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The Importance of Digital Skills in Education in the COVID-19 Era

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental right and we have to make sure we hold on to it despite any crisis and beyond. Just like in all the world, Kosovo has been affected by the pandemic COVID -19 in March 2020. The pandemic situation has changed how things function and it looks like this is going to be a new normal. As a result of it, all industries including the educational institutions, those private and public, had to reimagine how to switch into online performance and computer-based learning. Online learning has served as a lever to continue with education in an online platform and teachers worked hard to expect growth and productivity in every student. It is worth mentioning that since Kosovo became an independent country, we have never witnessed the educational disruption on this scale. We cannot predict exactly what the future information society will look like but at this time due to COVID -19 the world has experienced a new way of living and together with it we are witnessing the importance of having digital skills as a revolution which is impacting every industry but also in a dramatic way, in the field of education. How the education continued during the pandemic of COVID - 19, in Kosovo has raised different voices in education development during the second semester of the academic year 2019/2020. This paper will discuss the problems and challenges of teaching and learning during the pandemic time, the importance of digital skill and digitalization as a backup plan, and as a solution, so the education must not freeze in time as this.

Keywords: digital skills, digitalization, education, modernization, learning, teaching,

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right and we have to make sure we hold on to it despite any crisis and beyond. . Just like in all the world, Kosovo has been affected by the pandemic COVID -19 in March 2020.

The Pandemic COVID - 19 in our country has found us unprepared in many fields including education.

Therefore, as of this fact, we see that the development of the digital stage still remains a working process, which itself is giving teachers and students hard time while trying to cope with teaching and learning through computer-based, especially in our country.

Some of the problems that seriously are preventing the modernization of education are the lack of digital skills, digitalization of educational resources, and the teachers' training for digital skills in whole Kosovo.

As a result, we are facing a discrepancy between need and readiness.

Digital literacy refers to the use of desktops, mobile devices, the Internet, software applications, and other types of digital technology to learn and apply an online performance. Commitment to digital skills in education helps teachers, parents and students to interact not only in the classroom but also at a distance.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the educational systems around the world, expelling students and teachers from their schools in some form, and we know that Kosovo faced a similar challenge during the 1990s, when the Serbian regime of that time, demanded the closure of the Albanian school. As of this fact, teaching in the Albanian language was organized in private buildings and mosques. This was a unique example of civic mobilization to keep the education system alive in times of conflict and war but in last two decades last after liberation, no disruption of the education system at this level is remembered. But knowing that education is as important as the light, air and the water we need at all times, all educational institutions at this time have been mobilized for an adequate platform for the realization of online learning in various forms. With a mobilization from the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), the registered e-learning for grades 1-9 started to appear on RTK and Youtube and teachers also started to organize classes by holding different platforms. Also at the university level the teaching started to be organized through moodle platform, google classroom, google meet, zoom etc. According to statistics, it reflects that public primary and secondary schools have had significant difficulties, for various reasons, but one of the difficulties was the lack of digital skills, internet, then the lack of digitalization and as a result the applications of viber, facebook and what's up have been used to send or receive teaching units, assignments and so on.

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2020. The Pandemic COVID - 19 in our country has found us unprepared in many fields including education. Therefore, as of this fact, we see that the development of the digital stage still remains a working process, which itself is giving teachers and students hard time while trying to cope with teaching and learning through computer-based, especially in our country.

Some of the problems that seriously are preventing the modernization of education are the lack of digital skills, digitalization of educational resources, and the teachers' training for digital skills in whole Kosovo.

What prompted me to do this paper is that, as a result, we are facing a discrepancy between need and readiness and we have to fix that.

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At this time, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kosovo, begin to mobilize the system to adapt an adequate platform for the realization of online learning in various forms. Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI), recorded e-learning for grades 1-9 and they we synchronized on RTK, and Youtube and at the same time, teachers also started to organize classes by on different platforms. At the university level, the teaching started to be organized through the Moodle platform, google classroom, google meet, zoom, etc. According to statistics, it reflects that public primary and secondary schools have had significant difficulties, for various reasons, but one of the difficulties was the lack of digital skills, internet, then the lack of digitalization and as a result the applications of Viber, Facebook and what's up have been used to send or receive teaching units, assignments and so on but this has cause lots of difficulties for students and teachers to follow up with feedback.

Literature Review

As we are aware, digital skills have recently played an important role as we were obliged to access any possible platform to deliver learning so that children do not lag behind in learning.

