



## A SURVEY OF TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE RECEPTION ABILITY OF YOUNGER STUDENTS AFTER EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING DURING COVID-19

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**Abstract/Izvleček** Emergency remote teaching presented many new and unknown situations. Many studies have examined the impact of distance education on children's learning outcomes, including in the area of first language, particularly in reading and writing skills, and reading literacy. This research examines the area of literature teaching, more specifically the effects of the change in teaching on younger students' reception ability. One hundred and ninety-six teachers participated in the quantitative, explorative study. Responses indicate that there are moderate and major differences in the receptive skills of elementary students in the first through third grades, compared to students taught prior to the pandemic.

### Perspektive učiteljev o recepcijski zmožnosti mlajših učencev po poučevanju na daljavo v izrednih razmerah pandemije COVID-19

**Ključne besede:**  
pandemija, poučevanje  
na daljavo v izrednih  
razmerah, pouk  
književnosti, recepcijska  
zmožnost, razlike med  
generacijami

Poučevanje na daljavo v izrednih razmerah pandemije COVID-19 je prineslo veliko novega in neznanega. Veliko raziskav je bilo posvečenih vplivu šolanja na daljavo na učne rezultate otrok, tudi na področju materinščine, še posebej opismenjevanju in pismenosti. Ta raziskava pa preiskuje področje poučevanja književnosti, natančneje učinek spremenjenega načina dela na recepcijsko zmožnost mlajših učencev. V preiskovalni študiji kvantitativne narave je sodelovalo 196 učiteljev. Njihovi odgovori kažejo, da med učenci prvega vzgojno-izobraževalnega obdobja prihaja do srednjih in večjih razlik na področju recepcijske zmožnosti v primerjavi z učenci, ki so se šolali pred pandemijo.

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## Introduction

The founder of reception aesthetics, H. R. Jauss (1998), said that the meaning of a literary text emerges anew in every reading, as a product of the interaction between the text and the reader's reception, which means that the meaning of a literary work is dynamic and changeable, the formation of the meaning of the text is influenced by social and psychological factors, and by the process of acceptance of the literature by the reader. The reception ability of children differs from the reception ability of adults. Youth literary didactics is even more complex. It is built on three foundations: the science of the young reader, the science of the literary work in literary theory and literary history, and the knowledge of what happens when the reader and the literary text meet, which we call the reception aesthetics (Kordigel, 1999).

The communication model of literary didactics has been defined by M. Kordigel Aberšek (2008). In the first phase, the teacher prepares appropriate didactic steps to optimize his students' reception. He must sensitize the children to the reception of the selected literary text and prepare appropriate horizons of expectation for students. He must decide which part of the reception ability he wants to develop during interpretation, which initially overlooked signals he wants to draw to the children's attention, and which method he wants to use to check the newly acquired part of the reception ability and to deepen the literary-aesthetic experience. Such literature teaching must be based on multidirectional communication between the teacher and the students, and it is especially important that the students communicate with each other, because this is how individual contexts are opened and discovered. In the second phase, the students, previously motivated and sensitized by the teacher, experience the text provided by the teacher, each student shaping his or her individual context. Then, the teacher helps children to detect the perhaps overlooked textual signals to actualize the meaning of the text. In the third phase, the student and his imaginary world communicate with each other, while the teacher's role is to encourage the child's activity and creativity by providing imaginary input.

In this way, the teacher develops structural elements of receptive ability in all students, but in each student individually: perseverance, searching for and recognizing the relevance of the problem to one's own life situation, the ability to identify with a literary person, the ability to (co-)create an imaginative (eidetic) representation of literary setting, literary characters and literary events, the ability to

perceive, understand and evaluate literary events, the ability to recognize the context of individual motifs, the ability to separate author from narrator, the ability to separate reality from fiction, understanding of metaphorical and symbolic expressions, literary knowledge and literary-theoretical knowledge (Kordigel Aberšek, 2008).

