Challenges of teaching children literature online in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the COVID 19 pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to all the health, psychological, economic and other consequences it left, directly affected all levels of the education system in the world, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unlike other studies and courses studied at higher education institutions, the specificity of literature teaching is that in addition to textbooks on theoretical aspects of literature, students have a mandatory reading list. The paper aims to present ways of adapting to online children's literature teaching and the challenges faced by teachers and students of pedagogical faculties at two public universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In terms of the analysis of the results of online teaching, Kirkpatrick 's evaluation model was applied, which is also the basic method of this paper.

Keywords: children; COVID-19; literature; online teaching; Kirkpatrick's model

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which spread to all continents in early 2020 and affected all communities, had significant consequences for all segments of human life. Education, one of the most significant segments of human development, has faced one of the greatest changes since its inception. The closure of schools and all educational institutions and the transition to online teaching is just one of the consequences whose repercussions will be felt only in the years to come. The peak of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic caused nearly 1.6 billion students in 195 countries around the world to be unable to use their classrooms. Student teaching has been transformed via the Internet in the form of online learning as an alternative approach to education (Tonković, Pongračić, Vrsalović, 2020). According to some estimates, the pandemic disrupted and affected over 97% of the world's student population (Stepanović, 2020). With the closure of all educational institutions across the country in mid-March 2020, UNICEF estimates that some 500,000 children and young people (UNICEF 2020) have been affected in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Among the 850 million children and youth in the world, half of the population has no privilege to continue their education due to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020). The number is increasing as there are students from low-income families who cannot afford the cost of buying the equipment required for a smooth and errorless online/ virtual education. (Raisun & Digvijay 2020)

In that sense, teachers at universities are faced with lesser consequences than teachers in lower grades of primary and secondary schools, but the fact is that in that area there was a lot of resistance and non-acceptance of online teaching by teaching staff, all due to incompatibility with modern technology resources. However, despite all the difficulties we have encountered in the educational world, the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is also an opportunity to reconsider pre-pandemic educational practices. The authorities should use the lessons and experiences gained during the pandemic for further reforms of the education sector, application of innovations and development of blended approaches to learning (UNICEF 2020), and the pedagogical concept which implies a change in the way quality of teaching.

Unlike all courses at universities around the world, the teaching of literature differs in many ways (Kaler, 2009; Hameršak & Zima, 2015). The main reason lies in the fact that in addition to the required theoretical literature, students have a list of reading material that must be read during the semester. On a weekly basis, students in the children's literature classes have books by one author or from one historical period that need to be read in order to be able to follow the theoretical lecture. This means that there is a constructive dialogue about literature in lectures between students and professors, but also students and books. Only in this way, the literary value and aesthetic experience that the work carries, will encourage the student as a future lecturer and interpreter of the literary work, to question himself and the world around him. The totality of texts and works of written provenance and a cultural monument from the earliest times to the present day is a narrow definition of what we call literature today. On the other hand, in the science of literature, the term implies a comprehensive classification name, but also a value determinant for a certain group of written linguistic works.

1.1. Theoretical framework

The understanding of literature as art developed in the 18th century, so that in the time of Romanticism literature gained the status of an original creation by which a particularly gifted individual or a genius, transmits important experiences and knowledge, in a way comparable to other arts (Solar,

2007). Culler (2009) also writes about the complexity of the concept of literature in Literary Theory, concluding that literature is a speech act or textual event that attracts a special kind of attention, and in most cases, what leads readers to define a work as literary is the context found: in a book of poems, in libraries or bookstores.

In historical development, three categories of literary work have been differentiated: writer, work, and reader. The modern age and contemporary theoretical considerations have shifted the focus from the author to the work itself, and under the influence of structuralism, especially the work of Roland Barthes, the role of the reader comes to full expression. Reception theory implies the role of the reader in the production of the meaning of the work and the literary work is studied through the achievement of the effect by resisting or meeting the expectations of the reader. A significant part of the approach to literature, from literary theory, through psychological-pedagogical-methodological, to philosophical-social approach to literature confirmed the fact that there is a significant relationship between the creator the work and the character in it – the reader. The problem of accepting literature is a key problem in the theory of reception until today, but it is much older than this literary theory school, that is. it has been present almost from the beginnings of the theoretical understanding of literature, that is, from the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle (Pašić Kodrić, 2021).