I see the importance of digital skills as a persistent step because being with digital skills you can be a great digital citizen which can help us or it can be a good opportunity, not only to get through the crisis but also to face the challenges of the time, not only in education but in whatever other industry.

This study provides a study research literature about the importance of digital skills in learning and teaching to increase the ambition of its importance and find our country more prepared in time such as this with the pandemic of Covid-19.

Teachers' Professional development is of great importance and an essential tool as it can increase the quality of teaching and learning in a sustainable way and at the same time increase the effectiveness of education and ability of students. Digitization is a process of switching information from the typical form into a computerized form. The importance of knowing digitalization is more than just a teaching tool; it is a way to prepare students/technology users for a society full of technology, it helps educators and parents to understand how students can use technology appropriately. The pandemic of Covid 19, has struck the world in every corner and in every industry include here the education and as a result, children who should be in school weren't able to go and our schools found unprepared with lack of the resources to provide adequate instruction so the school can continue from home.

Jenny Arledge quoted that "Technology can become the 'wings' that will allow the educational world to fly farther and faster than ever before; if we will allow it." This should serve us as something of its importance in time as this.

Schools are key surroundings in which children acquire the fundamental skills and competences to cross throughout the adult world. More than ever in the last four months with the alert of Covid 19 Pandemic, we have seen a major urgency in the importance of knowing digital skills and communication technologies. There is no doubt that as of Covid 19, we must consider for our schools must have the digital learning platforms available so the schools do not shut down.

The literature review will lead us to a statement that can help us bring about a successful implementation of digital learning and teaching. According to the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD 2015), approximately 60% of teachers, state that they have moderate or great development needs in ICT for teaching.

All teachers need to be trained to not only use the computer for creating documents, saving, and sending but also to experiment with technology and exploit digital tools and resources for teaching. For example, network with other teachers and schools. This will help teachers be less anxious about digital teaching, more confident and capable, and the teaching will have more effective implementation.

According to Jean Underwood (Underwood, 2009), Professor of Psychology at Nottingham Trent University "Digital learning increased learners' interest in learning and practising digital skills and the time they spent on non-formal learning"

Becta review the literature of 2007 on the "The impact of digital technologies on learning" and found that digital learning overcome disadvantages and disaffection and the integrated use of technology enables a range of positive outcomes for children and young people. (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency, 2009)

According to O'Malley, "Attaining digital skills can help every child despite their learning difficulties as it provides learning at their pace" (O'Malley, et al., 2013)

Peltenberg (2009), found that students were better able to see their mistakes and to better understand what went wrong. (Peltenburg. M.P., 2009).

Devlin explains how virtual interactive lessons can be used to enable a small group of students develop their team work and negotiation skills.

So, according to these studies we see that the importance of digitalization skills is not just to the importance of teachers' to use the equipment and tools but also to their understanding of how they can be used to respond to learners' needs in both learning, homework assignment and non - textbook resource learning example through videos, or short readings.

Methodology

Today, we live in a time where technology is changing rapidly. However, we see that technology has brought not only new experiences but a whole new dimension to our daily lives by integrating us into a world we know as "connected to the internet". Of course, adults are also integrated into the internet but not everyone is as ready as children perhaps because adults are not native digitals like children, who belong to this era in the world. And perhaps this is a task of every parent and institution to prepare children not only for the physical world, but to develop in them digital skills so that they can be adopted into online learning as the era of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought together a new normal way of living and working.

This study is conducted through an online survey. The instruments for this study are ten teachers of Bachelor and Master Degree, who have used online platforms during pandemic school period and 100 students of grade 7 and 8 who voluntarily were able to be part of this online survey.

Both surveys, the teachers and students' ones were conducted through an online questionnaire

Results

From the student perspective, we conducted the questionnaire identified as the importance of gaining digital skills as a good way to move forward even when we had to remain isolated and have to stay inside in our homes as a result of any pandemic. The questionnaire brought the following benefits as most important:

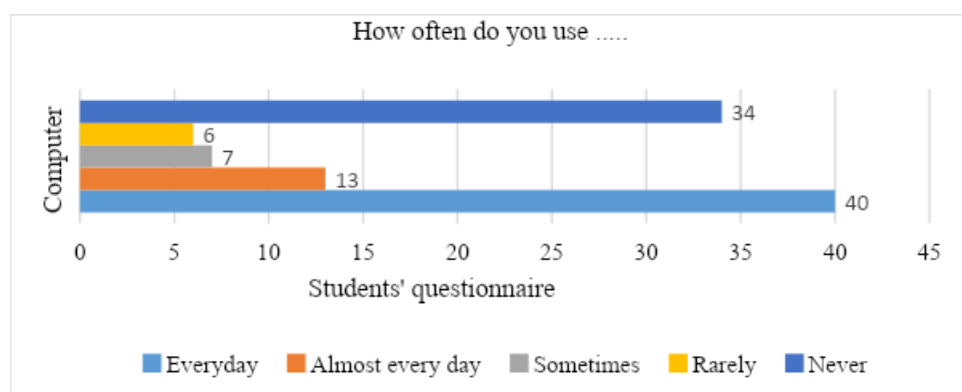


Fig. 1. How often do you use a computer?