Everything is clear and defined, up to the phenomenon of distance learning related to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a system in which teacher and student are geographically and technologically separated, and it was familiar and globally widespread even before the pandemic (Rogers, 2009). Even online teaching and learning are not new. In the United States alone, more than 250,000 individuals were educated through online courses (Picciano and Seaman, 2009) in 2008. However, this time the concept was different (Hodges et al., 2020). Schools, teachers, students and parents were barely prepared or even unprepared to adapt to e-teaching and e-learning. The new paradigm has grossly interfered with known, well-established, and proven ways of providing education, ways that changed overnight, with no preparation, or teacher education, and with insufficient technology available. E-learning involves several problems that influence how and how much a student will learn, including technology and internet access, absence of an e-curriculum, motivation for e-learning, lack of confidence in the use of e-learning technology, and teachers' attitudes towards online learning (Pestano Perez et. al, 2020). The youngest students were particularly affected by the shift from analogue to digital, since their digital literacy competence, especially in digital learning environments, was limited (Legvart, Kordigel Aberšek and Kerneža, 2021).

Adaptations (e. g. Pryor et. al, 2020), increasing inequality among students (e. g., Gunzenhauser and Saalbach, 2021; Meier Jæger and Hoppe Blaabæk, 2020), learning loss (e. g., Engzell, Frey and Vergahen, 2021; Kuhfeld et al., 2020) and adverse effects on the mental health of children and young people (e. g., Vaillancourt et. al., 2021) have been reported in numerous studies from all over the world. Nevertheless, the effects of the e-distance learning into which we have been forced are not all negative. Several studies show that the pandemic provided an opportunity to restart and reinvent schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Internet access became more accessible, personalized learning is now the norm, the way student and school progress is measured is being remade, teachers direct their learning through networks and in collaboration with a wider range of partners, educators collaborate with other professionals to face the innovations they seek, and new technologies are

introduced and/or integrated into the system (Magomedov, Khaliev and Khubolov, 2020).

When we looked for research examining the impact of emergency remote teaching on literature class in primary schools and on the reception ability of younger readers, we found no papers covering this area. Two studies had been conducted in field of literature teaching, but in a university setting. Pečenković and Pašič Kodrić (2021) talk about the challenges of teaching children literature online among students at the Faculty of Education. They point out the lack of technical equipment, lack of interesting internet content in all classes, especially in the context of syncretism and literature, difficulty accepting books in PDF format, and the lack of books in e-form. Muzaki (2021) highlights new ways of implementing and assessing learning outcomes in the university setting, a place that will have to adjust to new ways of teaching in the field of curriculum development, methodology and teaching; above all Muzaki emphasizes the need for learning management to produce digitally equipped teachers and learners.

When we examined the impact of emergency remote teaching on students' literacy skills in the first three grades of primary school, teachers reported differences between the COVID and pre-COVID generations. One-tenth of teachers reported no generational differences, less than one- fifth reported minor differences, one-third reported moderate differences, and slightly more than a quarter reported major generational differences in individual areas of learning (Kerneža, 2021). In addition, many problems were reported in teaching literature, especially in school interpretation and students' reception ability.

The situation in literature teaching is extremely complex, especially when we talk about the didactics of youth literature, written for a young reader who is not yet able to perceive and accept textual realities in terms of the author's message. It is defined by a particular type of literary text, a reader who has not yet completed his personal development, and a reception situation based on a reader who has not yet mastered reading technique to the point of receiving and understanding the text in all its dimensions (Kordigel Aberšek, 2008).

Teachers mainly reported problems related to the planning and implementation of literature classes as defined in the Slovenian language curriculum (Poznanovič Jezeršek et al., 2018).

In exploring the field of reception ability of younger students after emergency remote teaching related to the COVID-19 school closure, we focused on the part of the curriculum that provides teachers with didactic recommendations for achieving goals in the field of literature, since these summarize students' receptive skills.

### *The present study*

We were interested in the differences between the pre-COVID and COVID generations in the process of school interpretation, within which students are supposed to *observe individual elements of the text to create a response to the literary text*. They should *compare the results of reading the literary text, present them, and exemplify them with reference to the literary text*. Students should *form oral texts and towards the end of the educational period* (in line with their ability to write), they should also *form written texts after reading literature*. The reception ability should also be developed by *creating/ (re-)creating after reading the literary text*. According to the communication model of literature, the students remain at the centre of school reading, and the teacher encourages students to *overlap the semantic field of the literary text, and the student's horizon of expectations stemming from his extraliterary and intertextual experience*.

We were interested in any differences between the COVID and pre-COVID generations as reported by teachers. We made a general hypothesis that there would be differences in reception ability in younger students after emergency remote teaching because of COVID-19, compared to the generation before the pandemic, which was educated in a school environment under "normal" conditions. The research question that will help us to confirm or reject the hypothesis is as follows: Do teachers of younger students notice differences in the COVID and pre-COVID generations in reception ability after emergency remote teaching?

