Chapter 32
E-Learning in Secondary Schools in the Republic of Srpska and Improvement Suggestions in COVID-19 Setting

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32.1 Introduction

The pandemic of the new coronavirus has prevented the normal course of the educational process in primary and secondary schools around the world, as well as in BiH and the Republic of Srpska. Globally, over 1.2 billion students from 186 countries attended classes from home. Modern electronic communication that is fast and efficient has come to the fore [1].

The Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Srpska made a decision, according to which, from March 17, 2020, online classes for primary schools were organized through the public television service RTRS. On March 23, 2020, the Ministry of Education and Culture made a decision that obliged all high schools to organize distance learning according to their abilities [2]. Unlike some countries in the region, the Republic of Srpska did not have the technical ability to organize distance learning in high schools through television, so high schools had to “overnight” to manage and organize online classes for their students.

32.2 Organization of Distance Learning in Secondary Schools of the Republic of Srpska

Since secondary schools had a very short time to organize and send a distance learning plan to the Ministry of Education and Culture, most schools were initially organized by creating Viber groups with students in which teachers sent teaching units
and assignments and students sent feedback to professors by mail [3]. This may not have been the best method, but in any case, it was useful and enabled the continuation of the teaching process.

In our country, which belongs to the relatively underdeveloped countries, this type of teaching was something completely new for both students and professors. Bearing in mind that a certain number of students and teachers were not computer literate, at the very beginning of the introduction of distance learning, there were certain technical problems: some students did not know how to send mail, how to use more complex functions in Word, etc. With the help of teachers and classmates, these problems were overcome very quickly.

After this not so simple start, teachers started using better tools and platforms for distance learning such as Google Classroom, cloud folders, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and others. This way of working made online learning much easier for the students because they had all the teaching contents in one place and were able to communicate more easily with the teachers who were available to them 24 h a day.

32.3 Survey

At the end of the 2019–2020 school year, after 3 months of distance learning, we conducted a survey that included students from two secondary schools in Banja Luka (Republic of Srpska), one private and one public school. The aim of the research was to examine the opinion of students about the implementation and quality of distance learning in their school, the objectivity of assessment, and the problems they encountered. The students answered six questions.

Results and Analysis

The following diagrams show the comparative opinions of students from the two schools in which the research was conducted. Based on the results of the research, we can conclude that students from both private and public schools are satisfied with the distance learning in their school, given that over 90% of students from both schools gave an affirmative answer to this question (Fig. 32.1).

The second and third questions refer to the way in which students better master the material and the form of teaching that gives them a better education. 53.13% of private school students and 33.33% of public school students said that the combination of traditional and online teaching gives the best results in mastering the material (Fig. 32.2).

However, as we can see in Fig. 32.3, the largest percentage of students (81.25% of private school and 94.74% of public school) believe that they acquire a better quality of education through traditional forms of education. From this, we can conclude that students still give preference to the traditional over online learning.
Fig. 32.1 Students’ opinions on distance learning in their school

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Fig. 32.2 The way students master the material better
From Fig. 32.4, we can conclude that the students were satisfied with the cooperation with teachers, which was very important for the students. The teachers were supportive and gave them a motive to overcome all difficulties during online classes.

The issue of objectivity of knowledge evaluation and general evaluation of students in the distance learning system requires the most discussion among professors. As we can see in Figs. 32.5, 84.38% of private school students and 91.23% of public school students stated that the grades they received during distance learning were objective. However, the issue of objective assessment for teachers is one of the major problems in the distance learning system, which will be discussed later in this paper.

Figure 32.6 shows that 90.63% of private school students and 87.72% of public school students, i.e., 88.76% of the total surveyed students, stated that they had no problems during distance learning, while 11.24% of students stated that they had difficulties.

Of that number, 6.74% stated that it was difficult for them to master the material and understand the tasks without the presence of a professor, while 4.49% stated that the slow Internet was a problem.
Fig. 32.4  The cooperation with the teachers

Fig. 32.5  Objectivity of knowledge evaluation
### 32.4 Advantages and Disadvantages of Distance Learning

Distance learning has many advantages over traditional forms of teaching. Modern technologies offer teachers opportunities to create diverse, interesting teaching content, quizzes, and games that make teaching interesting to students. In addition to being interesting, this type of teaching allows students to review the teaching content that the teacher has placed on the platform at any time. Also, by using modern technologies, both students and teachers acquire new skills that will surely be useful to them in business and other challenges of the twenty-first century. On the other hand, according to the opinion of students shown in Sect. 32.3.1, we can conclude that the classroom and communication between teachers and students cannot be completely replaced by modern technologies, online platforms, and other forms of electronic communication.

As part of our research, we asked students and professors what problems they encountered during the online teaching process. In the results of the research, it has already been stated that the students went through the online teaching process without any major difficulties and only a few students stated that the problem was the weak Internet and the difficulty of mastering the material. For teachers, one of the major disadvantages of this type of teaching is the objectivity of student assessment and the real knowledge that students acquire in this way. Although today’s modern distance learning platforms allow teachers to create tests and set time limits for
creating tasks, the problem of independence of solving these tests remains questionable. This topic will certainly be much discussed in all the countries of the Western Balkans. In addition, teachers of practical classes in vocational technical schools believe that practical classes held online cannot replace those in school offices, companies, workshops, and hospitals.

In the process of distance learning, attention should be paid to the protection and authenticity of data exchanged between teachers and students. One way to authenticate is to use a digital signature in the exchange of messages sent electronically.

### 32.5 Conclusion

The previous 3 months have certainly been a great challenge for the entire education system of the Republic of Srpska. There have been difficulties that all of us who work in this sphere have encountered, but we can say that we are satisfied because the school year has ended successfully and most importantly the students have not lost the school year.

From the conducted research, we can conclude that students are satisfied with online teaching, although improvement should also be considered. COVID-19 has definitely brought changes in the education system of the Republic of Srpska and opened a new chapter in the use of modern technologies in education.

We hope that students and teachers will welcome the beginning of the next school year in the classrooms. We also believe that teachers will make the best possible use of the IT knowledge they acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic and improve the teaching process in the Republic of Srpska by combining traditional and modern online learning methods.

### References

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