

## The Motivation of Elementary School Teachers for the Implementation of the Distance Learning Concept

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### ABSTRACT

At the center of this research is the motivation of the teaching staff for the overall organization and implementation of the distance learning concept in elementary schools. This study's sample consists of 252 teachers, 118 of whom are class teachers and 134 of whom are subject teachers from 11 elementary schools. A questionnaire was used to obtain information about teachers' motivation for implementing the distance learning concept. The data obtained from the research was processed using a descriptive and quantitative method. The chi-square test was used to assess the existence or non-existence of a difference in teachers' answers. Based on the obtained results, it was concluded that a large percentage of the teachers were motivated to realize the concept of distance learning, but also that there is a difference in motivation between teachers with different work experience but not between class and subject teachers.

**Keywords:** distance learning concept, motivation, teachers, elementary school

### Introduction

The enormous technological expansion has had a great impact on the development of today's modern and contemporary society. We are encouraged to go "side by side" with global educational trends because of the constant changes that occur every day. In the process of digitization of society and education (as from the most affected social spheres), a large number of reforms are being implemented and we expect the timely outcome of their implementation and realization. The digital transition has presented several challenges, one

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of which is that it has necessitated changes in the views of online teaching administrators, teachers, and students regarding the importance of the Internet for learning (Kozma, 2011).

Recent research on distance learning in several countries indicates how technology mediates the roles of teachers and students in the instructional and learning process (Greenhow et al., 2020; Starkey et al., 2021). Distance or online learning has not only paved the way for the emergence of constructivism but has also become a key contributing factor in the emergence of new pedagogies (Reid-Martinez & Grooms, 2018).

A vast number of educational stakeholders were not well informed about how the spatial-geographic distance learning approach operates, its characteristics, or the necessary circumstances for its performance. Distance learning became common in the late 1800s, but its rapid expansion began in the late 1990s with the advancement of the Internet technological revolution. It is not a new phenomenon, but it continues to reach new heights as technological advancements progress (Kentnor, 2015). More specifically, distance learning began with the establishment of the Open University in the United Kingdom in 1969 with the introduction of the so-called open school. Half a century later, distance learning is becoming current and real in the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as in the neighbouring Balkan countries. In record time, the process of preparing a concept for distance learning, organizing it, and implementing it in virtual classrooms started. This issue is particularly focused on pedagogy as science, technology, and the design of teaching systems.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and students found themselves in a new environment, seeing the differences between the previous way of working and teaching online while also improving their digital competencies. This way of learning has imposed new expectations on teachers and students, including the use of numerous digital tools and resources, as well as the use of new approaches to teaching and learning (König et al., 2020). When a “new pedagogical approach or tool is presented, teachers make value judgments about whether that approach or tool is relevant to their goals. The more valuable the approach or tool is in their opinion, the more likely they are to use it” (Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al., 2010, 1322). Beyond learning how to use specific digital tools, resources, and online teaching methods, online teacher preparation programs, universities, and policymakers must provide appropriate support to teachers throughout their personal development, as teachers' professional identities have a significant impact on their self-confidence, performance, and curricular and pedagogical choices (El-Soussi, 2022).

It is obvious that the development of distance learning in our country did not occur fluidly and parallel to the traditional path of teaching with physical presence in schools. Distance learning necessitates high-level organization and preparation because it is unavoidable to create conditions in which the spatial barrier between the teacher and the student "collapses". From an organizational standpoint, the preceding infrastructure and nature of the educational system have a significant impact on the intensity of implementation of the distance learning concept. Also, we must state that distance learning requires both the student and the teacher to have a sufficient level of computer expertise (Burdina et al., 2019).

We have prioritized elementary education as a fundamental and mandatory component of the educational system, as well as a foundation for future systematic education and professional training. Researchers believe that achieving these functions requires language development, memory development, concept formation, perception and intelligence, and the use of innovative pedagogies (Obiweluzo, 2016). In the following text, the emphasis is placed on the motivation of elementary school teachers for the realization of the concept of distance learning, taking into account the different work experience of teachers in class and subject teaching.

### **The concept of distance learning and the role of teachers in the process of its realization**

The concept of distance learning, or so-called distance education, implies a specific form of education in which direct contact between the teacher and the students is not established face-to-face. Distance learning is a system and process of connecting students with distributed educational resources (Ristić & Mandić, 2019). Distance learning is also commonly known as online learning. Online learning, according to Mustofa et al. (2019), is an educational system that uses a variety of teaching techniques and singles out various teaching activities. Students master the program content independently, through various communication lines, and with the help of the teacher (if necessary). Using interactive learning media makes the learning process more engaging, and distance learning has the potential to promote digital literacy and learning styles (Ismail et al., 2018). In this context, distant education represents institutionalized formal education in which the educational group is geographically separated and interactive telecommunication means are employed to connect students, resources, and instructors (Stojanovska, 2012).