Out of 100 students 40 students use computer every-day and 13 of them claim they use almost every-day, while 7 declare they sometimes use it, 6 out of 100 claim they rarely use it and 34 out 100 claim they never use it. As 34 children declare they never use it, it seems like they don't have a computer at home or it could be as they have lack of skills and as technology holds a lot of promise, it is hard to implement digital skills properly if you don't have you own personal computer or a tablet.

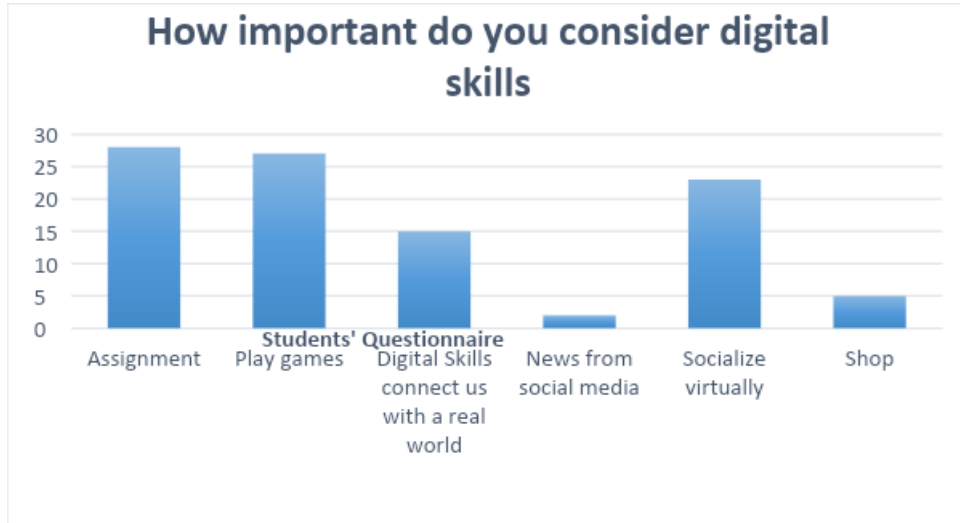


Fig. 2. How important do you consider digital skills

On this questions, students response was basically focused on the importance of digital skills as they can use those skills to complete their school assignments, play games, they can read news from media, socialize virtually and shop and 15 of they claim that digital skills connect them with a real world.

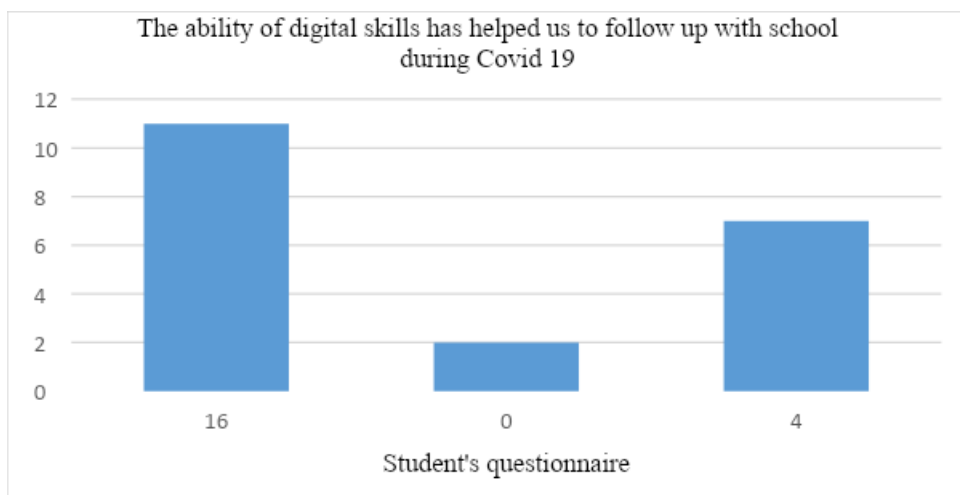


Fig. 3. The ability of digital skills has helped us to follow up with school during Covid 19

The pandemic time with Covid-19 has challenged education system in Kosovo just as everywhere around the world and in addition to it, the lack of experience in

managing online school has been overwhelming for teachers and also students as well.

