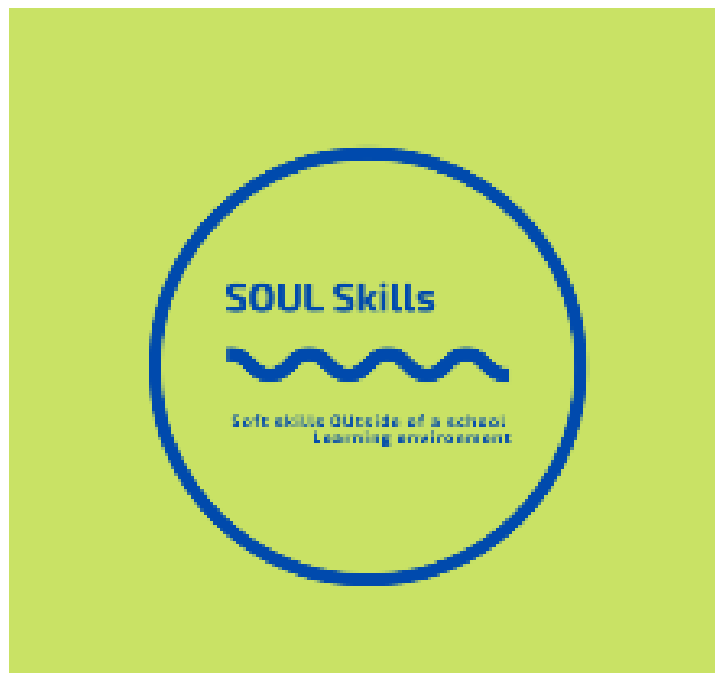




Child after the Social Isolation due to Covid-19

Analytical Report – Bulgaria



Project interim document

Prepared by GIS-TC and support of Platform AGORA

Content

Transferable skills and their role for pupils development and growth	
Education in Bulgaria during Covid-19 pandemic	6
Methodology. .	8
The Study Results (Findings)	10
Profile of respondents	10
Learning achievements and skill development of pupils	13
Out-of-school activities during COVID-19 pandemic (2020/2021 and 2021/2022 school years	19
Parents' and teachers' collaboration	21
Changes that teachers have to make to adapt for blended teaching	21
Difficulties that teachers face to implement blended teaching	25
Expectations for support by educators to implement blended teaching	26
Blended education as a future option of traditional education	26
Conclusions	30
Annex 1	



Transferable skills and their role for pupils development and growth

The 21st century is a century of knowledge, transferable skills and abilities. Transferable skills are generally referring to core competencies of analytical and critical thinking, and problem-solving in the real world. Transferable skills are also known as soft skills, 21 century skills are increasingly important for today's society as they are defined the core of personal competences for life and work. Transferable skills are the nucleus of every person's competencies. The attention to transferable skills development is based on the understanding proved by researches and practices, about their 'bridging' function and establishing a connection with foundational and digital skills. Transferable skills do not operate in isolation. They function in the acquisition of other sets of skills and vice versa - they are supporting their development. The formation of transferable skills begins in early childhood and continues throughout life. So its first developing phase is crucial so that the further periods to be successful.

Thus, it is essential that the school places formation of skills at the center of its educational function on the same level as acquiring academic knowledge. During the last decades, policy- and decision-makers in education around the world stressed on the necessity transferable skills' development to become a key part of the educational programs both at primary schools and at pre-schools entities. However, despite the significant global efforts, transferable skills are not developed progressively, neither in nor out of school. Within this context, UNICEF, EU and the national policies focused on embedding transferable skills within different education and learning systems, which resulted in the systematic development of a breadth of transferable skills, at scale, across the life course and through multiple learning pathways: formal, non-formal and community based (p.10).¹ In Bulgaria the concept incorporating the development of transferable skills at school is a part of *National Strategy for Lifelong Learning and of the National STEM Platform which tasks are development and implementing STEM methodology at public schools.*² *STEM development incorporated 21 skills presented in 4 sets of skills: Creativity, Critical thinking, Collaboration, and Communication, later became known as: 4 C's of 21st-century skills.*³

The new concept of transferable skills requires the school to rethink its way of proceeding, suggesting touse the academic learning teaching in the context of the individual disciplines within a more global process of personal growth. There are great variations of extra curricula training entities in Bulgaria. (See Annex1) Since 5-6 years ago in Bulgaria there is establishing a new type of public school, the so called "innovative school" which has more flexible educational

¹ The Global Framework on Transferable Skills, 2019. UNICEF Education Section Programme Division, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/global-framework-transferable-skills>; COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, 2018. Official Journal of the European Union ,C 189, file:///G:/SOUL_project/Literature/EU-8%20transfSkills2018_EN_TXT.pdf;

² <https://www.stemcoalition.eu/members/ministry-education-and-science>

³ Singh, M., (2021). Acquisition of 21st Century Skills Through STEAM Education. *Academia Letters*, Article 712. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL712>.

programs and teachers can use alternative elements to the traditional pedagogical approaches to cover the national educational standards. Transferable skills development is incorporated also for training. Since 2018 National STEAM Platform to the Ministry of Education and Science stimulates forming a special space - STEM Lab at public schools. The aim is to develop skills for science and technology focusing on acquiring theoretical and practical knowledge as well as skills development. Part of STEM Lab is oriented to 1-4 grade pupils.

In Bulgaria up to now transferable skills as a didactical system approach became a core teaching at out-of-school activities, at private schools and private kindergartens. Recently the number of teachers especially at primary schools that incorporate methods for transferable skills development has increased. Various types of education centers have been established all over the country and all of them offer additional to the public school curricula. Most popular are the training courses for foreign languages, art: dances, painting, singing, photo clubs and sports etc. The network of Chitalishta (cultural centers) traditionally is organizing out-of-school trainings depending on the local community demands. Another, widely spread form of extra curricula training for pupils is organized by public schools, but it is a paid form of helping pupils to prepare their homework in combination with other courses. It is worth mentioning that at most private centers, the teaching approach is focused on skills development as a base for personal growth. Kids are developing skills for decision making, critical thinking, quick evaluation of environment, how to become smart in communication and are trained to present themselves. Their curiosity is stimulated and rewarded. But teaching approaches and methodologies at those centers are different. Some – like the network of centers - “Smart Kids” operate around the country as a franchise company, others - had their own methodologies and methods different from those at public schools like: “Mobile Mathematic”.

In all those centers teachers decide which methodology and pedagogical tools to use. Thus, there are great variations of methods for skill development, as well as which skill to be a priority for development. It created a lot of difficulties for teachers and educators and a great variation of certification for acquired knowledge and skills. As all these out-of-school activities are paid, not all families could afford their children to visit these centers. The only out-of-school activities that have relatively low fees are those that are provided by the Chitalishta.

As a rule, transferable skills are formed together in a set of different combinations determined by the type of activity and learning tasks. Our understanding is that they are grouped in a special way and the driving element of the set group is the preferable one by the child’s way of expression, based on his/her innate characteristics. It is not possible to have absolute differentiation of the skills and separate training.

Pupils form their transferable skills step by step through solving different tasks by learning by doing. Teachers have to give them well selected tasks to stimulate the skills development.

Here it a decomposition of the selected skills related to the development of kids 6-12 years old. The suggested decomposition is provisionally made only for the aims of the study, as in real life it is impossible to be strictly separated.

Comprehension skill (written and oral texts):



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- Understanding any oral or written text, ability to recognize main ideas,
- Ability to put logical questions to the text,
- Skill to summarize the text and reveal its message, moral, conclusion;

Analytical and critical thinking:

- Gives own interpretation of any text and oral stories,
- Reveal and evaluate the information of any text (stories)
- Find the explicit meaning of the any text (stories),
- Reveal the attitude of the author of the text - a positive and negative messages of the author,
- Can invent another title of the text
- Ability to embed the message and moral of the text in different contexts.

Decision making and taking responsibility:

- Ability to give different adequate solutions of a task,
- To draw relevant conclusions based on specific information (instructions),
- To evaluate the task summarizing different relevant information concerning the task;
- To make a broad summary with potential task's consequences;
- To stand up for his/her decisions
- To be autonomy while expresses his/her opinion

Evaluation skills:

- Ability to analyses and evaluate what is going around him/her in a sense how to act;
- Ability to estimate behavior of friends (others)
- Ability to estimate own behavior;
- Ability to predict events and consequences of his/her acts;
- Ability to ask for help when it is needed;
- Ability to admit when s/he is wrong.

Communication skills:

- Ability to express to somebody his/her own opinion and to stand up for it (defend, justify with arguments),
- Prefer (like) to work in a group ,
- Ability to hear and take in mind opinions of the others,
- Likes to take the role of a leader, find ways to organize group work;

Creativity skills:

- Invent non-standard solutions (for games, stories, paintings, logical tasks ...)
- Usually gives different answers to one question,
- Reveals different associations in storytelling,
- Design innovation models, 3D modeling
- Creates various endings of a story.

Self-learning (Curiosity):

- Likes to put a lot of questions
- Can interpret a text in different understandings,
- Likes to invent stories;
- Likes to find unusual (unbelievable) decisions, fancy stories
- Ability for making assumptions

Self-control of the body

- Ability to keep self-control of the spontaneous body movements
- Ability to adhere to behavior rules in class

Education in Bulgaria during Covid-19 pandemic

For two years now, people have been living in fear of the Covid-19 virus. New and unknown, this virus has completely changed people's way of life. The COVID-19 pandemic created a crisis in almost all economic and social sectors. Governments were forced to take measures against the spread of the virus, among all working people, students and the society in general. Education was one of the most affected areas that were subject to major and significant adjustments.

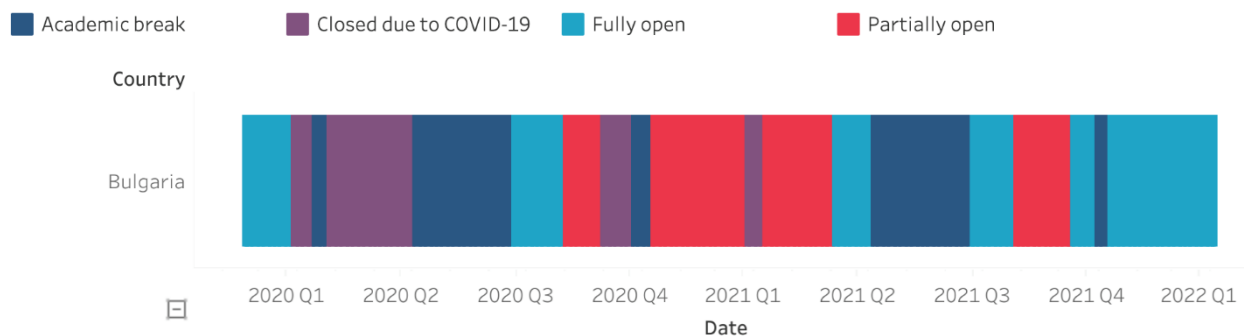
The immediate decision of the Bulgarian Government as many other governments around the world was to close schools and universities, as well as cultural and entertainment institutions and to transfer studying and working from in-person into distance one. Of course – if the nature of the activity allowed such changes.

All schools and educational out-of-school entities, including Chitalisha were fully closed in the beginning for about two weeks in March 2020, but due to the rapid development of Covid-19 pandemic schools were closed for the whole second semester (Fig.1). There was a decision schools to switch into distance learning from 1-12 grades. This required a good knowledge and qualification of the teachers to work with IT, platforms, software, but more importantly quickly to adjust the teaching material and teaching methods to virtual learning, to know how to create a virtual classroom and to establish virtual communication with students.