1.2. Purpose of study

Along with positivism, in the middle of the 20th century, the idea of a special methodology of the science of literature arose, and the methods of philology and history changed. Online classes became the only way to interact with students during the pandemic. Classes were held through some of the existing platforms that allow shared access to virtual classrooms (Teams, Skype, Zoom ...). However, as the focus of the courses in children's literature is precisely the literary work, it was necessary to search for the availability of reading titles in digitized editions. The reading list includes representative works of various types from national literature and literature of other nations, works of anthological value that form the foundations of world culture and the backbone of children's literature on a global level. Bosnia and Herzegovina still does not have a single repository of literary works available to Internet users. The paper therefore presents ways of adapting to online children's literature teaching and the challenges faced by teachers and students of pedagogical faculties at two public universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Data collection

The National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina has a digital collection on its website, which includes periodicals, magazines and calendars (editions dating from the end of the 19th to the first half of the 20th century), old and rare books (twelve titles), manuscripts (nine mostly oriental manuscripts), cartographic, graphic and musical collection. In addition to this, there is no repository where students in Bosnia and Herzegovina can find literary works that are on the reading list for primary and secondary school or literature studies. With the spread of the pandemic, groups of publishers and newspaper publishing houses from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina launched the joint portal hrlektire.com with almost 700 complete works, in order to provide students in isolation with online access to a large part of compulsory school reading.

Having in mind the importance of modern technologies, back in 2011, the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia in cooperation with the Croatian Academic and Research Network CARNET and Bulaja publishing house, launched a project of e-reading web portal where you can find

complete literary works of Croatian and world writers in various digital formats adapted to modern standards of responsiveness and use on various devices. E-readings contain and offer free access to all users of more than 370 literary works, over 160 audio books and a number of other educational content. Only on these portals, it is possible to find about 90 titles that are on the list of required readings in the course Literature for Children at the faculties of Sarajevo and Bihać, where future teachers are educated. Works from the oral tradition, as well as poetry from national, South Slavic and world literature, were easy to find and make available to all students. Likewise, a selection of fairy tales (starting with Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen) and Aesop's fables are available in an online edition, as representative works of world provenance. The problem was the lack of digitized editions of contemporary works from Bosnian literature. Namely, it is necessary to periodically enrich the reading list with modern editions, and in order for contemporary authors for children to get their opportunity and readership. For more complete data on the quality of online education of children's literature during the pandemic at the University of Sarajevo (Faculty of Education) and the University of Bihac (Faculty of Education), we decided to ask students how they experienced online teaching in these subjects. The survey was made according to Kirkpatrick's model, which is considered as one of the better models for checking the acquired knowledge and abilities (Pašić Kodrić 2018).

2.2. Participants

All students of the Faculty of Education at the University of Sarajevo had access to the survey in the following subjects: Children's Literature I (58 students had access to anonymous online survey in Teams), Children's Literature II (12 students), Literature and Education (69 students), and at the Faculty of Education at University of Bihać in the course Children's Literature (15 students). This means that a total of 154 students were given the opportunity to do the survey, but only 94 students took the survey. This non-response of students is considered important information in this paper and confirmed the professors' doubts about the big problem of online teaching – without classes in the classroom, students are, after more than a year in pandemic time, overloaded with mandatory different online assignments from different courses. Due to the partial saturation of online classes, students often avoid online obligations that are not on their list of priorities for taking exams, etc. which is partly understandable since the University of Sarajevo from March 2020 to July 2021 classes were held exclusively online. At the University of Bihać, the situation was somewhat better: after the lockdown, due to a smaller number of students and better epidemiological conditions, students attended classes in the classroom until July 2021.

2.3. Analysis

In terms of insight into the results of online teaching, Kirkpatrick 's evaluation model was applied, which is also the basic method of this paper. This paper includes a percentage analysis of all 94 answers to 4 questions with YES or NO answers and in terms of precise comments for each question, the 5 most impressive ones were singled out. Due to the limited size of the paper, not all comments could be listed, but a selection was made in terms of essential information in the context of Kirkpatrick 's model.

3. Results

In the offered survey, students were able to answer questions with YES or NO answers. Instead of the answer MAYBE, but also because of a more precise insight into YES or NO answers, students were also left with the possibility of a written answer in terms of more precise and creative expression, which is considered crucial in terms of acquired knowledge of children's literature. The percentage analysis of all

94 answers is summarized . A summary of essential information in the context of Kirkpatrick 's model is also represented.

