and new insight into the difficulties faced by children and youth around the world. Qualitative research is particularly important as regards the studies of the educational process because it provides a new insight into the effects of the state of emergency on the educational process (Kuzmanović, 2022; Mičić et al., 2021). Qualitative research is applied when collection of new insights and understandings, perspectives, and interpretations of the participants of certain research (Willig, 2013). Moreover, the use of narratives in research provides important insights (Daiute et al., 2020). Bearing in mind the fact that the phenomena we deal with in our paper are relatively new and complex and that they require a deeper understanding and additional explanations, we decided to adopt this approach.

Furthermore, it is important to examine the perceptions of online teaching/learning on the sample of students in order to gain an insight into its weaknesses, as well as the resources necessary for an adequate educational process and support in some future or similar emergency situations. The following authors Kovács Cerović, Mičić and Vračar (2022) emphasize the indispensable role of students, who actively participate in structuring their life and experience, which is important for the conception of education and the creation of national and global educational policies in the future. In this sense, the research involving students and seeking answers concerning the educational process can be considered not only particularly significant, but also necessary to form a more complete picture. Given that the pandemic caused by COVID-19 is still current, the possibility of another lockdown and complete or partial switching to online classes is not excluded. Bearing in mind the aforementioned, this paper can make a modest contribution to improving teaching and learning in changed circumstances, providing insights offered by pupils.

METHOD

The paper is part of some broader research, which aimed at examining the perceptions of pupils, teachers, parents, and undergraduate students related to online and combined (online and classroom) teaching/learning in the Republic of Serbia during the pandemic.

The objective of the broader research was to collect a sample of participants who were different with regard to gender, age, educational level, type of school, as well as from different settlements and parts of Serbia (Kovács Cerović et al., 2022)⁵ with the aim of identifying themes present in student narratives about teaching in changed circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The students answered five questions, i.e. they dealt with certain topics. The first topic related to the description of an event related to teaching which left a strong impression on the student, about which he/she thought for a long time, or which was interesting to the student. The second topic related to the student's perception of what was beautiful or good, and what was ugly or bad in the described event. The third topic related to the recommendations of students to their peers in another country in terms of expectations from online classes, events, preparation, thinking, and behavior. The fourth topic related to the students' proposals submitted to the teachers or the school, on how to make teaching in the changed circumstances better for all students. The fifth topic was related to the device or devices used by the student to study and attend classes.

The task of the research was to identify weaknesses and make recommendations for their mitigation or elimination. The findings obtained as part of wider research were published in the articles written by Mičić et al. (2020), Vračar et al. (2020), Keljanović et al. (2023), and Minić et al. (2023). Given the variety of topics and the large number of collected data, we analyzed the aforementioned topics individually, with the aim of a more complete understanding of the findings. The topic analyzed in this paper (fourth topic) is related to suggestions put forward by students' and intended for their teachers or the school, on how to make teaching/learning better during the pandemic.

The data were collected in the form of a narrative, according to the methodology of Daiuta and Kovač-Cerović (2017, 2020). The approach is based on a qualitative analysis of children's narratives about the changed circumstances of schooling caused by the pandemic. The design of dynamic storytelling (Daiute & Kovač Cerović, 2017, 2020) involves the collection of data in the form of a narrative through three genres: story, letter, and request. Employing diverse genres to enact different aspects of their knowledge, experience, and goals, participants provided a complex range of engagements with their environments for their own sense-making, and to inform

⁵ The data collected were made available for use by Kovács Cerović, T.

others about ongoing challenges, strategies, and successes in their situations (Daiute & Kovač-Cerović, 2017).