Fig.1. School lockdowns during 2020 and 2021 based on Covid-19 pandemic⁴

⁴ <https://covid19.uis.unesco.org/global-monitoring-school-closures-covid19/country-dashboard/>





In Bulgaria such immediate total transfer into distant learning ⁵ was new, unexpected act and neither educators nor students and families were prepared. About 700 000 kids, students and their families had to adapt to the online education. The Government took measures together with municipalities to ensure free access to learning opportunities through digital platform “Ucha se” (titled “I am studying”) for all public schools, teachers and students. Also, digital devices (tablets and laptops)⁶ were provided and schools had access to secure internet. Thus, to achieve equal access to digital education, about 80 000 tablets were distributed by the Ministry of Education all over the country and given to those in need. It was funded by Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth”.

Other platforms that teachers used were MS Teams, GoogleClass and Zoom. Since 2016 a platform “Virtual classroom Shkolo” (titled “School”)⁷ had been developed to implement electronic communication for actual information inside the schools as well as for permanent virtual communication with parents of students. During Covid-19 pandemic the platform was developed much quicker and more schools began to use it. There were other platforms oriented to facilitating teachers for direct communications and sharing their experiences like the platform: “Together at class” that were supported by project funding.

Distance learning was designed in three forms: synchronous, asynchronous and educational TV. In the beginning teachers used more asynchronous form, but later they transferred to synchronous teaching. Teachers at primary schools (76%) provided synchronous teaching as they found it more effective⁸.

In May 2020, Ministry of Education and Science opened schools to provide exams and to evaluate students’ achievements of remote learning and the success in general at the end of the school year. At that time there had already been published some research showing that remote learning was not effective as it was expected, especially for kids and pupils in the lower grades;

⁵ Distant learning, remote learning and online are used as synonyms.

⁶ Ministry of Education and Science bought 80 000 laptops and tablets that were given to students for the 2020/2021 school year with priority to pupils at 1st grade; funding by OP “Science and Education for Smart Growth”

⁷ <https://www.shkolo.bg/blog>

⁸ Hristova, A., S.Petrova, E.Tosheva, 2021. Analysis of the effects on the learning process, on distance learning of students and teachers during the academic year 2020/2021, p.37 (in Bulgarian)

its impact was negative on knowledge acquisition as well as on skills development⁹. Remote learning was a decision against Covid-19 circulation but its effects were viewed as negative on education. First alarm for worsening the level of achieved knowledge gave UNICEF and UNESCO, including their national offices in Bulgaria. Experts at the Institute for Researches at Education with MofE also signaled about identified bad results of school closures for long periods as it happened in winter / spring semester 2020.

Analyzing the results of measures during the first pandemic year and taking in account the results of numerous researches, the Bulgarian government decided to provide more flexible anti-Covid measures for 2021/2022 academic year like: to give autonomy to schools to decide when and how to close schools. There were obligatory measures ensuring some healthy school environment that everyone had to fulfill. The key point was the recommendation primary schools to be closed for no more than two weeks, if there were no any other possibilities for preserving the health of the students and their families. Moreover, the parents had the right to decide the way their kids to study – in-person or online, even if the teaching was carried out in-class. During the second Covid-19 school year – 2021/2022, blended education was regularly implemented. It was very difficult period for teachers on one side - to transform the lesson materials for remote teaching and from another - to teach simultaneously in-person and online, if here were pupils whose parents preferred them to stay at home.

Distant learning appeared as an option for the continuation of school education during the pandemic, but for out-of-school activities it was not suitable. Almost all out-of-school trainings were closed with the exception of some private foreign language courses that were positioned in private properties. They rearranged group teaching into individual ones and so had the right to continue teaching without out stepping the anti-Covid regulations. All sports clubs were closed, art courses stopped functioning.

General opinion about effects of school closure and social isolation was that there was significant learning loss during online education. Standard assessments (PISA) revealed that reading literacy is lower in comparison with last academic year with 8 points. Students' Functional illiteracy after online teaching assessment is 54% of all students, (previous academic year functional illiteracy was 47%). The combined effect of isolation and online teaching could be summarized as follows:

- The educational inequality has increased based on educational and cultural level of parents and families;

⁹ Aurini,J., Scott,D., 2021. COVID-19 school closures and educational achievement gaps in Canada: Lessons from Ontario summer learning research, *Can Rev Sociol*, *May*;58(2):165-185. doi: 10.1111/cars.12334. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34080780/>; Huang, R.H., Liu, D.J., Amelina, N., Yang, J.F., Zhuang, R.X., Chang, T.W., & Cheng, W, 2020.Guidance on Active Learning at Home during Educational Disruption: Promoting student's self-regulation skills in COVID-19 outbreak. Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University (SLIBNU);

- Academic knowledge is acquired in a slower rate and the achieved results are worse;
- Teachers/ educators have not been well qualified and prepared for online teaching, respectively for blended education, in general.
- School drop outs are continuing and increasing in low-economically families;
- Parents and family members have key role in online education.
- Parents and families did not have knowledge how to support online learning of the kids.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented closing of most schools in Bulgaria and all learners have had their education disrupted.

Methodology

To understand better the possible effects of Covid-19 pandemic and so the created anti – pandemic measures to be reasonable and to take into account different aspects of their impact a comparative study was carried out.

The **main aim** of the study was to identify the reflection of Covid-19 pandemic measures taken in Bulgaria (as well as in all project partner countries) on education of pupils at primary schools and at educational out of school entities oriented to different activities like: foreign language study, sports, art activities, etc. More specify the study aimed to clarify:

- The effects of isolation due to Covid-19 on the development of the selected transferable skills;
- The effects of school closures on learning behavior of pupils and impact of blended learning (online and face-to-face);
- To reveal the readiness of teachers and educators to cope with the requested changes of teaching, as well as what were their difficulties and kind of support they need.

The study aimed to obtain two types of information: information based on quantity data and qualitative information.

Target groups of the study were teachers at primary schools, educators at out of school training activities and parents of pupils aged 6-12 years old. The idea was to collect and analyze mirror information about children's learning behavior and so, to understand better the effects of social isolation based on the pandemic and the effectiveness of distance learning.

The basic method for data collection - the quantitative information was a questionnaire, distributed through Google forms and the method of individual interview was for collecting qualitative information. There were two questionnaires: one for educators and one for parents. The questionnaires were designed and created by an expert group of the project and approved by the project team. The identical translated versions were distributed in all partner countries. Most of the questions in both questionnaires had mirror character so, to achieve a different information

(from teachers and from parents) about transferable skills development during school closures. To evaluate the effects of the school closure on skill's development two corresponding choices about investigated skills were offered asking the respondents to choose one of the options.

The on-line questionnaires were distributed through educational experts of AGORA and GIS-TC networks, including Chitalishta networks, parents' associations, partners' municipalities, direct personal contacts with directors of primary schools and public and private out of school centers that provide different extracurricular activities such as: school support, sports, different art activities, language activities, etc., all over Bulgaria.

Most of the communication was by e-mails and phones. Participation of the respondents was voluntary, anonymous and by self-decisions based on snowballing. In this case – our sample was typology oriented, with self selection bias. Regardless of the limitations caused by the sample, the obtained results give a clear picture of the investigated problems

The time of data collection with the on-line questionnaire was about two months - April- May 2022.

Additionally, the qualitative part of the study was carried out via **individual interviews**. They were carried out face-to-face and through videoconferencing (by Skype and Zoom). The interviewees were selected with the help of GIS-TC and AGORA networks of educational experts – teachers and parents. The interviews were carried out after the analysis of quantitative information. The provided interviews with teachers and parents were as follows: 8 interviews with teachers, of them 4 were teachers at primary school and 4 were currently working as educators at out of school entities and 3 interviews with parents of children 6-10 years old.

In all stages of the study, the ethical lines requested were followed (consent of the responders, privacy protection, equal treatment, transparency, validity, and reliability).

The Study Results (Findings)

Profile of respondents

The study focused on two target groups: parents and teachers at primary school, Chitalishta and educational private centers.

Profile of teachers:

The questionnaire was completed by 129 individuals of which 93% were female and 7% - male. The majority of them worked in small towns and villages (52,7%), 19,4% were from Sofia – the capital and 27,9% were from large cities. That means that there was a balance between teachers who worked in large cities and in small settlements (Fig.2). The age group of the responders was diverse with the majority being 50-59 years old (42,6%), followed by the age group 40-49 years (24,8%), and 30-39 years – 21,7%. There were a few respondents up to 29 years old – only 7 teachers, (5,4%) and also 5,4 % were over 60 years old (Fig. 2 and 3). The majority group were teachers at primary schools - 75,2%, most of them worked at public schools – 93%, among which

there were teachers who worked at both- private and public educational entities (4%). They were from various sectors: primary school teachers, educators from supplementary training centers and Chitalishte, some of them were resource teachers working with children with special educational needs (SEN). They teach foreign languages, arts, music, dance and sports that were traditional activities for the Bulgarian extra curricula education.

Fig.2

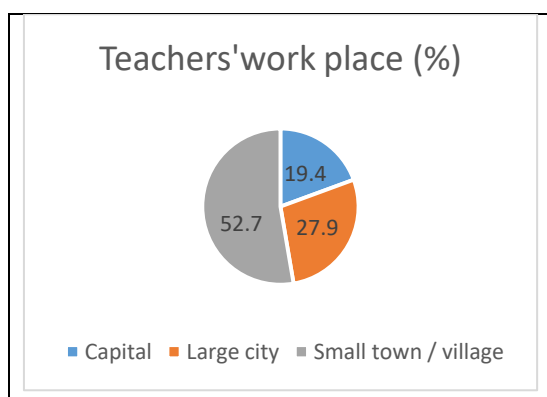
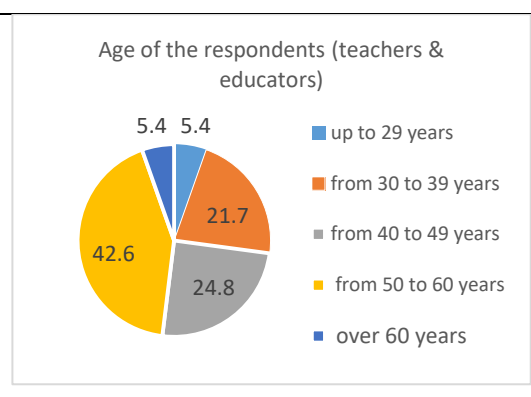


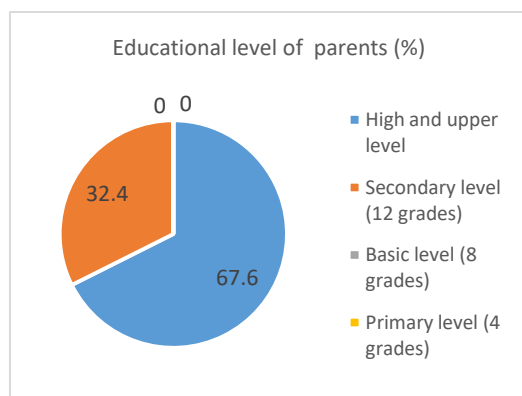
Fig.3



Profile of parents

The questionnaire addressed to parents of children between 6 and 12 years of age was answered by 182 persons, of which 85,7% were mothers, 9,9% were fathers and 4,4% other family members. The age of respondents was as follows: 50,5% were at age 30-39 years old; 42,3% were between 30-39 years; only 1,6% were 29 years old or younger and 5,4% were over 50 years old. With regard to their level of education, 67,6% had completed higher education and 32,4% had completed secondary level of education: gymnasium and professional schools (technique school). Not a single person reported to have lower than secondary education background. (Fig.4.)

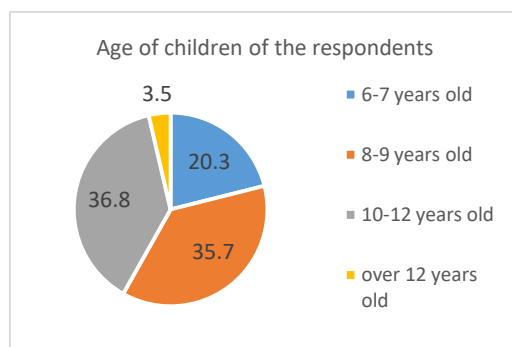
Fig.4.