Burrhus Frederic Skinner, a well-known American psychologist, created his theory of learning in 1950, with programmed teaching at the center. His concept includes the following key characteristics of programmed teaching: keeping what is important from the

content and rejecting what is useless; breaking the material into perfectly consumable sequences; mastering the sequences from easier to harder; continuous feedback; and actual application of newly gained knowledge during the teaching process (Vilotijević, 2000). Considering Skinner's conception set up in this way, it is noticeable that teaching in distance learning conditions is closely correlated with programmed teaching. In classical teaching, the teacher's attention is focused on all the factors that affect the overall organization and realization of the teaching, the atmosphere that reigns in the classroom, and in fact, the complete "ambience" in it, which is not the case in distance teaching. In distance learning, teachers emphasize the content preparation part. The entire distance learning system is dependent on the quality of the content taught.

In order to be able to implement quality distance learning in schools, it is necessary to use the following: appropriate technical equipment for teaching preparation; digital didactic tools; digital resources and materials; methods, forms, and techniques for achieving results; contents that can be processed individually or in groups through short-term or longer-term projects or individual dynamics; determined criteria for checking the fulfilment of the set learning goals and results; as well as appropriate methods, techniques, and instruments for evaluating student achievements (Bureau for Development of Education, 2021).

Parallel to the change in teaching preparation under distance learning conditions, there was also a change in its implementation. The so-called "didactic triangle," which consists of three major teaching factors: instructor, content, and student, is turned into a "didactic pentagon," which consists of teacher, content, student, parent, and technology. It becomes apparent from all of this that, in the process of distance learning, the function of teachers has shifted to that of guides/mentors (Ministry of Education and Science, 2020). Following global educational trends, teachers must stay up to speed on the most recent educational policies and initiatives, as well as employ exact, adapted, and correctly upgraded methods, strategies, and instruments that are used on a daily basis in teaching at all educational cycles and levels.

The facts and findings of different studies (both international and domestic) show that one of the most essential variables is teachers' active participation in the process of integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into educational activity (Veličković, 2014). The teaching staff's knowledge of ICT is crucial for successfully implementing the concept of distance learning. The quality of a teacher has an essential position in education, and a teacher who has suitable qualifications is an essential component in the teaching of the teacher itself (Baan, 2012). Since the very beginning of the

integration of ICT in schools, several researchers have analyzed the factors influencing the acceptance and use of ICT by teachers in schools (Capan, 2012; Dudeney, 2007; Virkus, 2008; Zhang, 2013). They show that the main barrier to the integration of ICT were the teachers because they are the same persons who lead the teaching process in the classroom. The findings of the study of Ghavifekr & Rosdy (2015) indicate that technology-based teaching and learning is more effective than traditional classroom teaching and learning. This is because using ICT tools and equipment will create a more engaging and effective learning environment for both teachers and students. The majority of teachers in this study feel that ICT improves classroom management because students behave better and are more focused. Furthermore, this study demonstrated that students learn more effectively when lessons are developed with ICT since they are more engaging and fascinating. The integration of ICT in the classroom requires careful thought to improve the country's educational system's competency.

In addition to the visible multiple changes, it is still the teachers who are responsible for the climate that prevails in the virtual classroom and the dynamics of acquiring information based on the students' progress, wants, and affinities. Motivation to learn is an effort made so that individuals are motivated to conduct specific activities linked to learning attempts in order to obtain the desired results. The lower the level of learning effectiveness, the more it causes a decrease in the motivation and activeness of students in learning (Zaitun, et al., 2021). Sumirah et al. (2021), explain that learning motivation is necessary for the learning process because someone who does not have the motivation in learning is unlikely to carry out learning activities. Teachers' work motivation and/or satisfaction are projected to drop as a result of the numerous changes in the overall course of education. The variations in teacher motivation to work following the new concept of distance learning and the traditional model of teaching can be perceived based on the elements that impact motivation to work in general. According to the findings of the research (Bura, 2021), the most significant reduction in job satisfaction is related to working circumstances. The complete responsibility for technical equipment, the reconciliation of private and professional life "under the same roof," and the limited period for adaptation all have an impact on job efficiency.