The sample in the research consisted of 5th grade elementary school pupils in the Republic of Serbia (N=100, both sexes, 40 male pupils and 60 female pupils). In this research, the responses were analyzed of 5th grade elementary school students who, due to the current developmental period (beginning of adolescence) and different level of schooling (transition from lower to higher grades), are faced with new demands for adaptation. One part of the demand for adaptation originates from the development crisis and numerous changes in various aspects, and the other from a higher level of education. We considered it important to deal with this age group of students and analyze their responses, even in the significantly changed schooling conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The questionnaire comprised open-ended instructions for creating a narrative in accordance with a dynamic storytelling approach (Daiute & Kovács Cerović, 2017). Students shared their experience of schooling during the pandemic through online guides. The questionnaire link was distributed by school psychologists and teachers. Participation in the research was voluntary. The purpose of the research was explained to participants in the research, and it was stated that the obtained findings would be used exclusively for research purposes. Pupils' responses were collected on three occasions and followed important milestones in the organization of classes in the Republic of Serbia during the pandemic (Mičić et al., 2021), during the lockdown and transition to online education exclusively (May and June 2020), then in December 2020, when most schools organized classes according to a combined model (online and classroom), and in April 2021 (when classes were again organized exclusively online). In this research, pupils' responses collected at a time when most schools organized classes according to a combined model (online and classroom), during the first semester of 2020, were used. Responses were collected at the end of autumn 2020/21 semester, when most schools switched to the hybrid model (December 2020).

Collecting answers in the form of narratives was done using the instruction: *"This situation is not always simple. Maybe you once wished things were different. Imagine that there is a box in which you can insert suggestions intended for teachers or the school, as to how to make teaching/learning in these circumstances better for you and your friends. Write down a few suggestions or tips that you would put in there"*. The answers were anonymous and came directly to the researchers, without the mediation of teachers or school psychologists.

■ ANALYSIS

The collected responses were processed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used in order to recognize, i.e. extract and organize certain themes (Willig, 2013) and extract the gist from the obtained data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that thematic analysis is a useful and flexible method for processing data obtained in qualitative research, both in psychology and in other sciences. We used MAXQDA 2022 (VERBI Software, 2021)⁶ for data analysis, bearing in mind that the use of computer programs does not correspond to all types of qualitative research, but they are most often used in thematic data analysis (Willig, 2013).

The authors independently analyzed the students' answers to the question asked, and then exchanged reports on the review of student narratives. The views expressed during the reporting are corroborated by examples from the students' responses, with consideration of alternative interpretations. After thematic categories were independently identified, the authors discussed the findings until a list of narrative categories and narrative examples was agreed upon.

Findings of the study were processed in several phases: Phase 1: Familiarization with the data; Phase 2: Generating initial codes; Phase 3: Searching for themes; Phase 4: Discussion of themes; and Phase 5: Defining and labeling themes. The first phase was related to familiarization with the answers, which meant that, first, we read the text several times and wrote down our comments and ideas. In the second phase, we generated initial codes. Initially, the following categories were singled out after reading the entire document: the need for classes to last longer, the need for classes to be as regular as before (for the whole class to be together), teachers are expected to be more understanding and explain better (the relationship between teachers and students) "We are doing great" (satisfied with the current teaching model), less material/homework/lessons, health measures + rules of conduct, no tests, complaints, going to school every day, no suggestions/complaints, TV classes, "there is no need for online learning when going to school" (against the combined teaching method), going outside/physical education, no category.

The third phase was concerned with searching for topics, and the suggested topics are presented below:

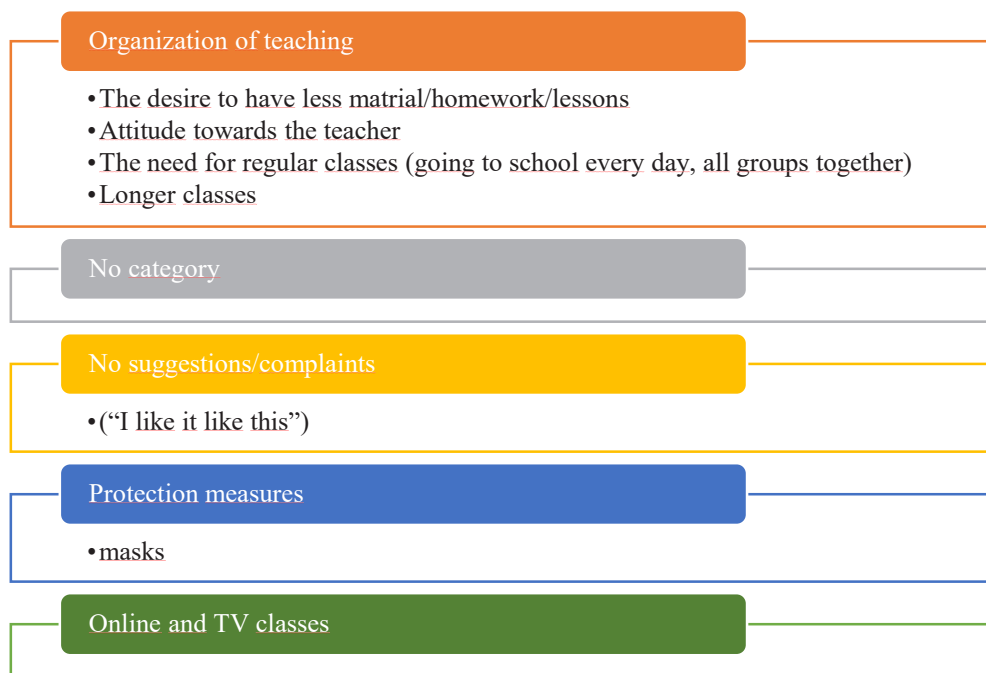
- no category,
- online,
- TV teaching/learning,
- protection measures + masks,
- no suggestions/complaints (I like it this way),
- teacher,
- less material /homework assignments/lessons,