Statistic concerning the place of living is similar to the one of teachers – respondents: the majority of them lived in small towns and villages (47,3%), 29,7% lived in Sofia – the capital and 23,1% were from large cities. It gave us the right to accept and interpret the study data received by the two target groups - educators and parents as a mirror data, showing different aspects of one and the same study item – effect of school closure on pupils' skills development.

It is important to highlight the type of family of the respondents, 78% live in a nuclear family (parents and children), compared to 17% who live in an extended family (together with one of the progenitors' parents as a one household) and 5% were mono-parental family. Of these, 31% have one child, 61% have two children, and 12% have three children. None of the study participants, reported to have more than three children. Among the respondents 20,3 % of the parents have children between 6 and 7 years old; 35,7% have children between 8 and 9 years old; and 36,8% have children between 10 and 12 years old. (Fig.5)

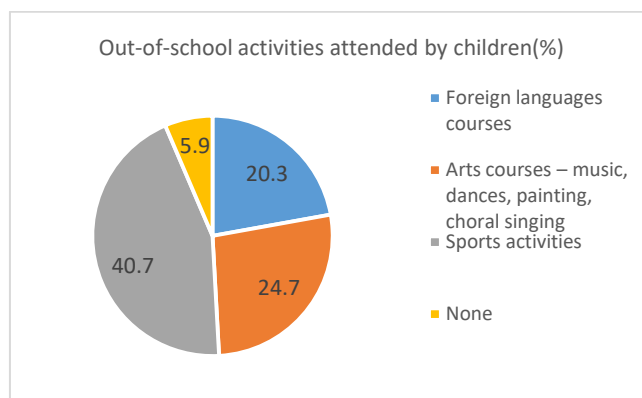
Fig.5.



Concerning the extra curricula activities, it is essential to point out that 85,7 % children used to attend various extra curricula training activities and only 14% did not participate to school additional training activities. Most popular out of school educational activities were sport activities (40,7%), different art courses like: painting, dance, musical instrument playing and

choir singing (24,7%) and learning foreign languages (20,3%). Some of the children combined and participated in several out of school courses (fig 6.)

Fig.6.



About 55% of these out of school activities were organized by the network of Chitalishta (cultural centres) especially in small towns and villages. There were two main reasons based on which children to attend different extra curricula activities at Chitalishta: these are public entities and course fees are low so the families could afford them and the other one – usually Chitalishta are situated close to the place of living and so, it is comfortable for the family. Moreover, some of Chitalishta recently begin to collaborate with local schools and these relations stimulate parents to help for enlarging traditional activities of Chitalishta.

Analysing the profiles of the study respondents the two target groups were typical for the general picture of educators in Bulgaria: the majority of educators are female, the largest group is teachers aged between 50-59 years old – 36,25 %; teachers up to 29 years old on national level are 6, 82%¹⁰. Respondents were distributed in balance all around the size of the settlements, the distribution of educators and parents was similar, they all were at the higher level of the educational scale. Thus, we could accept that the typology sample of the study reflects the general picture of investigated social groups. It gave us the right to compare the received data as well as to make some conclusions related to the general professional group – educators.

Learning achievements and skill development of pupils

The Covid-19 pandemic and school closures for relatively long periods (the whole second semester of the 2020/2021 year), caused a quick implementation of distance learning, which went together with social isolation of pupils and their families.

¹⁰ Преподавателски персонал в общообразователните училища по възраст , НСИ, 2022 ([//www.nsi.bg/bg/content/3468](http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/3468))

Primary education system in Bulgaria focused on oral lesson's explanations and exams was mainly applied, as well as some additional written papers in a few cases. Thus, online teaching was accompanied by introducing very different ways of teaching that were new to pupils and teachers alike. Online education became a challenge for teachers, kids and their families. Teaching and communication was difficult for both sides. The evaluation process was very difficult as there was no physical face-to-face contacts between pupils and teachers.

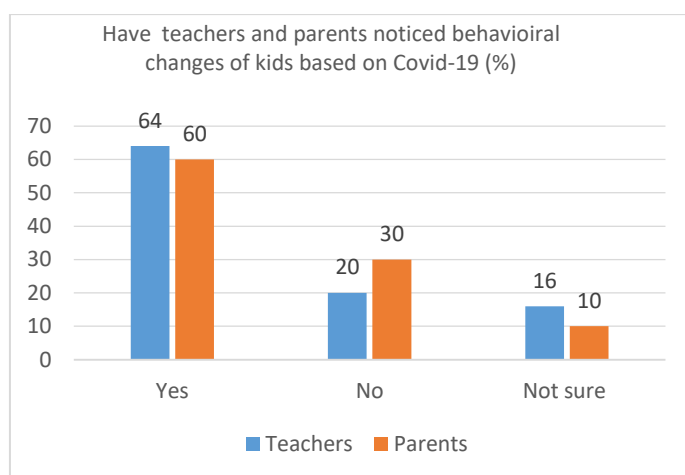
It was worth to compare teachers' and parents' evaluation of the effects of social isolation periods and online studying on the learning attitudes of the kids. Both – teachers and parents were asked mirror and similar questions. They were asked to evaluate if they could see any changes of the pupils' behavior as a result of school closures and the long period of staying at home with limited contacts with their friends (Fig.7)

The changes that parents and educators recognized were assessed predominantly as negative, although both groups identified some positive effects, too. But only one parent pointed out that her child felt better during on-line learning and the mother shared:

“My child accepts new information much better through computer, feels calm and undisturbed during lessons. I think that he learns more than in class teaching. He likes to be alone and to study alone. Of course, he asks me questions when he does not understand and I explain.... I am at home during on-line lessons, but do not stay together with him. ...”

Mother of a boy, primary school, Sofia

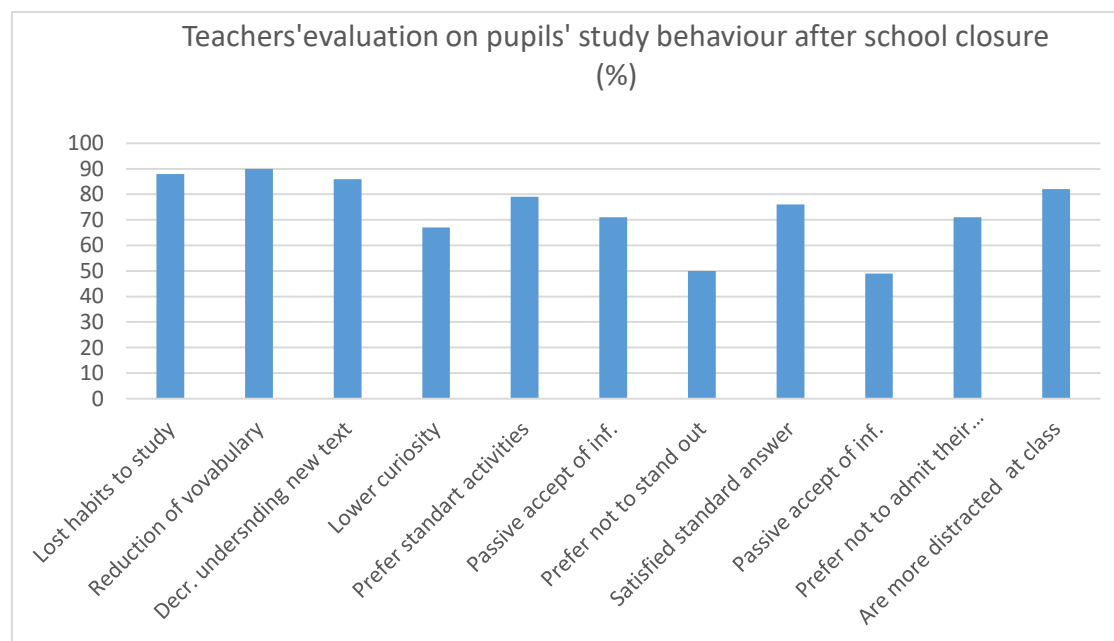
Fig.7.



The opinion of teachers was mostly oriented on evaluation of achieved level of academic knowledge and skills development as they compare the results between in-person and on-line teaching.

The majority of educators answered that there were visible negative changes of pupils' behavior at class after periods of school closure. Assessment of the acquired academic knowledge during blended teaching also revealed mainly negative effects of distance teaching: 36% of respondents pointed out a significant deficits and gaps of knowledge, 6% stated that the knowledge was practically not acquired and that distance learning caused a great deal of learning loss. At the same time, 51% evaluated the achieved knowledge as satisfactory; even 5% stated that it was the same as in-person studying. When assessing the effects of school closure on skills development, the educators were even more unanimous (Fig. 8.).

Fig.8.



When the schools reopened teachers indicated that during the pandemic pupils lost their interests on studying and especially on reading books and so, their active vocabulary became limited, most of them faced difficulties to express themselves. The understanding of a new text has worsened, their curiosity has significantly decreased, they had become more closed in themselves and prefer to accept passively any new information. At the same time, the majority preferred not to admit their mistakes. About half of the teachers recognized that the pupils became less interested to stand out in front of the class and to express any own idea or to stand for their own task decisions.

About half of the pupils were satisfied with standard answers. In general, teachers pointed out that pupils became less attentive during the lesson, easily distracted and seemed to be bored. Even some teachers during interviews pointed out that they had invited psychologist to cope together with the existing high anxiety and uncertainty of pupil's behavior in class after Covid-19.

“It was very difficult to restore pupils’ behavior towards learning at class. They were so anxious, nervous, worried ... They did not hear anything what I was saying. We did not know what to do. The director decided to ask for help the psychologist and together to solve the problems. ... Psychologists identified a very high level of anxiety in most of the pupils. We had to work together with parents.... It was very difficult to explain to them the problems. ... it took a long time to reestablish a normal learning environment at class.”

Teacher at a primary school, in the country, small town.

There were a lot of similarities between the opinion of teachers and parents on how Covid measures reflected on kids behavior related to studying and in general (Fig.9.). While teachers focused on level of academic knowledge of pupils and emphasized more on lack of learning attitudes and loss of skills like ability for decision making and critical thinking, parents paid attention to the ways kids study at home on-line, described home environment for online learning. About 40% studied alone or had to study alone as there was nobody to help, 60% pointed out that their children needed support to complete their online lessons. And this support was usually given to them. Parents shared that kids did not have enough time to answer to what teacher had asked for. Very often kids know the reply, but were not so quick to act on time. Parents pointed out that their children very quickly became bored and could not followed the teaching process (41%), did not understand the lessons and needed explanations from family members (Fig.10).