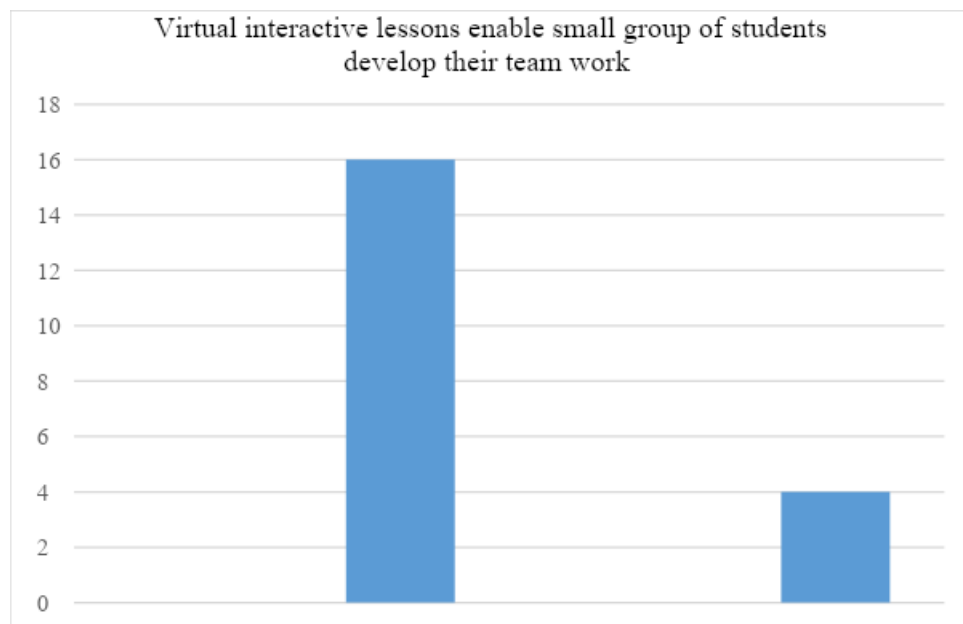


Fig 5. Virtual interactive lesson enable small group of students develop their team work

Kosovo education especially in primary and secondary school has faced different challenges during pandemic to continue with school. According to some teachers' questionnaire, lots of teachers didn't have developed computer skills to switch to online teaching, and as far as how effective was online teaching, 16 out of twenty claim that virtual interactive lesson enable small group of students develop their team work and study better instead of more than 10 students in the class.

Discussion

In addition, besides students with the realization of the lesson, there are obviously problems with the teachers. The reasons have been various but even if it wasn't a pandemic situation at all, we must think that the 21st Century Teacher cannot be considered as a complete teacher without skills and knowledge of the use of technology, at least fluent basic skills.

Based on the research conducted online, we have received results that one of the difficulties that have arisen during the development of online learning have been the lack of digital skills, especially by a considerable number of teachers, while the son or daughter, the grandson or a granddaughter had to intervene in writing the report, lesson plans, monitoring assignments.

Given this fact and this experience, we are aware that of course these difficulties have arisen as a result of what we as a society have allowed in "good times" to have teachers who do not have digital skills. I think that maybe in the near future should be part of the entrance exam, the realization of an online lesson, where each teacher performs all other administrative work independently, always keeping the student at the center. This will push them to develop digital skills, study and research for a more sophisticated format for realizing the online lesson as interactive and motivating for the student.

Conclusion

As of these days, more than ever, technology use has become essential part of education due to pandemic situation teachers are trying to use it to provide remote instruction. The development of digital skills enables teachers and students to develop effective self-directed learning skills. The difference is that in the classroom they are led by a subject book, while they are self- directed they can reach a wider horizon of what is required by researching online. So when they master digital skills they will be able to identify what they need to learn, find and use online resources, apply the information on the required field and even learn to evaluate the results. This affects work efficiency and productivity. Now, in addition to engaging the learner more, digital skills sharpen critical thinking skills, which serve to encourage young people to develop their online skills, engage more and be more creative, and more successful in any field.

Commitment to digital skills helps teachers and students interact not only in the classroom but also in a distance because they help us work as a team and improve work efficiency.

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