⁶ Serial number: MQPO20-EFtXwK-b6Pjcx-3OWKhM-WkHFjB

- regular classes (going to school every day, all groups attending classes together),
- longer classes

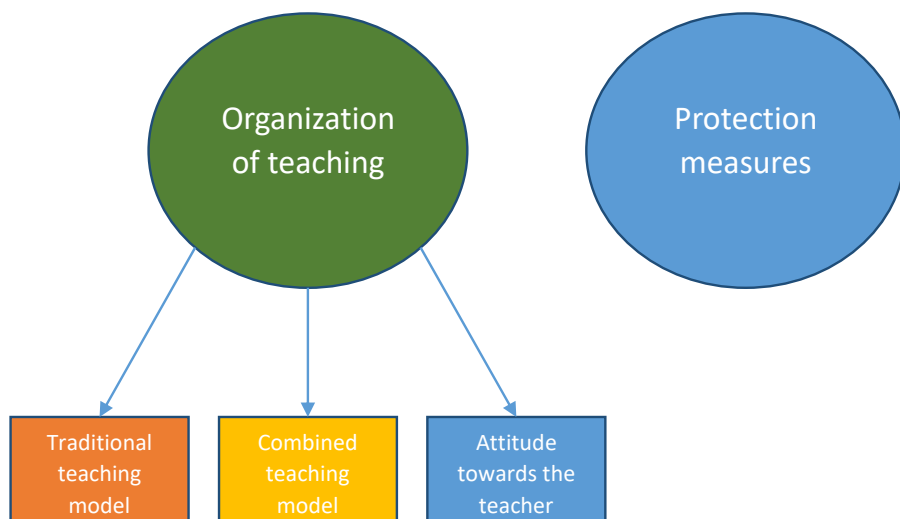
In the fourth phase, the thematic categories of the narratives were discussed. The selected topics were organized into several main topics: Organization of teaching as the main topic and its subtopics: the desire to have less material/homework/lessons, attitude towards the teacher, the need for regular classes (going to school every day, all groups together) and longer classes. In addition, the following topics stood out: no category, no suggestions/complaints (“I like it like this”), protection measures (subtopic: masks), online and TV classes (shown in Figure 1).

Figure 1. Initial topics and subtopics



The last phase related to definition and naming of topics. Two main thematic categories of narratives were found: organization of teaching and protection measures (shown in the map below).

Map 1. Defining and naming topics



■ RESEARCH FINDINGS

Organization of teaching. During the 2020/21 school year, the teaching/learning process in schools in Serbia was organized in several ways: exclusively online, i.e. remotely, and most of the school year in accordance with a combined model: one day at home, one day at school (in most primary schools) or one week at home, one week at school (in most secondary schools) (Kuzmanović, 2022). When the students made suggestions intended for their teachers or the school on how to make teaching better in the above-mentioned circumstances, they most often mentioned suggestions related to direct teaching, that is, they would like teaching to be regular, to take place every day without dividing the students into groups. In addition, the students gave suggestions for teachers to make teaching better for everyone in the educational process. An interesting and unexpected piece of information was the students' suggestions as to duration of lessons, i.e. they wished lessons lasted longer. In addition to the organization of direct classes, as another topic, student proposals related to protection health measures particularly stand out. Among the surveyed students, there were also those who had no suggestions or objections to the current way of teaching in the schools they attend.