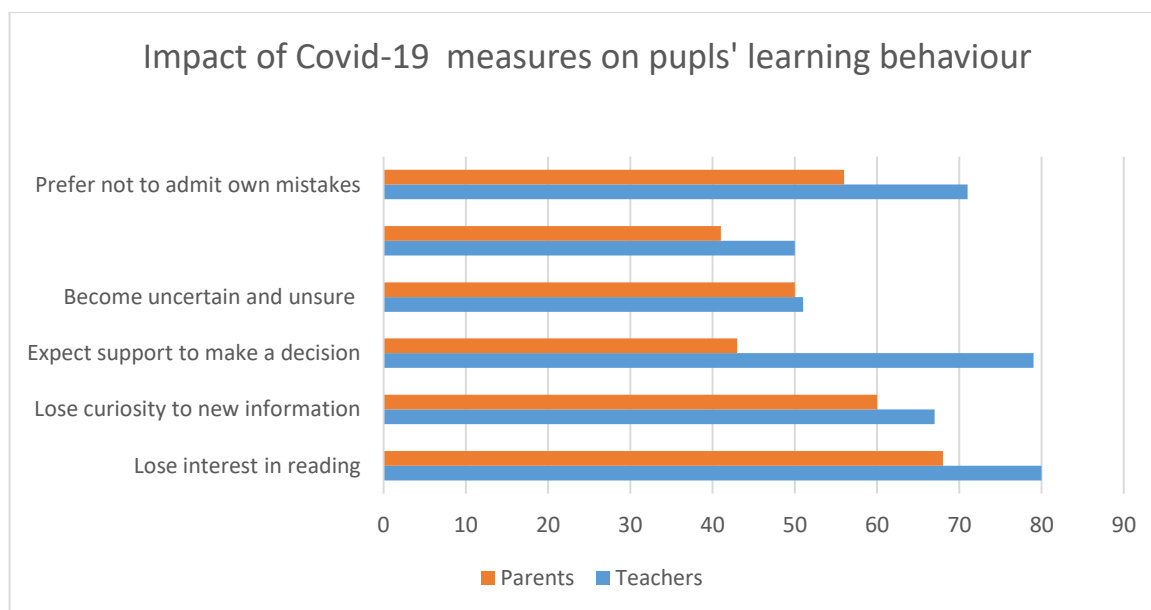
During on-line lessons kids often wanted to do other things like: to walk around the room and they did it, to go to the toilet or to look for something to eat. Parents during interviews shared that kids, especially those that were 1st and 2nd grade usually had toys in their hands during lessons, some (5%) even refused to study on-line and often missed lessons. Some parents hired tutors to cover the educational program, others asked teachers to work individually with their children. Families had to decide by themselves how to support their children during on-line teaching. “Parents had to become teachers“ could be heard everywhere very often. Some people said that with approval, others with criticism for the existing educational policies and administration. Essentially, the study revealed the importance of creation of “a study home space” to discipline the kids and to help them concentrate.¹¹ The role of such space is somehow to replace the

¹¹ The same results published Arnou,Ch, Cornelis , G., Jan Heymans. P., et al.2021. COVID-19 and educational spaces: Creating a powerful and social inclusive learning environment at home, Acad. paper

classroom by setting the appropriate environment. The fact that the majority (60%) of pupils had personal electronic devices at home is not enough for creating a study environment.

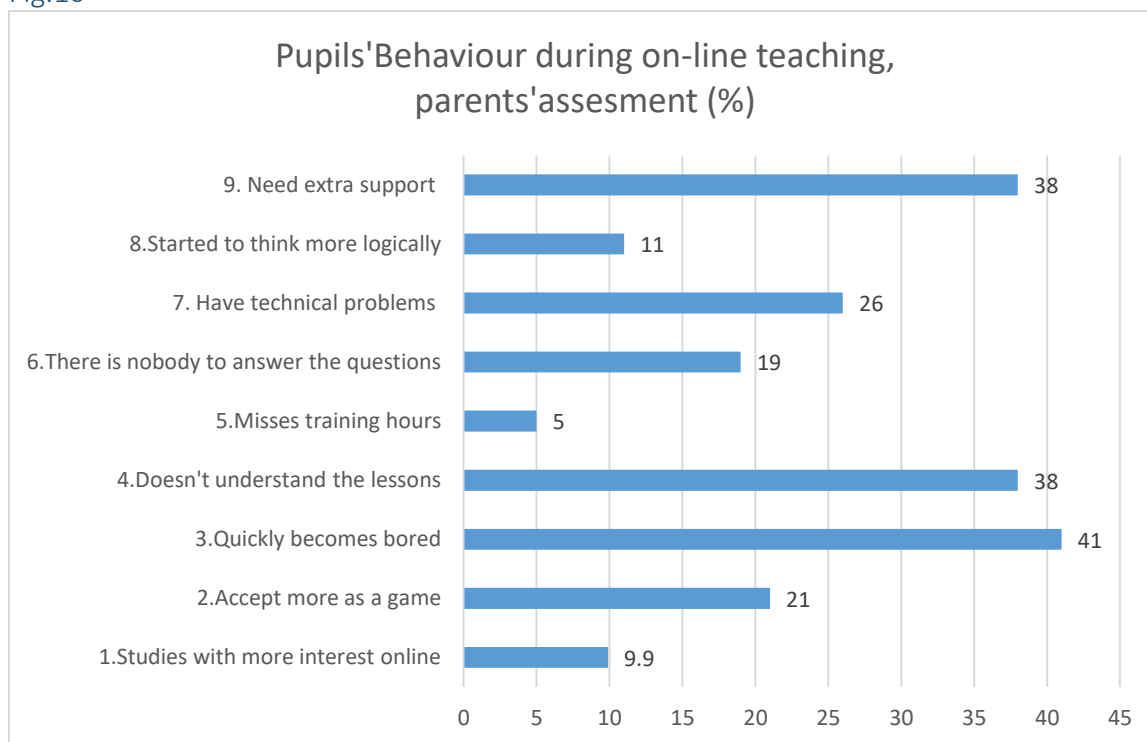
After the Covid-19 pandemic begun there was no doubted that the education level of students decreased a lot. Transferable skills significantly have been lost. UNICEF warned of a global education crisis: in Bulgaria every fifth student reported worse educational outcomes than before; about 64% has decreased ability for reading comprehension or only a third of 10-year-olds is able to read and understand a simple written story. It revealed that about 30% had felt loneliness, uncertainty, irritability, 20% shared about anxiety and sadness¹².

Fig.9



¹² Impacts of the COVID-19 on preschool and school education in Bulgaria, June, 2020, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/bulgaria/en/media/11011/file>

Fig.10



Online teaching has been evaluated also as something positive. Parents recognized more positive effects that the teachers. Parents stated that kids began to use electronic devices not only for games, nevertheless that they accepted on-line lessons as games, kids became more knowledgeable using IT technologies, became more logical and started to think more logically. These positive effects had been recognized by not so many parents (Fig10.) as this was a period that nobody was prepared for distant education. Its rapid implementation was just obligatory act based to the needs of COVID measures. Already after two years' experience of blended education, on-line teaching is not so unknown and it could be a start for larger blended education in Bulgarian educational system.

On the contrary – teachers could not see any positive elements related to online teaching. About 90% of them expressed very clear their negative opinion about on-line teaching based on their personal practices. Here are some of the most common negative opinions:

“There are not any positive effects.”

“Pupils lost communication skills, as they stay alone at home.”

“There is no personal development.”

“Online education is loss of time and pupils' disorganization.”

“Pupils forget everything. We have to begin to teach from the beginning.”



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Predominantly negative effects of schools lock-down and online education revealed a research carried out by Institute for Research at Education with Ministry of Education¹³. These results stressed on an alarming decrease in the emotional, behavioral and cognitive engagement of students' as well as self-assessment of their learning abilities in 2021 compared to 2020 data. Number of substantially increasing the proportion of students with low engagement and self-esteem learning abilities increased.

A few teachers managed to recognize positive effects on kids' personal development:

“Pupils realized the need for lively communication and collaborative work in class.”

“Computer literacy of pupils and teachers increased.”

“Possibility for acquiring skills to work in a different environment.”

“The shy pupils found a manifestation (hidden behind the screen)”

Others recognized positive impact on bettering teachers' qualification:

“Sharing between colleagues has increased.”

“New educational platforms became part of our teaching.”

Many teachers paid attention that school closure and online teaching initiated communication with parents; parents became engaged in their children's education.

“Make parents more active in participating in their children's education.”

“Parental involvement has increased.”

“Educators focused on practical acts to motivate parents' participation in class activities.”

Out-of-school activities during COVID-19 pandemic (2020/2021 and 2021/2022 school years)

Usually a lot of kids attend different out of school activities: about 20% study foreign languages in private courses, organized by private Foreign Language Centers, Chitalishta or individual private lessons; 41% had sport exercises, 25% visited different art courses: dances, ballet, painting. Only 2% of the parents - participants in the study, said that their children did not have any out-of-schools educational activities and 12% said that kids attend more than one out-of-

¹³Hristova, A., S.Petrova, E.Tosheva, 2021. Analysis of the effects on the learning process, on distance learning of students and teachers during the academic year 2020/2021 (in Bulgarian)

school activity. All these out-of-school activities as well as extracurricular activities at schools provided after the lessons were even more limited by the anti-pandemic measures than regular schools. All such activities were closed for long periods. No one of the respondents stated that these private courses transferred their teaching into online teaching. Some training courses – especially foreign language teachings changed their organization of teaching and group teaching was transferred into individual one. It gave educators and children opportunity not to stop learning but change the learning environment. There was no communication with peers during lessons as learner was alone with the teacher. Educators quickly had to design other model of teaching. But not all of the foreign language courses continued to function during the closure periods of educational entities. Most of the courses organized by Chitalisha stopped to function as all public educational and cultural buildings had been closed.

Parents insisted and supported out-of-school activities to remain functioning during the periods of school closures. Parents were ready to support different organizational pedagogical changes that facilitated kids' attendance of out-of-school trainings: 33% pointed out that their children continue to go regularly to the out-of-school activities, 33% said that they go from time to time and 33% - stopped to attend. (Fig.11)

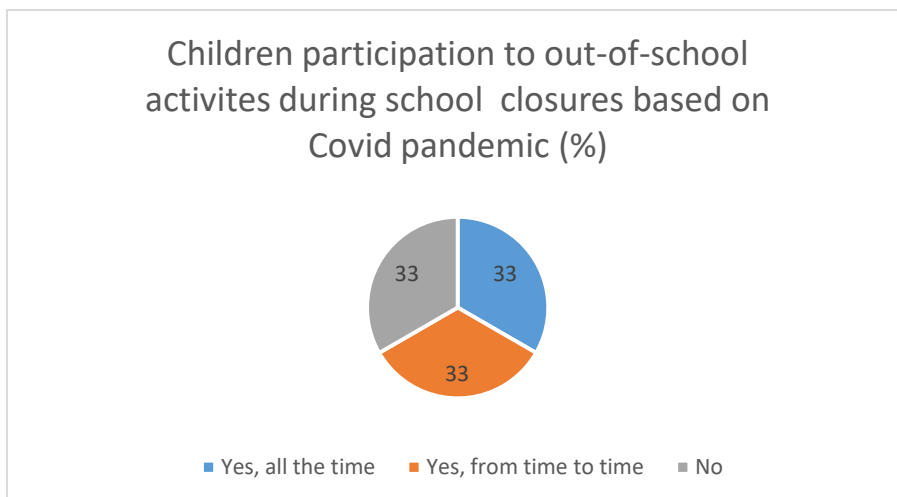
Anti-COVID pandemic measures did not totally closeout of school activities neither in the capital and large cities nor in the small towns and villages (Fig.12). But out-of-school activities were more reduced in small towns.

The study revealed that sport and art activities in small towns were the most reduced ones. Some of the courses closed and did not open any more or they continued to function only with a few children.

“After Covid restrictions kids that continued to participate in my trainings were only a quarter of the usual participants.”

Educator of sport dances, small town

Fig.11.



“Children that came back after the periods of closure decreased a lot. From about 40 children organized in 4 training groups today (May 2022) - an year after the start of the Covid pandemic, they are only the half, organized in 2 training groups.”

Ballet Educator, small town

Educators during interviews explained such strong reduction based to demotivation of children themselves to continue to go to trainings, financial difficulties for parents to continue to pay for additional trainings as some of them had lost their jobs, re-assessment of family priorities during long stay at home, changing the style of family living during social communication limitations periods. Related to the level of skills development, educators said that kids had forgotten almost everything and the training had to start from the very beginning.