The advancement of technology and science influences teacher professional development and training in the 21st century. Teachers must now keep up with new achievements, information, and technologies in order to help students succeed in novel ways (Omerdić et al., 2021). Active learning entails not just students obtaining information and knowledge from teachers but also mutual learning between the teacher and students as active subjects in the classroom. As a result, student participation in the learning process can

be said to reduce boredom and promote a sense of pleasure in learning, resulting in improved student learning outcomes (Usyan et al., 2022).

Distance learning can be asynchronous or synchronous. Asynchronous learning occurs when students can choose when they want to learn using a range of digital resources. Students can communicate and complete activities at their leisure, and they can learn at their own pace. Synchronous learning activities, on the other hand, take place via live video and/or audio conferencing with immediate feedback (Kim, 2020). Technology is rapidly being utilized not only to offer instruction but also to support and help learners and to assess students in novel ways, such as employing analytics to analyze the quality and usefulness of online resources and track student participation in online activities (Martin & Ndoye, 2016).

The effectiveness of distance learning is determined by the design and preparation of the learning material, the teacher's participation in the online environment, and the interaction between the teacher and the student (Bao, 2020). The support that the teacher can provide to the students can be academic or non-academic. Academic support includes, on the one hand, activities related to a certain subject that are dependent on the substance and scope of the material, and on the other, activities that are dependent on the instructor himself. The most significant activities conducted by the teacher in this section are: describing the content of the teaching material; motivating students to progress; and strengthening students' talents for learning and research. The supplementary explanations of the more complex information, which students need more time to learn, are an important element of this process. Sharing materials without more thorough information may result in a negative reaction and a reluctance to research a specific subject. Giving guidance on how to use the materials encourages and motivates students to learn how to learn and master the content on their own. Independent exercises targeted at solving issue scenarios are unavoidable for this objective, as they allow students to enhance and extend their knowledge while also discovering new scientific truths on their own. In contrast to academic support, non-academic support plays a more significant part in the distance learning process. This support refers to the assistance that teachers provide to students in order for them to improve their abilities and acquire new competencies in order to complete the assigned tasks and requirements as outlined in the curriculum. The majority of non-academic assistance consists of facts, comments, and explanations. Teachers' work styles can be defined, but they are generally changeable and tailored to the students' age, talents, and requirements, the working environment, and the difficulty of the topic. The teacher must be adaptable, honest, open, and willing to collaborate, as well as comprehend the needs of the students. It is essential to encourage and develop a good atmosphere in order for all students to actively participate in the learning process. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to: strengthen

teacher-student and student-student communication; encourage inter-student cooperation through work in pairs and groups; create conditions for active learning through IT tools; organize project and research activities; provide timely feedback from teachers after completing assigned tasks; give a concrete and clear explanation of the rules for monitoring, valuing, and evaluating students' work, and so on (Vučinić-Marković et al., 2020).

## **Research Methodology**

Every educational system owes it to all students to provide them with an education that will expand their capacities and opportunities, as well as develop their individual affinities and interests. Teachers' professional preparation, passion for work, and striving for advancement in response to educational obstacles are all factors that influence the overall course and quality of teaching.

The motivation of the teaching staff to work and apply new methods, strategies, and tools when conducting distance education is critical to the successful implementation of distance education and the concept of distance learning in general. Therefore, the motivation of the teaching staff for the entire process of preparation and execution of the distance learning concept in elementary schools in the Republic of North Macedonia is at the center of this research. In order to achieve the research's purpose, the perspectives and opinions of class and subject teachers were examined through the lens of their work experience in elementary schools.

A questionnaire was utilized to obtain information about teachers' motivation for implementing the distance learning concept. The data gathered from the research was analyzed using a descriptive and quantitative method. The chi-square test was used to determine whether or not there was a difference in the responses of teachers from grade and subject teaching, as well as between teachers with different work experience.

The research includes a population of class and subject teachers from elementary schools. The sample contains 252 teachers from 11 elementary schools, with 118 class teachers and 134 subject teachers.

## **Results and discussion**

Based on the previously presented methodological framework for the phenomenon under research, this section provides a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data obtained from the research, which pertains to the motivation of teaching staff for the overall organization and implementation of the concept of distance learning in elementary schools.

The interest in this research is aimed at perceiving the motivation of teaching staff in elementary schools for the realization of the concept of distance learning. Accordingly, one basic question is placed in the survey sheet's foreground: "Did you have the motivation to realize the concept of distance learning?". In the table below, we show the responses received from the class and subject teachers to this question.