Traditional teaching model. The most frequent suggestions made by students as to the improvement of teaching in altered circumstances related to the daily attendance of traditional classes (17 responses).

“I wish they did not divide us into groups and all of us went to school together. I would like everything to be like before.”

What some students meant by daily attendance was regular and “normal” education, as they defined it in their answers (11 answers). Apart from their wish that education was like it had been prior to the pandemic, the students said that they wanted everyone to attend classes together, without dividing into groups, as was practiced during the implementation of the combined teaching model. The students suggested that the lessons should not be shortened, so that they could master the material and so that the teacher would have enough time to explain the teaching unit, which was not possible to achieve during the shortened lessons to 30 minutes.

“I think that all groups should go to school together and, of course, keep their distance and wear masks. So, if the number of infected people rises, then we should return to the way it is at the moment.”

“The lessons should be a little longer because some teachers don’t get to teach the whole lesson.”

“Lessons should last longer so that the students could master the material well.”

Combined teaching model. The combined teaching model, according to the students, was implemented in two ways: the class was divided into two equal groups: one group attends lessons at school three days a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday), and the other group attends lessons two days (Tuesday and Thursday), and the groups rotated the following week (primary schools) (Kuzmanović, 2022).

“I believe lessons via zoom are good, as well as teaching on TV. But we can still learn more in school. What I and the majority of my fellow students want is everything to be normal as before!”

Students perceive lessons broadcast on TV channels of the Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) as demanding and difficult to follow. The students were presented with a lot of material that was not synchronized with the material they study in regular classes (either ahead of or behind what is shown on TV) (Kuzmanović, 2022).

“I suggest our teachers not to set assignments in the Google Classroom until we go to school and meet with the teachers, so that they can check our knowledge in class, and that the assignments in the Google Classroom be given to us if, due to the epidemic, it is not possible to go to school.”

Attitude towards the teacher. The most common suggestion for teachers concerned explaining the teaching material. This was true for both online and face-to-face teaching. Students claim that when following classes online, they need teachers to explain the material more slowly. On the other hand, teachers who are not used

to different teaching circumstances, try to adapt their teaching methods to the new, significantly changed context. In addition, there are evident technical difficulties of online teaching (weak microphone, bad internet connection, insufficient training of teaching staff for the implementation of educational technology) which the students do not explicitly identify.

"I wish my math teacher spoke more slowly and wrote better because I can't understand her handwriting, and I wish she could explain the lessons to us better."

In addition, the altered circumstances also apply to face-to-face teaching where classes are shortened, and teachers do not manage to cover the teaching material in the course of one lesson. For this very reason, the students propose having longer lessons so that the teachers have enough time to explain the material, check the students' knowledge, and get to know the students. On the other hand, students believe that they are overloaded with obligations because they follow combined classes (face-to-face and online) with TV classes, where the material is incompatible.

"The classes should last a little longer, as we don't get to do everything that was planned."

"First of all, teaching/learning on television should not be more important than teaching/learning in school, but we are taught that this teaching must be like that and that they only broaden the knowledge we acquire on television."

"Teachers are to adapt to teaching on TV, because they don't know what they should do either."

From the student's perspective, one gets the impression that, when it comes to combined teaching, it was not known which form of teaching had primacy and that every possible failure in the educational process was attributed to the situation itself and insufficient readiness of teachers to implement educational technologies in teaching.

Protection measures. Within this topic, the students pointed out that it is important to respect the rules/measures of behavior related to wearing masks and keeping physical distance ("We wear masks (we are not to take them off because we are not at a distance of 2 meters) and not to hug, kiss), in order for all of this to pass quickly", "Teachers should remind children more to wear masks, sick children should not come to school, they are supposed to wash their hands, teachers should also wear masks and everyone should upload their homework to Google Classroom so as not to forget something", "Despite the pandemic, I think we should respect the rules on the condition that we are provided with the conditions where we feel as if there was no pandemic"). In addition to the above-mentioned, students emphasize the mandatory disinfection of their hands and the rooms they stay in during classes. Apart from the health measures reported by the students and which should be observed, some students talk about the school without masks ("I wish we didn't wear masks, because sometimes I don't understand my teachers", "I wish we could go to school every day

and didn't have to wear masks", "If only I didn't have to sit alone but with others"), which indicates the students' desire/need for face-to-face teaching/learning they were used to before the pandemic.