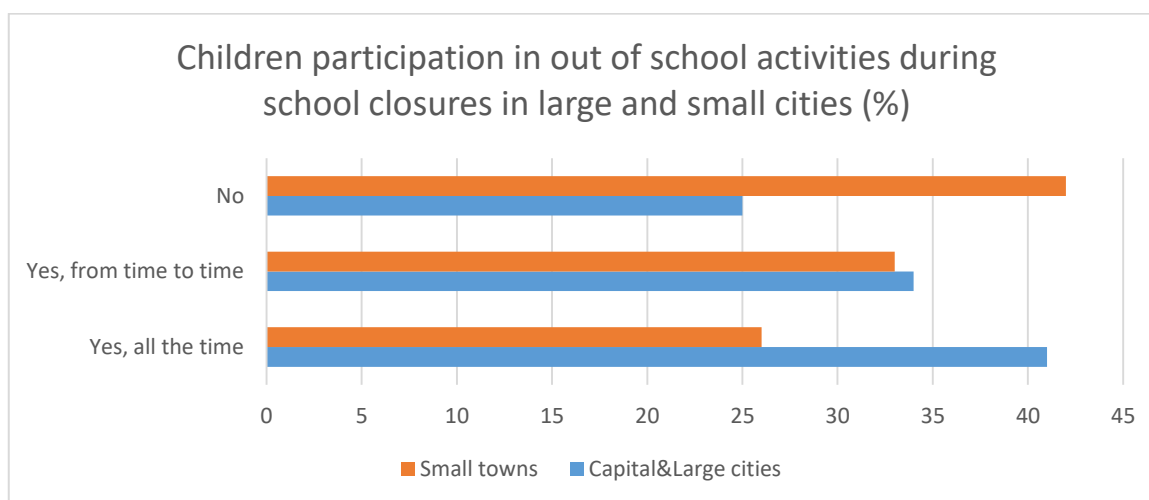


Fig. 12.

Parents' and teachers' collaboration

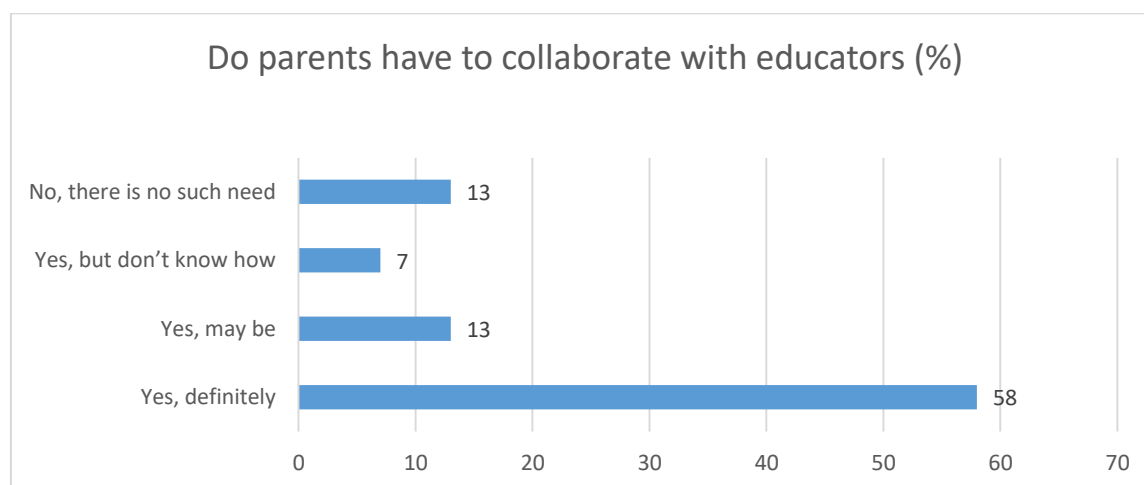


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One of the positive effects of Covid-19 school closures and online teaching was that parents and teachers started to collaborate (83%) of which initiators of the contacts were parents (41%), and 42% were teachers. 57% of the parents had clear understanding that they have to collaborate with teachers in developing transferable skills of the children, 22% were thinking about it and only 13% prefer to stay outside of education of their children and believed that it was not their responsibility. 7% of parents agreed that they had to collaborate with teachers and were ready to do it, but did not know to do it.

Fig.13.



Mechanisms for bettering such collaboration according to parents could be related with the available access to free resources – concrete information and knowledge, time, information materials (57%), free consultations with professionals (45%). Creating an informal groups (space) where parents are able to exchange information and good practices was considered as a motive to increase teacher-parent interaction (38%). At the same, about 3% of parents were satisfied with the current collaboration.

In general, analyzing the study results we could conclude: *teachers' predominated opinion was that kids had lost a lot of academic knowledge and transferable skills during school closures; blended teaching in the form that it was carried out could not cover and could not compensate the lack of physical communications of kids. The important role of parents for education of their children was understood by both: teachers and parents.*

Changes that teachers have to make to adapt for blended teaching

It is already well known that Covid pandemic and implementing blended education caused a significant change in the teaching process. The teachers in Bulgaria were not prepared for this rapid change. Teachers were in a situation to manage to adapt themselves for on-line and blended teaching not only to use the online platforms, but also to rearrange the way of presenting the lessons material, to teach themselves how to communicate with pupils at a virtual classroom.

The study aimed to reveal the changes that they faced to adapt to online teaching, difficulties that teachers encountered during the new way of teaching, needs that they recognized during the period of online teaching and major help that teachers expected to get. (Fig.14 and 15)

The majority changes that teachers had to do quickly related to creation of a new lessons design were to adapt to on-line presentations (51%) and to find forms for online small group discussions (50%). To prepare lessons for online teaching, teachers stated that they had spent much more time for pre-lesson preparations (55%). Intuitively, teachers recognized that they needed other mechanism for evaluation of the achieved knowledge. Most difficult for them was the evaluation of the acquired knowledge and achieved skills during virtual classroom (Fig.14). They shared elements of evaluation of the in-person teaching as they did not know the tools for doing it during online periods. The training courses organized by Ministry of Education could cover the existing needs of educators for online teaching. To cope with lack of knowledge to work with IT teachers used ready digital resources from Internet (62%). Only few of them had knowledge to create their own digital models and visualizations of the lessons or to use such products created by colleagues from the school (11%) and/or from colleagues in others schools (16,5%).¹⁴ The lack of collaboration among educators created additional difficulties for all of them. Only 7% of teachers had active collaborations with colleagues from the same school and only 1,7 % collaborated with teachers from other schools. Teachers as a common practice did not share their knowledge and experiences with colleagues.¹⁵

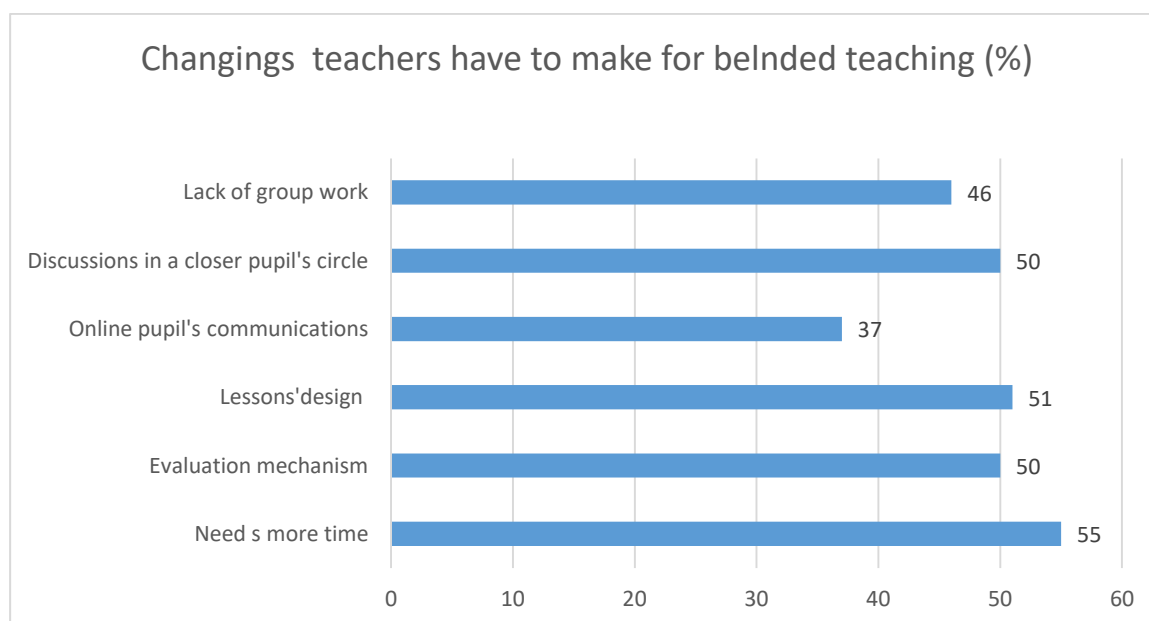
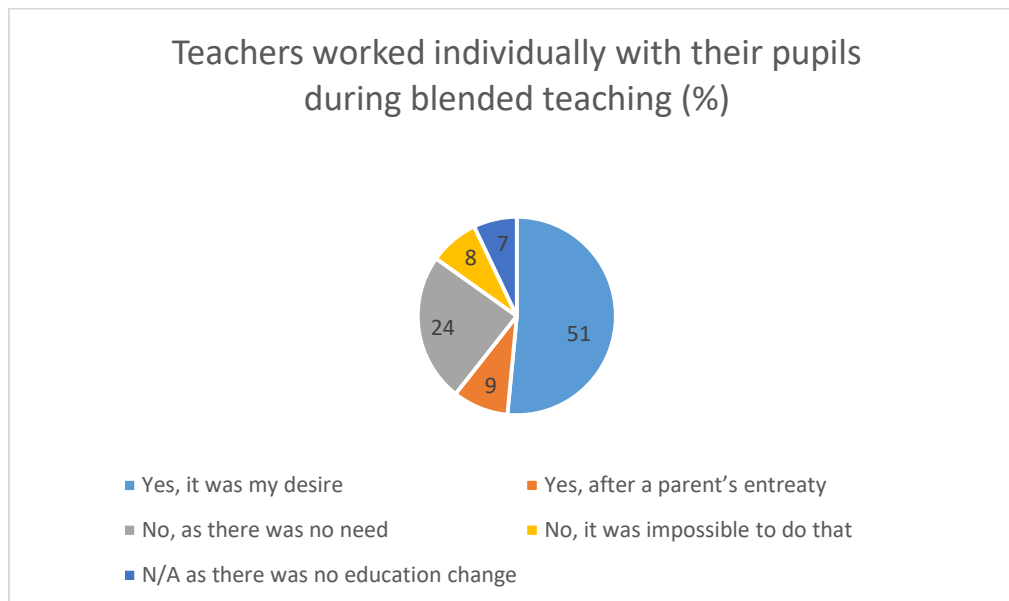


Fig.14.

¹⁴ Hristova, A., S.Petrova, E.Tosheva, 2021. Analysis of the effects on the learning process, on distance learning of students and teachers during the academic year 2020/2021, Institute of research in Education, Sofia, (in Bulgarian)

¹⁵ The same

Fig.15.



The data showed that the majority of the teachers (60%) had to work additionally with their pupils during blended teaching in order to cover the appeared gaps of academic knowledge acquisition. The extra work was in-person and individual: teacher-learner. This work was done on voluntary basis. Teachers did it based on personal understanding and responsibilities of their profession - to be a teacher.

"I was not obliged to have extra work with some pupils, but they needed it and I had to do it."

Primary school teacher, capital

"During online learning being at home pupils did not learn anything, especially when kids at first grade are concerned. Next school year they have to be at second grade, so I have to work with them additionally. Most of the parents asked us to do it. The parents in our town could not pay for private lessons, so we have to work additionally."

