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Application of E-Books from the Perspective of the Students of Teacher Education and Pedagogical Faculties in the Western Balkans²

Extended summary

Development of electronic media and changes in the social context during the global health crisis have resulted in an increased interest in digital resources, especially e-books. Focusing on this format of book, especially in the field of education, raises the question of the perspective of its application in the future changed social circumstances. Bearing in mind the importance of the role of teachers and preschool teachers in education of children during the most intensive period of their development, but also the fact that children today grow up in a digital information environment, the aim of the research was to examine the attitudes of students of teacher- training and education faculties regarding the future application of e-books.

The authors examine (a) the experience of students of teacher- training and education faculties (N = 394) from four Western Balkan countries regarding the use of digital libraries; (b) anticipated purpose of using e-books after graduation; (c) students' views on the universal values of books, regardless of the format in which they are published.

The research results indicate that students have experience in using digital libraries and that the majority uses national libraries of the countries where they study, but they also use national libraries of other countries in the Western Balkans. From the corpus of international digital libraries, the largest percentage of students use: *Free eBooks*, *Open Library* and *Internet Ar-*

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chive. Digital libraries were never used by 6.9% of the surveyed students. Some future research should examine the factors that affect some students' lack of interest in using digital libraries, then the purpose of using certain digital libraries, as well as the scope and factors of using these libraries for study purposes.

When it comes to evaluating the purpose of using this medium after graduation, the highest percentage of the surveyed students (30.2%) will use the e-book whenever possible, while 15% of students state that they will not use e-books in the future. Bearing in mind that students of these faculties are trained to work with generations that will grow up in digital information environment, the fact that a significant percentage of future primary teachers and preschool teachers is determined not to use e-books is worrying. As even direct experience during the global health crisis did not influence this commitment of students, it is important to examine the factors that caused this.

Certain values of printed and e-books, which can be considered universal, are important in terms of the impact of primary school teachers' and preschool teachers' professional activities on future generations of children/pupils. Examining students' attitudes towards these values shows the highest degree of agreement with the statement that an educator must use a printed book, not just an electronic one, so that pupils can develop a positive attitude towards books in general. This information is important, bearing in mind that it sublimates one's own experience regarding the use of printed and electronic books, as well as awareness that the tendency of modern, information age is the dominance of words over images. Students differed the most in their attitudes regarding the statement that a positive attitude and love of the book as a value in itself can be developed, regardless of the form of the book. The more intensive use of e-books during the health crisis could have affected the value perception of certain elements of its application by students.

The research results indicate that future primary school and preschool teachers are aware of both the universal values and the potential of the application of printed, as well as e-books. In order to enable them to work efficiently and effectively with future readers, within their formal education, it is necessary to develop openness to future changes in the development of books, but also a critical attitude towards the potential outcomes of these changes.

The position of students of Western Balkans' teacher- training and pedagogical faculties regarding the future application of e-books is determined by openness regarding the application of modern technologies in education, experience in using e-books, clear position on the purpose of its future application, as well as a value commitment regarding different book formats and books in general. The research findings show that future primary school and preschool teachers are characterized by values that qualify them for an adequate approach to the outcomes of future changes in the development of books and modern education.

Keywords: e-book, digital library, students of teacher education and pedagogical faculties, Covid-19 pandemic, Western Balkans

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