**Table 1**

*Motivation of class and subject teachers for the implementation of distance learning*

Answer categories	Class teachers		Subject teachers		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
I was highly motivated	50	42.37	63	47.02	113	44.84
I was partially motivated	57	48.31	56	41.79	113	44.84
I was not motivated	11	9.32	15	11.19	26	10.32
Total	118	100.00	134	100.00	252	100.00

The obtained value of the chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.12, p > 0.05$ ), is not statistically significant, indicates no difference in motivation for implementing distant learning between class and subject teachers.

We believe that teachers' work experience in elementary schools is closely related to their motivation for professional development, acceptance of innovations, implementation of new teaching methods and techniques, and investment in the advancement of the educational system.

For that reason, the motivation for implementing the distance learning concept among the class and subject teachers is shown in the following table, based on their work experience in elementary schools.

**Table 2**

*The motivation of teachers for realizing the concept of distance learning, according to work experience*

Work experience	Answer categories							
	I was highly motivated		I was partially motivated		I was not motivated		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Up to 10 years	43	38.05	35	30.97	4	15.39	82	32.54
From 11 to 20 years	62	54.87	57	50.44	7	26.92	126	50.00
Over 21 years	8	7.08	21	18.58	15	57.69	44	17.46
Total	113	100.00	113	99.99	26	100.00	252	100.00



Based on the statistical processing of the data obtained using the chi-square test procedure ( $\chi^2 (4) = 37.96, p < 0.01$ ), we perceive that we have a significant statistical difference. This finding indicates that there is a variation in motivation for implementing the concept of distance learning among teachers with different work experiences. The examination of this data suggests that teachers with more work experience are less inclined to implement the concept of distance learning than teachers with less work experiences.

In the Republic of Croatia, research has also been conducted regarding the use of modern teaching aids in distance learning, in correlation with teachers' motivation (Topčić, 2021). Using new technology and applying modern teaching aids is most common among teachers between the ages of 20 and 30, according to the data obtained. If we compare the results that we presented (Table 2), with the results of the research conducted in the Republic of Croatia, we will confirm once again that the younger generations of teachers have the motivation to use the new technologies that the new times demand. This obtained difference in the teachers' motivation for the application of this new concept indicates that there is a need to take future appropriate measures to overcome it.

We can agree that implementing distance learning also creates new problems, including students' difficulty understanding the learning material, boredom more efficiency, and less motivation to learn. For this reason, more complex skills are needed to change the school's role and function to what is expected by the teachers (Widiansyah & Putri, 2022). Teachers' motivation to implement the concept of distance learning is influenced by a variety of internal and external factors, including their previous readiness for implementation, the infrastructure and development of the educational system, available resources, and so on. In order to find appropriate support for the findings above, it is required to send the acquired results to the remaining questionnaire questions, which are related to the motivation of the teaching staff for the implementation of this new learning concept.

In this context, previous preparation and competency of the teaching staff for the implementation and realization of the concept of distance learning are important, for which the ICT skills that teachers possessed prior to the introduction of distance learning are essential. The process of implementing the concept of distance learning is closely related to the available ICT skills of the teachers. Not all teachers possess the same level of digital literacy or the ability to think quickly enough to implement complete distance learning (Hamdani & Priatna, 2020). Based on their work experience in elementary schools, the class and subject teachers' thoughts about their readiness for implementing the concept of distance learning are shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3**

*Opinions of class and subject teachers about their readiness to implement the concept of distance learning, according to work experience*

Answer categories	Work experience												Total	
	Up to 10 years				From 11 to 20 years				Over 21 years					
	Class teachers		Subject teachers		Class teachers		Subject teachers		Class teachers		Subject teachers		f	%
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Yes	6	15.00	7	16.67	13	22.81	17	24.64	0	0.00	0	0.00	43	17.06
Partially	33	82.50	34	80.95	40	70.17	45	65.22	8	38.10	12	52.17	172	68.25
No	1	2.50	1	2.38	4	7.02	7	10.14	13	61.90	11	47.83	37	14.68
Total	40	100.00	42	100.00	57	100.00	69	100.00	21	100.00	23	100.00	252	99.99

Firstly, the attached data was analyzed statistically to compare the readiness of class and subject teachers for distance learning implementation. The chi-square test resulted in a value of 0.17, indicating no significant difference ( $\chi^2 (2) = 0.17, p > 0.05$ ). To acquire more accurate information, we continued to analyze the positions of teachers who had different work experience. The obtained value of the chi-square test is 64.95, which is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) for four degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2 (4) = 64.95, p < 0.05$ ). According to this evidence, there is a distinction amongst teachers with different work experience. Teachers with less work experience have a greater ability to implement this concept than teachers with more work experience.