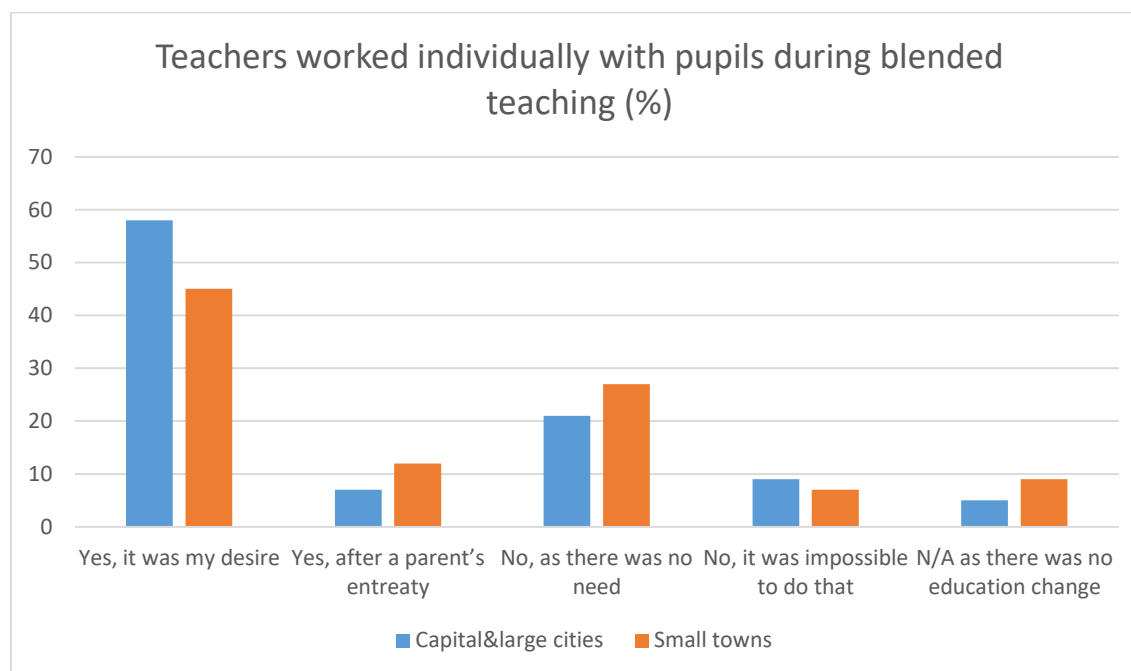
Primary school teacher, small town

"In our private educational center, we have to focus more on the school lessons to cover the appeared gaps of knowledge. Some of the teachers worked with their pupils furthermore and we had to work with them according to our program, but with others – who did not have any additional help during school closures, we have to teach them according to school programs. For us it was difficult and we had to change our programs."

Educator at a private Educational Center, capital.

In the capital and larger cities more teachers worked in-person individually with the pupils that wanted extra explanations than in the small towns. (Fig.16.)

Fig.16.



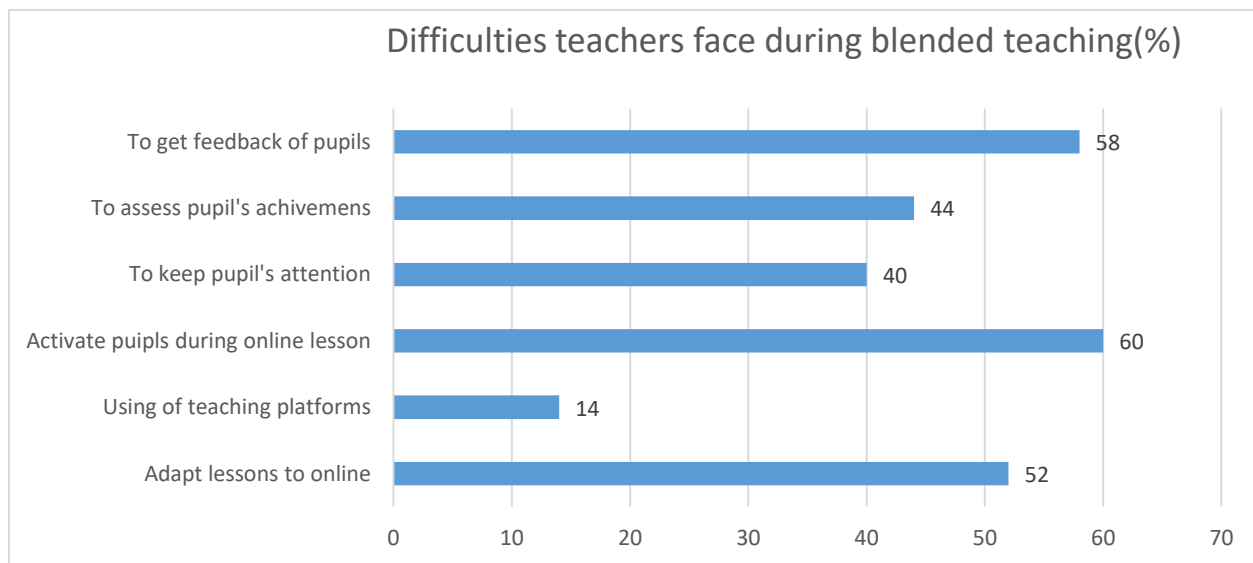
As it was mentioned above, parents also stated that they themselves and their children had more individual contacts with the teachers during Covid-19 school closures. It was important to note that there were no differences between the opinion of parents all over the country. The feedback from parents, identified during the interviews was clear: they wanted more support for educating their children and this support they expected to be by the teachers, parents expected schools to give them organizational support how to help the online learning process; parents expected schools to incorporate more information and practical tools for families as online education is a new way of teaching and learning. Some parents solved the problem by organizing additional private trainings to their children during which studying materials were learned out, but it was accepted as a temporal measure. Today, the common parents' attitude is that family could organize extra to the school curriculum activities which to be above the average educational level. The revealed opinion of the parents – respondents in the survey was related only for the upper secondary educational level of people. There were no respondents who had lower educational level. Common by and large understanding of parents was that schools are responsible to provide education, parents could have only supporting role. **Covid-19 pandemic showed that parents have a key role for education of their children.** How teachers and parents can collaborate – became a discussion item in the society.

Difficulties that teachers face to implement blended teaching

Online teaching was unknown for the majority of the educators and they did not practice it at all before the pandemic. Teachers' qualification was not sufficient and most of them stated that they had many difficulties to become an online teacher (Fig.17). The main difficulties related to the change they had to make were: to adapt study materials for online teaching and to be capable to use existing potential of the digital technologies for lessons presentations, to organize team activities, to encourage individual participation, to find forms for interactive virtual teaching, etc. To keep pupils' attention and concentration during a virtual lesson was a problem for most of them. They shared that the most difficult for them was to keep active pupils' behavior towards tasks of the lessons (60%). To evaluate the pupils' achievements during online teaching was also very tricky as virtual classroom had many variations depending of the pupil's family. There were two obvious reasons that the study revealed:

- a. firstly and very common was that family members helping the child to study in front of the computers answered instead of the child and so teacher did not have real feedback of pupil's knowledge and achievements;
- b. secondly, there was a lack of evaluating mechanism of online teaching. Evaluation of pupil's skills achievements was made by teachers using their self-created methods, which in general were based on practical experiences. It was not possible teachers to use evaluation methods that they were using at classroom, as they could not watch and examine pupils' behavior during online lessons.

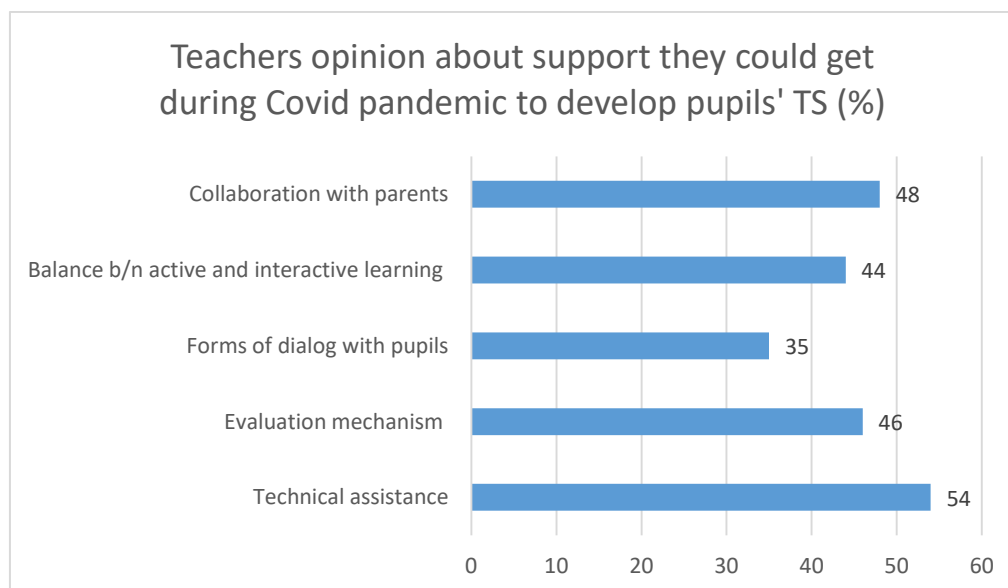
Fig.17



Expectations for support by educators to implement blended teaching

The study revealed that the majority of the teachers believed they needed various types of technical support to be capable to use software and programs that could enrich teaching in more attractive ways (54%). Also, they stressed the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents for effective teaching-learning process of kids (48%). 46% answered that they need external support in the development of evaluation mechanisms (Fig.18). An important help educators needed was to find appropriate methods to keep the balance between active and interactive learning both – during online and face-to-face classrooms.

Fig.18.



Blended education as a future option of traditional education

The Covid-19 pandemic showed to the people that unexpected, unusual and unknown social situations could happen and quick decisions had to be made. Blended education was one of the decisions necessary for the education system to continue to function by finding a solution in terms of how to observe the health measures for reducing the virus dissemination. In general, blended education is an option to find ways to deal with existing limitations for some students to be at school. To understand better how online teaching was accepted by teachers and parents they were asked about how they see the future of blended education. Logically, if they have found something useful of the online teaching they would continue to use it. Teachers evaluate the usage of IT in teaching as positive and facilitating pupils' understanding tool when it is implemented during in-person study (Fig.19.) Moreover, it is a digital technology that kids are already accustomed with and like it.

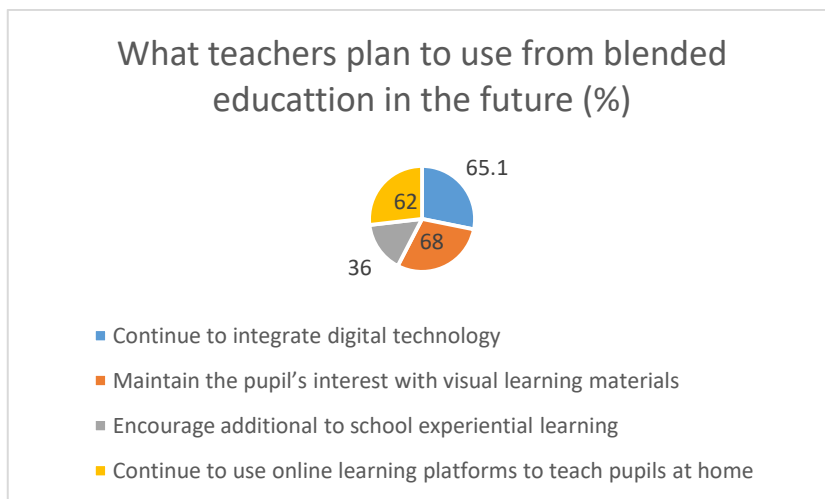
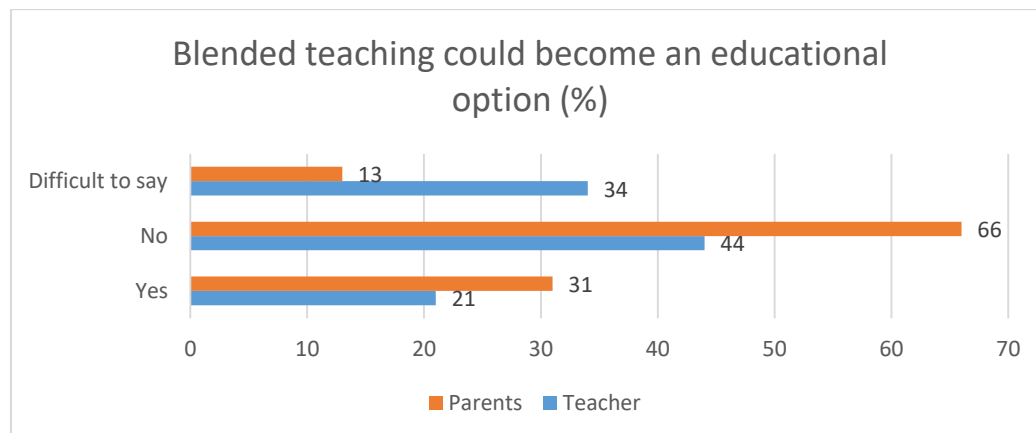


Fig. 19.