### **Method**

We designed exploratory research (Stebbins, 2011). The study was an investigation of a new phenomenon, emergency remote teaching, that emerged during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. At the end of the 2020/2021 school year, when distance learning had lasted 11 weeks (in addition to 6 weeks in the previous school year, plus one week of extra school holidays), teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire that

provided us with a large and representative sample. The collected data were processed with the statistical program SPSS and analysed in the form of descriptive statistics. The findings were verified and confirmed by a Chi-square test.

### *Participants*

The link to the online questionnaire, with a request to send it to first, second and third grade teachers, was sent to 456 Slovenian elementary schools included in the Register of Educational Institutions and educational programs published on the website of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Slovenia. It was also shared in larger teacher groups on social media. The simple random sample comprises 196 elementary school teachers teaching in first (6–7-year-old students), second (7–6-year-old students) or third (7–8-year-old students) grade. Ninety-eight teachers teach in first grade (50.0%), 55 teachers in second grade (28.1%) and 43 teachers in third grade (21.9%). The share of teachers in the first grade is greater, as there are two teachers collaborating in each class at the same time.

### *Instruments*

In the first part of the questionnaire, we were interested in what class the teacher was teaching. In the second part, we asked the teachers about the differences between the COVID and pre-COVID generations in terms of their skills in literature class. On a scale of 1 to 4, teachers rated the differences between generations (1 – I do not notice differences between generations; 2 – I notice minor differences between generations; 3 – I notice moderate differences between generations; and 4 – I notice major differences between generations). If they were unable to assess the differences, they chose the response indicating that they could not assess these skills. Student competences in the field of literature reported by teachers are based on the Slovenian language curriculum:

- observing individual elements of the text to create a response to the literature text,
- comparing the results of reading a literary text, presenting them, and exemplifying them with reference to the literary text,
- forming oral and/or written texts after reading literature,
- creating/(re-)creating after reading a literary text,

- overlapping of the semantic field of the literary text and the student's horizon of expectations, stemming from his extraliterary and intertextual experience.

In the third part of the questionnaire, we asked teachers an open-ended question, about whether they noticed any other changes between COVID and pre-COVID generations.

The questionnaire was tested on a sample of nine teachers. The validity, reliability, and objectivity of the questionnaire were ensured.

## Results

The results presented in Table 1 show that most teachers found moderate differences in reception ability between COVID and pre-COVID generations.

Table 1: Frequency (f) and structural percentage (f%) of teacher-reported differences in reception ability between COVID and pre-COVID generations.

	No differences		Minor differences		Moderate differences		Major differences		Unable to assess		Total	
	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%
Observe to create a response	39	19.9	54	27.4	60	30.6	31	15.8	12	6.3	196	100.0
Compare, present, exemplify	29	14.8	53	27.0	60	30.6	34	17.3	20	10.3	196	100.0
Oral/written text	14	7.1	43	21.8	54	27.4	69	35.2	16	8.5	196	100.0
Create/recreate	30	15.3	45	23.0	51	26.0	54	27.4	16	8.5	196	100.0
Semantic horizon	24	12.2	44	22.4	49	25.0	44	22.4	35	18.0	196	100.0

**Notes:** *Observe to create a response:* observing individual elements of the text to create a response to the literary text; *Compare, present, exemplify:* comparing the results of reading a literary text, presenting them, and exemplifying them with reference to the literary text; *Oral/written text:* forming oral and/or written texts after reading literature; *Create/recreate:* creating/(re-)creating after reading a literary text; *Semantic horizon:* overlapping of the semantic field of a literary text, and the student's horizon of expectations stemming from his extraliterary and intertextual experience.

When we talk about *observing individual elements of the text to create a response to the literary text*, most teachers note moderate differences between generations, followed by those who note minor differences.