■ DISCUSSION

An increasing number of researchers and practitioners around the world point out that the pandemic experience will mark the developmental trajectories of young people (Velez, 2021), which requires further research, as well as the reorganization of existing school systems. Transition to online education, i.e. the closure of schools due to the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus and the organization of classes according to the combined model (online and classroom) fundamentally changed the manner/means of schooling. Among other things, the changes in the educational process and teaching methods were characterized by the separation of students from their peers, the disruption of established routines, but also a significantly changed system of previous support that students had within the system (Kovács Cerović et al., 2021).

The effects of the pandemic on the educational process as a whole and all its actors must be understood in a broader context, bearing in mind the fact that there is a complex interaction between the individual and the systems that surround and shape him/her during his/her life, and that behavior and psychological development are a function of the exchange that takes place between the individual and situations, i.e. the environment to which the individual belongs and of which he is an inseparable part (Caprara & Cervone, 2000). Furthermore, for a more complete understanding of the effects of the pandemic on the educational process and students, as the main actors of that process, it is important to take into account the development specifics of the period in which they are and the current development crisis.

The findings obtained in this research are expected and in line with previous findings and reports on the global scale concerning the effects of the pandemic on the education of students around the world (Reimers, 2022). Based on the findings, we can conclude that the educational process during the pandemic in the Republic of Serbia faced numerous organizational, health, technical, pedagogical, and psychological challenges, which was confirmed by some previous studies (Kuzmanović, 2022).

The changes in the educational process during the COVID-19 pandemic were demanding and required rapid adaptation by all its actors. Among the most significant requirements for adaptation are the organization of teaching and learning, maintaining motivation for learning, as well as monitoring and evaluating student work (Đerić et al., 2023). The findings of the research conducted by Buđevac (2023) indicated a number of issues in the organization and implementation of the educational process. According to the author, the most common problems include

lack of adequate equipment for the implementation of online teaching and learning and digital competencies regarding both students and teachers; furthermore, the author mentions lack of motivation and concentration, as well as unclear instructions given by the authorities. The students whose responses were analyzed in this research also emphasized similar problems in the organization and implementation of classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The suggestions of the participants of this research most often related to their desire for lessons to be regular and direct and for classes not to be divided into groups, but for everyone to attend classes together while respecting all epidemiological measures. The pupils' complaints related not only to the organization of classes, but also to the insufficient readiness of teachers to apply new forms of teaching. The pupils wanted lessons to last longer, so that the teachers have enough time to cover teaching units, i.e. they want education to be like before the start of the pandemic. Also, the participants of this research point out that during online classes, teachers had technical difficulties organizing their lessons, usually there was not enough time, due to shortened classes, to teach a lesson. The aforementioned is in accordance with the findings of previous research in which the participants stated low effectiveness of the transfer of social, cultural, and academic values (Arsenijević, 2021), then missing parts of the established curriculum and canceled classes during the altered schooling conditions (Scott et al., 2021). In the research conducted by Conner et al. (2022) students indicated the inadequacy of online learning and called for increased security measures in schools during the pandemic. This was mentioned in accordance with the findings in this research.

There are studies that show that one of the keys to the successful response of schools to the changing conditions of education due to the COVID-19 pandemic is the voice of students (Alayeva, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has particularly emphasized the importance of student voice in particular regarding attempts to improve the educational process (Conner et al., 2022). The participation of students in the educational process and the inclusion of their voice in the classroom and at school can have, undoubtedly, numerous advantages; moreover, the effectiveness of this approach depends on readiness to react in accordance with students' ideas and proposals (Cook Sather, 2002).