At the same time, neither teachers nor parents believe that blended education could be used in the future as a norm. Parents are more negative as they evaluate online learning, not online teaching (Fig.20).

Teachers in small towns were even more skeptic that blended education could become a part of the traditional one (Fig.21.) It was not realistic to be used as an option at primary school but also at secondary ones.

Fig.20.



Both, teachers and parents accepted blended education as a form of teaching only in crises and special needs like epidemic, long-term disease of some pupils with SEN. Online teaching could not replace and ensure in-person full education. **Teachers were very clear that they will not agree anymore to teach in-person and at the same time in parallel to teach online as they were obliged to do during the school closures.** This combination was very exhausting and detriment of both face-to-face and distance learning.. The teachers complied with the decision of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education which was based on the desire to solve both issues – health

and education – during the pandemic, though the teachers expressed opinion that this was not the correct and good decision having in mind the children’s development.

Fig.21.

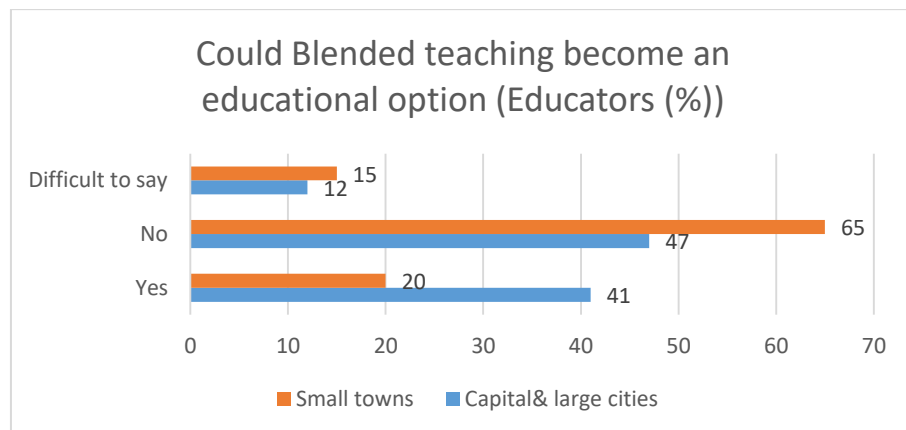
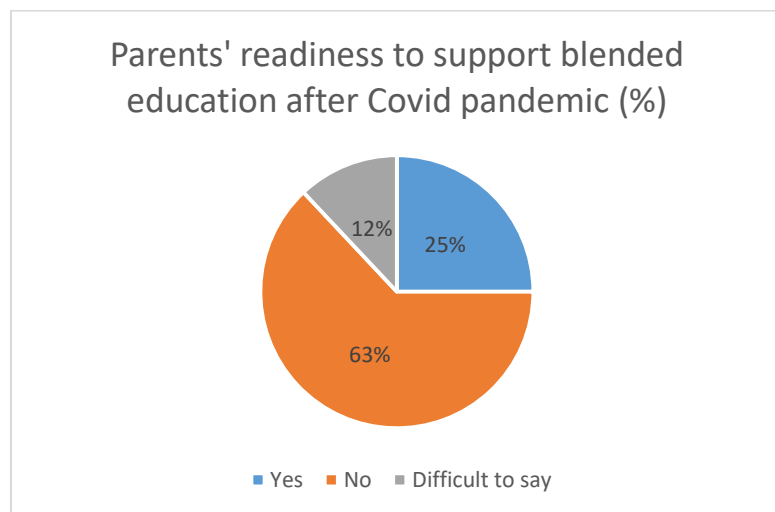


Fig.22.



Information that was gathered by interviews also pointed out that teachers and parents had very clear negative opinion about online teaching and so would not support blended education.

“Kids cannot be taught online. They cannot stay alone in front of the computer and learn what I am teaching. Even they are together with a family member it is very difficult for me



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to be sure that the child hears and understands what I am saying. Most difficult for pupils and also for me is to teach them writing skills. The new combination – computer, paper and a pen disorganizes the learning process. Mathematic lessons are easier and the dialogue with the child is much clear, but still I don't know who is answering to my questions – the child or the family person next to him. The teaching-learning online situation is always confusing especially at first grade..... No, blended teaching is impossible at primary schools.”

Teacher, primary school, small town

“For me as a teacher the transition period from teaching at class to online teaching was very difficult. I had totally to change the lesson design presentations; I was not sure what pupils understood at all. In the beginning, I saw them on the cameras but later – they managed to fix cameras in a way not to be seen. Kids are very quick and well oriented working with digital technologies. My pupils are in 3 grade and they are very smart. For me, the most difficult was to evaluate what they have learned. So, when we were back to in-person education I had to reassess everything. In parallel to the new teaching program, I had to make a revision – let us say – revision, but in fact it was teaching unknown study material..... Blended teaching is not suitable for primary and even for secondary schools. “

Teacher, primary school, capital

“Blended teaching, yes it is difficult but it is also a challenge for me. In the beginning I was very enthusiastic, put a lot of efforts to prepare lessons for online teaching, thinking how to make lessons attractive for my pupils. Later, the difficulties began to appear. The contacts between me and pupils were not defined, the efforts to organize the online team work failed, parents instead of helping the learning process unconsciously they impeded it by answering instead of their kids. It was difficult to evaluate pupils achieved knowledge, not talking about skills development.”

Teacher, primary school, small town

Parents were even more negative about blended teaching to become an option of traditional education. Interviewed parents complain that online learning did not stimulate the curiosity of their children, decreased the attitudes to study. Parents together with children had to stay at home complying with the anti-Covid-19 measures. The whole family was at home but as parents were on distance work they could not pay enough necessary attention to the kids. Out-of-school educational centers that usually helped pupils to do their homework were also closed at that time. For all family members it was unusual and difficult time, sometimes even conflicts were created.

“I was on a distance work during school lockdown and I did not have enough time to study with my kids nevertheless I was at home. I shared the time between work and controlling the kids to study but I doubt that it was successful. Everybody has own computer or tablet but it was not sufficient. Online learning is not for pupils. Yes, they became very smart dealing with digital technologies but it is not knowledge. Because of

my control they stayed in front of the computers during online lessons but what they were doing - it is the problem. I think that they were missing most of the lessons as they were only physically there. Teachers had to find more interesting forms of teaching..... Blended teaching... No, it is not a solution. Online education for kids is unexpected vacation, time for play.”

Mother of twins, capital

“I am embarrassed thinking about effects of blended education as an option. Thinking about securing health environment - staying at home and studying online for me is a good decision. My son was happy to stay at home and to study alone. My working hours were flexible and I managed to stay with him. I myself recognized his progress, he began to use the computer to find information that he was interested in. But from the other side, limited communications with his peers is not good for his socialization. He stopped meeting his friends face-to-face. It is not good.”

Mother, primary school, capital

The majority of the respondents and interviewees had negative opinions about online and blended education. Parents wanted definitely more support from school /teachers how to help and behave with the kids during online lessons at home. Home environment could not be a study space. Social isolation and lack of peer communication of kids put families in a new situation during which many unexpected changes of “normal” family life needed to happen. The majority of parents declared that online teaching changed the attitudes of learning of their kids.

But not everything was bad.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic interrupted traditional teaching behavior. Online teaching was necessary to be implemented because of health reason. Nobody was ready for these changes. The effects of online teaching were not known neither by decision makers nor by teachers and parents. Decisions were made in dynamic based mainly on practical results.

There were a lot of efforts to ensure an infrastructure for distant education. Access to internet and digital platforms were provided all around the country. Many digital devices had been given for free to those who were in need through schools. But it was pity to realize that a lot of students who received tablets and laptops missed online classes.

Current study was carried out after two years of periodical school closures and blended education implementation as measures against Covid-19 pandemic. Study reveals some positive and some negative effects of online education during social isolation periods and the Covid-19 crisis.

In summary, the major general positive effects are as follows:

- Parents understood that they had to collaborate with the teachers and educators of their kids as they are also responsible for their children’s’ education. Definitely, online



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education forced parents to pay more attention to their children during the learning process, to support and to help them during studying which was not usual common practice. The imposed periods of obligatory home stay for the family increased communication between parents and kids and so parents became more involved in the learning process of their children. A positive outcome from school closures is that more teachers and more parents began to work together to provide and share learning strategies and practical experiences.

- The society begins to talk about the role and responsibility of parents for the success of pupils learning in general.
- Online teaching stimulates teachers to improve their knowledge and skills to use IT during lessons and to make it more attractive and understandable for the kids during teaching at class. Children learn that digital devices could be used not only for games but to help to find and understand different information including - learning lessons. Thus, the first steps for self-education were introduced to the pupils.
- Online teaching as a new tool could be used in the future by teachers to continue teaching pupils in critical situations that don't allow them to be at class.

It is worth to mention that all marked positive effects revealed by the study have to be further developed as they are at the very beginning. The return to normal educational practices and style of family life could cause all those to be quickly forgotten.

Analyzing the study results negative effects of online teaching are much more, they are more visible and worried. The results stressed on difficulties for both – teachers and parents to achieve the adequate and the “normal” level of education by online teaching under the pressure of the pandemic. There were significant gaps in academic knowledge identified, even worse was the development of transferable skills. Skills such as decision-making, comprehension, self-expressions, among others, have been negatively affected by school closures. Moreover, returning back to school pupils were distracted, bored and stressed with communication problems. **Both teachers and parents stated that online teaching is not acceptable for primary schools.**

In Bulgaria online teaching is a new approach and during Covid pandemic many teachers had to face it for the first time. The study revealed a spectre of difficulties that teachers had to overcome mainly by self-learning and participating in online seminars and short-term training courses organized by Ministry of Education and NGOs. Teachers were in a situation learning by doing. Common practice was in-school collaboration. There was a gap of knowledge and qualification for using IT in the process of adapting the lessons for online teaching. Totally new and unknown to the teachers was the process of providing active participation of pupils during online lessons,

organizing team work, etc. One of the most difficult elements of online teaching for teachers were the mechanisms for evaluation of achieved knowledge by the learners. Evaluation of skills development was almost impossible as they could not watch directly pupils' behaviour.

In general, teachers agreed that online education has great potential in the future but they have to be qualified for using IT. Nowadays, there is no readiness and attitude blended education to be implemented at schools.

The study revealed that out-of-school training entities paid more attention on development of transferable skills than public schools. Nowadays, in Bulgaria a lot of after school educational centers help pupils to prepare their homework. Additionally, working on the homework the educators of these centers teach children more practical knowledge by using different alternative methods and their focus is on personal development of the children. Very often some of these centers become more effective than schools, as the ways of teaching motivate in a better way the children to study, to engage in self-learning and to discover new facts and knowledge. Participation there is paid and not so many families could afford this additional training for their kids. Nevertheless, it is important public schools to share knowledge and to collaborate with such educators especially about methods of teaching.



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Annex 1.

Educational Entities in Bulgaria

1. Type of entity operating in the country

CHITALISHTE (TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY CULTURAL-EDUCATIONAL CENTER)

1. Entity Details	
Entity type	Non-profit-making public entities
Mission	The Chitalishte is traditional community center providing to the local community cultural, educational, informational and social services most of which are for free.
Sources of funding	Subsidized by the state budget through the municipal budgets depending on the number of paid staff. In addition, they are supported by the municipal budget for buildings reconstruction and renovation, organization of cultural events, mobility, etc. Some of the art schools, courses and classes they provide are paid by the learners. Members of their libraries pay a membership fee, the amount of which in most cases is symbolic (3 - 5 EUR per year). They receive donations and can apply for project funding as well.
Human resources	Each Chitalishte has paid staff - mainly its management team and librarians. Their number depends on the type and scale of the settlement in which they are located and the size of the community in which they work. (from 1 to 30 paid employees). For cultural and educational activities they use part-time local trainers - foreign language teachers, IT specialists, musicians, choreographers, conductors, etc. , the payment of which is formed by fees from the learners in the courses. Some of them organize nonformal civic training courses in cooperation with NGOs and use external moderators and experts.
Scope of activities	<p>The Chitalishte provides local services to the communities.</p> <p>Core Chitalishte activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chitalishte Public libraries and reading rooms: 3,300 Chitalishtes maintain public libraries and provide free access to them. Approximately 750,000 readers visit them every year. Over 15 million books are borrowed from the Chitalishte libraries annually by children and adults. • Amateur creative activities: Children's and adult choirs, amateur theatre



groups, folklore ensembles (singers and dancers), modern dance groups, creative workshops, clubs, art groups etc.

