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## *The voice of students in the classroom during the pandemic – “I will tell you what to expect”*

### Extended summary

*Research goal:* The goal of the extended research was to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of the changed system of schooling from students' perspective by analyzing students' narratives. The goal of the research presented in this paper was to identify the topics present in students' narratives related to the changed way of schooling during the Corona virus pandemic from letters written to their peers from a foreign country where classes were yet to be held online.

*The importance and the theoretical concept of the problem:* During the 2020/21 school year, teaching in schools in Serbia was organized in several ways: exclusively online (distance learning), most of the school year using a combined model: one day at home, one at school (in most primary schools) or one week at home, one at school (in most secondary schools). In an effort to understand how students experience the changes determined by the changed schooling conditions (teaching in pandemic conditions), we examined the experiences of the fifth-grade primary school students through writing letters to their peers from another country. The students of the fifth grade were chosen because their beginning of a new cycle of education is

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marked by a changed model of schooling in the conditions of the pandemic. The theoretical basis of the work is the *student voice* theory, according to which students are the main actors in the educational process and therefore their participation is of key importance for understanding the teaching process. Student participation enables participation in making educational decisions and it is an important source of information that can help make the teaching process more adequate and efficient. Respecting the students' voice is especially important in the changed conditions of education caused by the pandemic and the transition to online teaching, which brings a lot of novelties and unknowns, including the course of the teaching process, as well as its outcome.

*Precise description of the methodological approach: The applied methodology implied data collection in the form of narrative through letter writing as a genre.* The narratives were collected from 100 fifth-graders from primary schools in Serbia (60 girls and 40 boys) during the first term of the school year 2020. *The pupils dealt with the topic referring to their recommendations to their peers in another country in terms of their expectations from online classes: events, preparations, considerations, and behaviour related to the changed conditions.* Letter writing is important because it informs teachers about the experience of students. In addition, writing letters is a form of self-expression, which can be an important tool for coping in various crisis periods. The phenomena we are dealing with in our paper are relatively new and require a deeper understanding and additional explanations. For this reason, we opted for thematic analysis because it is useful for processing qualitative research data. Coding was performed using MAX-QDA 2022 software.

*The most important results and conclusions: The qualitative analysis of students' answers about teaching during the pandemic identified two central themes: the experience of the changes in education and advice for compliance with epidemiological measures.* The main topic, *the experience of changes in education*, consists of three subtopics: *5th grade* (students listed all the changes that followed the transition from early primary to subject teaching), *learning* (students wrote in their answers about assessment, control tasks, subject matter) and *the organization of classes* (students listed all the characteristics of the model classes held during the pandemic). Within the second topic - *advice for compliance with epidemiological measures*, the following subtopics were highlighted: *wearing masks, keeping distance, disinfection, and compliance with the rules*. When it comes to the first topic, *the experience of changes in education*, students characterized the new form of teaching using letters as different, strange, fun, interesting, tiring, more complicated, difficult, confusing, and unusual. It was observed that the students tried to explain in detail in their letters how the classes were organized. They pointed out the method of implementation of live and online lessons, the length of the lessons, as well as insufficient time for processing and preparing the lesson content. The findings of this research indicate that the students show a high level of compliance with epidemiological measures and that they have a strong sense of responsibility for the health of other people and their peers. The findings indicate that there are certain challenges of a technical, organizational, pedagogical, psychological, health and ethical nature during online and combined lessons (online and on-site lessons). The students' answers indicate that even when the circumstances of the teaching organization have changed, it is important to keep in mind the individual approach to the student, taking into ac-

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count motivation for work, digital skills, technical equipment (availability of the Internet, one's own space at home, devices for online class participation). The most significant findings obtained in this research show that we cannot treat uniformly the experience of teaching, and that the organization of lessons in changed circumstances suggests the need for an additional study of the problem, in order to examine some factors that contribute to a positive or negative experience with lessons in changed circumstances, especially from the point of view of students as the main actors in the educational process.

*Pedagogical implications:* With the presented research, we tried to obtain guidelines for continuing the research of this issue and for undertaking adequate preventive and/or intervention measures for the most efficient organization of classes. The presented findings may be useful for educational policy makers, especially in order to improve online teaching and in some future changed circumstances, which may potentially occur. By observing and understanding the effects of teaching during a pandemic on the educational process, certain preventive measures can be taken for some future emergencies. The obtained findings can help to understand better the changes in the educational process during the pandemic, with an emphasis on the advantages, in order to further strengthen them. The identification of the advantages can help us to continue with the implementation of those segments of online teaching that have stood out as significant for the progress of students in the educational process. Also, it is necessary to look for the shortcomings of the changed way of schooling in future research, in order to mitigate or eliminate them with modern measures for the sake of the more efficient and adequate teaching.

**Keywords:** the voice of students, pandemic, teaching, qualitative research

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