One-fifth of teachers note no differences between generations. The results of the Chi-square test show that there are statistically significant differences between the answers ( $\chi^2 = 81.898$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). More than half the teachers note moderate and minor differences between generations when students *compare the results of reading a literary text, presenting them, and exemplifying them with reference to the literary text*. Just under a tenth of teachers notice major differences between generations, and fewer notice no differences between generations. There are statistically significant differences in teachers' assessments ( $\chi^2 = 70.449$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The ability where teachers notice the greatest differences between generations, which is confirmed by the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 107.061$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), is *forming oral and/or written texts after reading literature*. Major and moderate differences are noted by three-fifths of participating teachers, one-fourth of teachers note minor differences, and less than one-tenth of teachers note no differences. *Creating/recreating after reading a literary text* is an area where most teachers note major and moderate differences between generations, slightly fewer teachers report minor differences, and three-fifths of respondents note no differences between generations; the differences are statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 67.878$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Most teachers note moderate intergenerational differences in the *overlap of the semantic field of the literary text, and the student's horizon of expectations, stemming from his extraliterary and intertextual experience*, while only a few teachers note major or minor intergenerational differences. A statistically significant difference in the results is confirmed by the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 43.571$ ,  $p = 0.000$ )

If we look at the results in terms of differences observed by teachers and not in terms of literary skills, we observe that teachers' responses range from 12 to 19 percent, and the ability to create oral and written texts stands out, with only seven percent of respondents noticing no differences. There are no major discrepancies in reporting of minor differences between generations, as the percentages range from 21 to 27. The same applies to moderate differences between generations, reported by 26 to 21 teachers within different abilities. A larger range is noted when it comes to major differences between generations, which is almost 20 percent.

We asked teachers to report other observations related to differences between COVID and pre-COVID generations (Table 2).



Table 2: Frequency (f) and structural percentage (f%) of teacher-reported other observations in relation to differences between generations.

<b>Development area</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>f%</b>
Social emotional	8	4.1
Cognitive	14	7.1
Communication	5	2.6
All areas	7	3.6
Other – in general*	10	5.1
Other – literature class**	14	7.1
No answer	138	70.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Fifty-eight teachers answered our question about other problems they face and observe during their work with the COVID generation. Most reported things that indirectly affect their work in the literature classroom. Teachers reported cognitive problems related to problem solving, learning skills, abstract thinking, and creativity. Slightly fewer teachers reported impairments in the areas of socio-emotional development (e. g., interaction, sense of community, self-confidence, cooperation, etc.), all areas of child development in general, and communication (e. g., working in groups, greater need for communication, attention, listening, etc.). Teachers also report other general problems\*: low parental criteria, the generally detrimental effect of technology on children; the probability that differences will become apparent in the coming years, and the reality that students had been negatively rated before the pandemic. We were particularly interested in observations dealing directly with literary texts\*\*. Teachers reported various aspects of parental influence: instead of reading fairy tales and books, parents give their children a tablet or smartphone; parents care more about developing reading techniques, less about interpreting texts; shared reading is becoming less important, with fewer children participating and completing the Reading Badge. There are also problems with the students' concentration while listening to the teachers' narration and reading: It is difficult for them to listen to the fairy tale until the end, nor do they know what the story is about; the students are restless and cannot remain quiet and still to listen to the full story; the children are absent-minded while listening to the fairy tale. Children show a lack of imagination, which could be a result of the stated lack of general knowledge and exposure to art and literature; they have no ideas for dramatizing the text. The teacher's observation that students do not read enough could be related to another teacher's statement that students have modest vocabularies.

Teachers also report that children's ability to formulate oral and written text deteriorates from generation to generation and that the pandemic has deepened the differences; some differences are complex and difficult to attribute to the pandemic alone.

## **Discussion**

What should literature teaching look like? Why is teaching literature not the same as teaching other subjects, and why it should not be compared to teaching other educational fields? M. Kordigel Aberšek (2008) writes about this in the scholarly monography *Didactics of Youth Literature*.

A literature lesson should not be just a classic school lesson, lasting 45 minutes. It requires motivation in which we prepare children's horizon of expectation for a carefully selected text, which will address students at their current level of development and interest and prepare them to encounter a text that they do not read themselves but that is narrated by the teacher, so that they can focus their energy on observing, understanding, and evaluating the reality of the text. The teacher then thoughtfully directs the children's attention to textual clues that they may have missed when encountering the literary text, but which they can recognise if we call their attention to them, thereby strengthening their reception ability. At the end of the didactic unit, we deepen their experience and encourage their creativity. For a teacher to accomplish all this, he must carefully plan didactic communication: the organisation of the lesson, what he will say, what he will do, what his students will do, and what psychological effect this will have on the child and the child's feelings. In the case of distance learning, this didactic communication was largely absent. In emergency remote teaching, the child was, when a literature class was on the schedule, mostly if not entirely left alone, which is in stark contrast to what literature classes are supposed to be. The democratic dialogue, which should be the basis of communication according to the didactics of youth literature, when the author's speech, the message of the literary text, the teacher's speech and the speech of ALL students are interwoven, was mostly absent in the hours of Slovene class happening during emergency distance learning. Many goals that would otherwise be achieved without major problems in a traditional learning environment were not achieved during distance learning.