- Encouragement and development of **children's talents**: music and art schools, ballet, foreign language classes, literary clubs, fine arts clubs, etc.
- Participation in local, regional, national, and international **cultural events**: festivals, competitions and art exhibitions.
- Preservation of **national customs and traditions**: Children's and adult groups for authentic folklore, ethnographic museum collections, revival of old Bulgarian handicrafts, etc.
- **Publications**: literary collections of local talents, studies of the history and traditions of the local regions, etc.

Contemporary Chitalishte Activities:

- Introduction of the new informational technologies through the Chitalishte public libraries and establishment of Information and Training Centers: access to the Internet, training courses for computer literacy for children and adults, provision of information and consultations.

Collaboration with schools in the region for providing out of school and in school educational activities.

- Life-long learning: vocational training for adults.
 - Initiatives for social inclusion of minority and vulnerable groups.
 - Promotion of community involvement and local development.
-

2. Areas of training

Main areas	Art and culture, intangible cultural heritage, foreign languages, music, dances, theatre, ICT, summer school for children
Types of training	Regular hours (2 – 3 time per week) of the amateur groups, schools and classes; libraries are open every day;
Target groups	Children of all ages from the respective community incl. those in primary schools; professionals, trainers, adult amateurs, parents.

3. Specific characteristics

The Bulgarian Chitalishte is traditional, community-based, cultural-educational, non-profit organizations with a ubiquitous presence in the country. The first Chitalishta appeared in the 1850s as organized and funded by the community "reading houses" reflecting its dream for better literacy and education of young people as a bridge beyond the isolation and "window" to the outside world. Gradually the Chitalishta developed as independent community centers all over the country stimulating for decades the local creativity and energy in the area of culture and education.

Currently there are 3,450 Chitalishte institutions registered as local legal entities. Geographically they are proliferated throughout the country - almost in each Bulgarian town and village. Each community center has a large building with an auditorium, educational and rehearsal rooms. There is a Law of Peoples Chitalishte regulating its functions including its educational function. The Ministry of Culture is

responsible for the Chitalishte sector.

Today the Chitalishte is the structure (outside the school educational system), which is associated with an informal alternative environment for learning and acquiring certain skills and competencies for children and adults.

Informal learning and education for children and young people in the Chitalishte is a resource for improving language skills of native and foreign language ability to comprehend different content, build an environment for communication and socialization, independence, initiative and autonomy, develop their creativity and skills of cultural expression, digital, motion and general culture.

YOUTH CULTURAL CENTERS/ MUNICIPAL CHILDREN'S CENTER/ MUNICIPAL YOUTH HOME

1. Entity Details

Entity type	Non-profit-making public entities
Mission	Cultural-information and creative environment for young people, a place of entertainment and leisure time.
Sources of funding	State budget/ municipal budget; fees clubs and courses
Human resources	Paid staff - management team and some of the teachers. For some activities local trainers are invited as part-time employers
Scope of activities	<p>Core Youth Center activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amateur creative activities: Children's choirs, amateur theatre groups, folklore ensembles (singers and dancers), modern dance groups - sport dances, hip-hop, white dance; creative workshops and schools – fine and applied arts; language schools, theatre; admissions preparation, sports; • Encouragement and development of children's talents: music and art schools, ballet, fine arts clubs, sports, photo and movie clubs, etc. • Participation in local, regional, national, and international cultural events: festivals, competitions and art exhibitions; • Providing concerts, theatre performances;

2. Areas of training

Main areas	Art and culture, intangible cultural heritage, foreign languages, music, dances, theatre, etc.
Types of training	Regular hours (2 – 3 time per week) of the amateur groups, clubs and classes; one-time cultural events;
Target groups	Children of all ages incl. those in primary schools; professionals, trainers, adult amateurs, parents.

3. Specific characteristics

The Youth Cultural Centers/ Houses are located in big regional or municipal centers in Bulgaria. They have buildings with auditoriums, rehearsal or training halls. They are established during the socialist time and in many ways duplicate the Chitalishte functionality.

CHILDREN EDUCATIONAL CENTERS

1. Entity Details

Entity type	Private for profit entities
Mission	They define themselves as places for personal growth, mental, emotional and physical development. Places where children learn with interest, dream, strive, create and have fun.
Sources of funding	Private – fees; donations;
Human resources	Paid staff - management team; teachers – full time job, teachers working at schools but hired under a second contract, retired. For some art activities they use part-time local trainers.
Scope of activities	<p>Core Children Educational Centers activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extracurricular preparation for the learning process: determining the level of school readiness before and after completing the course; <i>developing intellectual skills</i> - mathematical and linguistic knowledge, logical thinking, imagination, visual and auditory memory, attention and concentration; fine motor skills - visual-motor coordination; <i>developing social skills</i> - free communication with children and teachers, communication with empathy, cooperation during learning and play, following the rules, ability to control behavior in different situations; <i>developing personal qualities</i> - emotional intelligence, motivation to learn, Ability to work in team. • Art studios: Through art, children experience themselves as creators and discoverers; have better self-esteem; they learn to trust their own strength, to use both their knowledge and their intuition. • Art therapy; • Theater of emotions: Through the methods of psychodrama, art therapy, theater and non-violent communication, children discover "Who am I?" And "What is my relationship with others?"; they develop their emotional intelligence; • Foreign language studios: through stories, songs, games and tales • Summer schools: variety of creative forms of communication and development forms, incl. excursions, visits of museums, cooking, sport events. Etc. • Services to the parents: Psychological counseling and therapy for children



and parents; Speech therapy diagnostics, counseling and therapy; Psychological diagnosis (dyspepsia); *

- *The activities listed above are not regular for all Children educational centers in Bulgaria. These are selected from the most advanced and popular centers in Sofia.*

2. Areas of training

Main areas	Extracurricular learning; Arts; foreign languages, sports, theatre, etc.
Types of training	Everyday classes; weekend events for some of the activities ;
Target groups	Children from primary schools (age 6 – 10) or junior high school class (age 10 - 14) ; teachers, trainers, psychologists; parents.

3. Specific characteristics

The Children Educational Centers are located mainly in the big cities in Bulgaria.

They are located near to the school buildings in the districts, using their own or rented premises. Services out of the extracurricular preparation for the learning process are paid separately. The management is flexible and can provide additional services at the request of the parents (e.g. swimming courses). During the pandemic, all children's education centers stopped working. I have no information whether the state has compensated them for the financial losses. Many of them have actually gone bankrupt.

NGOS/ PARENTS BOARD OF SCHOOLS INCL.)

1. Entity Details

Entity type	Non-profit-making private entities
Mission	<p>Every NGO has specific mission but among those dealing with children are: to support child development; early child development; to support schools in making inclusive environment for all children; supporting children and young people in the process of learning; to work together with schools, parents and teachers who consciously support children to build their social and emotional skills; advocacy campaigns for policies guaranteeing the rights of children and improvement the well being of Bulgarian families and children;</p> <p>The Parents Boards School: Independent voluntary associations, mainly of parents, to support the development and facilities of schools, kindergartens and out-of-school pedagogical institutions (centers for work with children, municipal children's complexes, the centers for student technical and scientific creativity, others</p>

Sources of funding	Donations/ Project funding
Human resources	Paid staff - management team; Professionals: teachers and resource teachers, psychologists, social service providers, medical specialists, art therapists, mediators; Volunteers, members, etc.
Scope of activities	<p>Core activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in a partnership with schools, parents and teachers in the interest of children’s wellbeing; • Provide opportunities and environment for better child development; • Development of role models for building children qualities such as teamwork, patience, confidence, persistence and analytical thinking, all of those not being part of the school curriculum. • Provide training programs aimed at teaching professionals, parents or children and young people; • Provide school mediation to resolve conflicts; • Organize campaigns, advocacy, public events, debates, etc. • Variety of other activities in support of child development;

2. Areas of training

Main areas	Training for teachers, parents, specialists, children and youth; , consultations, advocacy, research, provision of services, methodologies, innovations and approbations, protection of child rights, mediation, social inclusion, etc.
Types of training	Depends on the type of activities;
Target groups	Children of all ages (age 0 – 18)incl. those in primary schools; professionals, trainers, parents, school managers, public administration, etc..

3. Specific characteristics

A small number of NGOs have their own building or premises. Most of them use rented premises, which makes their activity more expensive. Most of the services are free of charge for end users, as they rely on project funding. There are paid services such as consultations, training and expertise. Most of the activities have higher quality than the ones being provided in schools as they select the professionals to work with.

EXTRACURRICULAR PRIVATE SCHOOLS (ARTS, LANGUAGE TRAINING, SPORTS)

1. Entity Details	
Entity type	Private entities for profit
Mission	To upgrade the skills, knowledge and talent of children in a specific area that is not taught in school: music, language, sports, fine arts, theater, etc.
Sources of funding	Fees for paid services.
Human resources	Paid staff - management team; Teachers and professionals in the fields.
Scope of activities	<p>Core activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of regular classes in music (various musical instruments, pop, jazz, folk singing) • Foreign languages (foreign language alliance); • Variety of sports: football, basketball, tennis, etc. • Private theatre schools; • Fine and applied arts; • Dance schools: folk dances, sport dances, latino, etc.

2. Areas of training	
Main areas	Training of children in a specific area.
Types of training	Weekly activities (once or twice a week) during the school year or summer vacations; provision of access to the facilities: stages, courts, swimming pools, etc.
Target groups	Children of all ages (age 6 – 18)incl. those in primary schools; professionals, trainers, parents.

3. Specific characteristics

Sometimes the services provided in the private schools are more expensive than the once provided in the state, municipal entities or chitalishte, but usually the quality of the services is higher. T

EXTRACURRICULAR-OUT-OF-CLASS

1. Entity Details

Entity type	Public extracurricular activities organized by school
Mission	To upgrade the skills, knowledge and talent of children in the school, but not as a part of the curricular. These activities are not obligatory and are attended only by those interested. At same time all activities somehow upgrade the academic knowledge and skills of the curricular at the concrete public school. Usually these activities take part during the weekends and holidays
Sources of funding	semi-public funding as Fees for paid services are covered by children families, project findings
Human resources	School staff is involved in organization and management as well as providing the planned activities.
Scope of activities	<p>Core activities:</p> <p>There are many opportunities for lessons outside the school curriculum. These can be both activities in academic subjects (elective courses, quizzes, group activities, Olympiads, meetings of scientific societies, conferences, competitions, etc.) and educational events (trips to museums and places of interest, visits to theaters, creative activities, guiding circles, preparing concerts, staging performances, holding craft fairs and other collective creative work).</p>

2. Areas of training

Main areas	Activities cover a large area. Ex. During the school year there could be around 20-25 different subjects organized in clubs , courses, studios, etc.
Types of training	Types of training: <u>it is not classical lessons, different pedagogical methods are used like: spot visiting (cultural events, natural places), learning by doing, team working, etc.</u>
Target groups	Usually in average 60-70% of all pupils un the school are participating in out of class activities

3. Specific characteristics

Usually most of the activities are in close relation of academic curricular, preparation for participation in national educational events like national competitions in mathematics, foreign languages, etc., The variation of these activities depend of the motivation and entrepreneurial attitudes of the director and teachers of the school and support by school's PARENTS BOARD.



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