Various types of training were organized for the professional development of the teaching staff. Given that a greater number of teachers participated in a large number of trainings, the questionnaire provided a list of different types of trainings from which they could select several options.

**Table 4**

*Types of training for professional preparation for the realization of the distance learning concept*

Answer categories	Class teachers		Subject teachers		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Use of equipment	36	12.63	42	11.35	78	11.91
Using distance learning platforms	93	32.63	130	35.14	223	34.05
E-content creation	26	9.12	40	10.81	66	10.08
Use of e-content	57	20.00	85	22.97	142	21.68
Realization of distance learning	39	13.68	34	9.19	73	11.14
Monitoring and evaluation of students during distance learning	34	11.93	39	10.54	73	11.14
Total	285	99.99	370	100.00	655	100.00

Some teachers stated in the survey sheet's section of open questions that the subjects who implemented the training in their schools were not properly prepared and did not have adequate information for the successful implementation of distance learning. To ensure the successful implementation of distance learning, teachers individually investigated and sought additional sources and available resources. In that way, they managed to get better quality and applicable knowledge. The teachers in this part also indicated that too much focus was placed on the usage of equipment, which in some schools was not available or was not given in a timely manner.

For a more complete understanding of the researched problem, the respondents were asked the question "What is your attitude about the setting of the concept of distance learning?" Based on the responses, less than half of the teachers, 45,64%, had a positive attitude toward the placement of the concept of distance learning, 28,17% indicated a negative opinion, and 26,19% did not express themselves. Considering the percentage representation of the responses, it is clear that the teaching staff was not sufficiently prepared and informed about the implementation of the distance learning concept.

## **Conclusions and findings**

Synthesizing the knowledge from the consulted literature and the results obtained from our research, we come to the conclusion that most teachers were motivated to realize the concept of distance learning. Based on the findings, we deny the paradigm of adequate awareness and training of the teaching staff in elementary schools. We have come to the point of collision of three intertwined segments: the ICT skills of the teaching staff, readiness, and motivation to implement the concept of distance learning. As may be seen from the results, there is a difference in motivation between teachers with different work experience but not between class and subject teachers.

We must not overlook the fact that the group of teachers with more than 21 years of work experience had the most difficulties, such as a lack of ICT skills and a decreased desire and willingness to implement the concept of distance learning. Because the digitalization of education is progressing at a rapid pace around the world, including in our country, it is necessary for this group of teachers to conduct school-based training to enable each teacher to first acquire basic ICT skills and then to practically advance and develop them to a higher degree.

The research problem's scope provides a multitude of adaptable options to enhance the notion of distance learning's implementation, increase teachers' work motivation, and improve the quality of education. In the context of this, we emphasize the need for professional development and developing the personal competencies of teachers. Through the organization and implementation of training, seminars, workshops, and other similar events, new knowledge can be acquired in a formal, informal, or informative manner. It is essential that the trainings are arranged in such a way that they cover all of the segments that are critical to ensuring quality implementation of the instruction chronologically. During the professional development of the teaching staff, it is vital to consider the age restrictions and to act in accordance with the needs, that is, where the gaps are identified because otherwise the training would be ineffective.

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## Motivacija nastavnika osnovnih škola za implementaciju koncepta učenja na daljinu

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### APSTRAKT

U središtu ovog istraživanja je motivacija nastavnog osoblja za sveukupnu organizaciju i implementaciju koncepta učenja na daljinu u osnovnim školama. Uzorak ovog istraživanja čine 252 nastavnika, od kojih su 118 razredni nastavnici i 134 predmetni nastavnici iz 11 osnovnih škola. Za dobijanje informacija o motivaciji nastavnika za implementaciju koncepta učenja na daljinu korišćen je upitnik. Podaci dobijeni istraživanjem obrađeni su deskriptivnom i kvantitativnom metodom. Hi-kvadrat test je korišćen za procenu postojanja ili nepostojanja razlike u odgovorima nastavnika. Na osnovu dobijenih rezultata zaključeno je da je veliki procenat nastavnika motivisan da realizuje koncept učenja na daljinu, ali i da postoji razlika u motivaciji između nastavnika sa različitim radnim iskustvom, dok takve razlike između razrednih i predmetnih nastavnika nema.

**Ključne reči:** koncept učenja na daljinu, motivacija, nastavnici, osnovna škola