The participants of this research also emphasized that combined model of teaching (online and classroom) is too tiring to follow besides their not knowing which source of information they should rely on (TV lessons that were broadcast on RTS or teachers who teach them directly, but they also send assignments to students through various applications when they are not in the classroom). Also, the pupils who, under these circumstances, followed the lessons both online and in the classroom were overloaded with tasks, which is typical of such forms of teaching. This indicates a series of challenges of a psychological, pedagogical, and organizational nature, which is in accordance with previous findings indicating that education during the pandemic has changed not only the way in which one

learns, teaches, communicates and collaborates within teaching communities and the educational system (Braslauskienė et al., 2022), but also the way one experiences different emotions and states, as well as a lack of decisive action by the school administration to solve problems, time management difficulties and organizational difficulties (Braslauskienė et al., 2022). The general conclusion of the conducted research is that the majority of pupils want lesson to be taught like before the start of the pandemic and to continue their education “without having to wear protective masks” and keeping physical distance, to socialize with their classmates again. This is in accordance with some previous research in which the participants pointed out that they are worried about the loss of routine and social interactions with peers (Prodović Milojković, 2021). This represents a major problem during education in the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus.

The participants of this research are at the very beginning of adolescence (sub-period of early adolescence), in a period of important developmental crisis, during which numerous transformations and changes take place (Vasta et al., 1992). Changes in adolescence include the intrapsychic and interpsychic reality of adolescents, of which the identity crisis is the most significant crisis (Erikson, 1980). This is important to emphasize, among other things, because through attending classes, building and maintaining relationships with teachers and peers, identity is gradually established, and the foundations for the future vocation are also built (Dahl et al., 2018).

The number, abruptness, strength, and relatively short time of changes in the anatomical, physical, emotional, intellectual, social, moral and sexual areas (Vasta et al., 1992) are conducive to adolescent disorganization. Bearing the above-mentioned in mind, it is worth noting that this paper presents the responses of 5th grade pupils who, due to the structure and organization of schooling in the Republic of Serbia, switched to a different teaching method compared to 4th grade pupils. The focus was on classroom teaching, where each subject is taught by a different teacher. The transition to a higher level of schooling is accompanied by significant demands for necessary adaptation which, combined with changed schooling conditions and methods of teaching organization due to the pandemic, further complicates the adaptation process, and makes the outcomes of the adaptation more uncertain.

■ CONCLUSION

The obtained findings indicate that there are certain challenges during online and combined classes (online and classroom). Bearing in mind the inevitable role pupils play in the conception of education and the creation of national and global educational policies (Kovács Cerović et al., 2021), the conclusions drawn can serve as a basis for the formation of educational policies in the future, with an emphasis

on crisis situations and the preparation of the school system for adequate reaction to unforeseen and sudden circumstances and situations.

The findings may also have significant practical implications with the aim of improving online teaching and the quality of education as a whole. In this sense, *important recommendations resulting from this research are as follows:*

- enabling the participation of students in making decisions about the way the teaching is organized and gives them the opportunity to make suggestions and solve acute problems on their own;
- listening to students' voice, understanding students' voice, reacting in accordance with students' voice, and changing the outcomes of the educational process;
- empowering students to voice their opinions on current issues to do with organization and implementation of classes;
- conducting evaluations more frequently in order to obtain guidelines and concrete recommendations to improve teaching during the pandemic.

It is of paramount importance to be aware of students' perspective on education and to appreciate their voice in order to understand life in schools (Cook Sather, 2002). In this sense, *the specific recommendations for teaching during the pandemic resulting from this research are as follows:*

- ensure better coordination of teaching material on different platforms and television, in order to reduce confusion among students (regarding lessons to be studied, where to do homework, etc.);
- ensure that teachers understand the importance of slower presentation of teaching material;
- solve practical problems of accessing the Internet, computers, and platforms, additionally educate teachers in terms of the application of teaching technologies;
- observe prescribed protective measures in the combat against the COVID-19 virus;
- pay special attention to the age categories of students, taking into account developmental specificities and the current developmental crisis.

Bearing in mind that the findings of qualitative studies indicate that student voice can influence the promotion of greater participation in learning (Mitra, 2018), and that students are more likely to be engaged if they know they have a choice about how to structure the learning activity (Schmidt et al., 2018), we deem it important to appreciate (hear) what the students have to tell us. The conducted research and the obtained findings can serve as a significant "voice:", especially in the context of the changed conditions of schooling caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The obtained findings could improve the practice in the field of education, especially at the level of teaching organization from the perspective of those who are most affected by such practice, i.e. students themselves.

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