These results provide answers to the research questions. Teachers do notice differences in reception ability between the COVID and pre-COVID generations of younger students. They report moderate differences in observing individual elements of the text to create a response to the literary text, in comparing the results of reading literary texts, presenting them, and exemplifying them with reference to the literary text, and in overlapping of the semantic field of literary texts, and the student's horizon of expectations stemming from his extraliterary and intertextual experience. Major generational differences are emerging in forming oral and/or written texts after reading literature and in creating/(re-)creating after reading literary texts. Our hypothesis is confirmed. There are differences in reception ability in younger students after emergency remote teaching due to COVID-19, compared to the generation before the pandemic which was educated in a school environment, under "normal" circumstances.

The main limitation of our survey is the sample size, so the results should be only partly generalised. The conclusions should be taken with caution. We do not have the answers of the teachers before the pandemic, which would help us to better understand the observed phenomenon and possible changes in the reception ability of students that might have occurred even before the outbreak.

## **Conclusions**

In search of research that examined the effect of emergency distance education on reception capacity in younger students, we mostly found research about reading literacy or reading comprehension. The field of literature didactics is relatively poorly represented. Therefore, our research is particularly important because it explores a somewhat forgotten field of literature didactics. It would be useful if there were data on the reception ability of students before emergency remote teaching that could be compared to the receptive ability of young students today. A larger sample of teachers interviewed could also contribute to greater representativeness of the data obtained.

There are many starting points for future research. We wonder how remote work affects other aspects of children's literary development, such as storytelling, where, as in the development of receptive skills, the role of the adult plays an important role (Baloh, 2015). Koritnik (2015) states that with the help of a stimulating learning environment, which is also created by the teacher's appropriate choice of methods,

we can positively influence children's receptive development, even without lowering the goals. We are interested in how a teacher can adapt the digital learning environment, digital teaching, and digital learning to have a positive impact on children's reception ability even without sacrificing goals. In the context of distance education, we should not look for the negative alone, because distance learning also offers many advantages that could be considered when it comes to reception ability. Ozmen in Atıcı (2014) studied the use of learning management systems supported by social networking sites in distance education to determine the views of learners regarding these platforms. The model, which deals with positive and negative aspects of lecturing through a distance education platform, points out some aspects that could also have a positive effect on distance work in literature classes: the opportunity for repetition, communication, immediate feedback, visual ease of screens, absence of distracting items, easy self-expression and independence. A pandemic is not necessarily the only reason for distance education. Non-crisis situations may also require the teacher to adapt his or her work, such as in the case of a child's illness, a child athlete, a special-status student, and others (Pestano Perez et al., 2020). Professional teacher development in reading literacy and reading culture is important even in "normal" circumstances (Pečjak, 2021). It would be especially important to offer and present the opportunity to deliver quality literature instruction in other environments, such as digital, when various circumstances make it unavoidable. We believe that the priority that our research highlights is not only to focus on the consequences of the pandemic and to find solutions for distance literature class. It is also about the reactions of teachers who noted differences even before distance learning, but which have now deepened. What is the reason for these differences? Possible answers are already reflected in the responses of teachers in this study, and as the teachers replied in our questionnaire – the reasons are not necessarily limited to classroom, but (also) to the home environment, e. g. using cell phones instead of reading, losing the importance of family reading, lack of general knowledge and non-exposure to art

This paper shows that during emergency remote teaching, there were differences in the reception ability of first to third grade elementary school students who participated in distance education.

The research does not offer solutions in this area, but it does show that when we talk about reading, reading motivation, reading literacy, and other "readings", we need to think about everything that reading literature entails – from expanding children's imagination, developing children's cultural legacy, teaching about consequence and morals, learning about story structure, having fun, reducing stress, improving literacy, increasing general knowledge, enjoying magic moments of imaginary worlds with loved ones, and many more, up to reception ability.

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