3.1. Summary of responses for level 1

5 separate students written comments on the first question (Level 1) in the survey:

Respondent 2: *"It was interesting, completely new approach, however great difficulty in finding literature in PDF format. Also, it is not fun to read PDF books".*

Respondent 10: *"The online lectures on children's literature were the best and most interestingly organized. The new knowledge we have acquired through life situations and examples will be of great benefit in our further education and work. I hope."*

Respondent 29: "Certainly. It will be very useful in your future work, each of these three subjects are very useful for life in general, not only for our future work. Literature is more than just a fiction, but all online is still hard."

Respondent 31: *"For me, online teaching in this subject was great! At times even more effective than the classroom. Technology has given us countless possibilities that I think we have made very good use of; both the professor and we, the students, did our best to do our best to master what is in front of us, and I think we did a great job and succeeded!"*

Respondent 15: *"Honestly a little hard in the afternoon to sit for 3 hours and look at the cell phone / computer. I don't enjoy the online process, just live encounters. I plan to use the knowledge primarily in future practice at university, and then in future work."*

Table 1

Level 1- Reaction- Kirkpatrick's model

Question	YES	NO
How did you react to the online teaching of children's literature? Did you enjoy the online learning process? How do you plan (plan at all) to use that knowledge?	72%	28%

3.2. Summary of responses for level 2

5 separate students written comments on the first question (Level 2) in the survey:

Respondent 1: *"Well, we "broke" the prejudice that online teaching cannot be effective, we have proved that everything depends on effort and commitment to improve and get the best out of it."*

Respondent 8: *"I began to look at all the books from a critical point of view, entering into the deeper themes of the plot itself. Now I know what misogyny, misandry and the monarchist conception of the world are and where do they come from too – from our famous classical fairy tales."*

Respondent 12: *"I did not change my attitudes, I just confirmed to myself that practically everything should be presented to children, in order to learn some important things more easily."*

Respondent 41: "*I have changed my attitudes a lot about how important it is to choose the right literature for children."*

Respondent 19: "*I learned a lot about empathy, Difference, gender... and how we need to develop it in children as much as possible. I consider every change important because it can only benefit me, not hinder me. Also, knowledge about many relationships between children and animals, knowledge about interpersonal relationships is knowledge that we need throughout life."*

The answers of Level 2 question is summarized in Table 2

Table 2: *Level 2- Learning- Kirkpatrick's model*

Question	YES	NO
What knowledge, attitudes, perceptions did you change after classes and do you consider these changes important?	87%	13%

3.3. Summary of responses for level 3

5 separate students written comments on the first question (Level 3) in the survey:

Respondent 7: "*Of course. I realized how important it really is to bring children closer to what we do through various games of associations, pictures, illustrations, and at least to be based on pure memorization."*

Respondent 9: "Of course I am. Literature has opened up a whole range of different topics for me to work with children, we have also had various opportunities to see how children can express their creativity through literature. We learned so much beautiful and carefree about children that I developed an even greater sympathy for my future work."

Respondent 33: *"I did not. My attitude towards future work was positive at the very beginning."*

Respondent 41: *"I'm not saying I'm ready enough for a full parenting, but I think I have a foundation for a great career."*

Respondent 72: "*Definitely yes. I figured out how to bring children closer to the actions and characters from various stories, fairy tales, and how to teach them true values."*

The responses of Level 3 question is summarized in Table 3

Table 3: *Level 3- Behaviour- Kirkpatrick's model*

Question	YES	NO
Have you changed your behavior in a positive way after classes and developed certain positive ideas for your future job?	92%	8%

3.4. Summary of responses for level 4

5 separate students written comments on the first question (Level 4) in the survey:

Respondent 4: "Of *course I believe, if I don't believe in myself, if I'm not sure of what I'm doing, then I don't even need to do that job. I want to be dedicated to the children completely, to understand their needs, way of thinking, behavior, etc.*

Respondent 6: *"I believe because improvement is needed. I think that the whole education of preschool children and children of early school age in Bosnia should be changed and improved a lot."*

Respondent 26: "*Yes, if we make an effort and advocate, and convey to children the importance of literature, we have already in some way improved their knowledge, as well as their education." Girls must become strong independent women, not lazy non-independent princesses."*

Respondent 17: *"Not in Bosnia. Everything here is too hard."*

Respondent 85: "*I believe, if I myself have learned a lot from children's stories, so many lessons, advice, criticism, I think that children will too and that it is very important. I think now how stupid I am to behave as a princess."*

The responses of Level 3 question is summarized in Table 3

Table 4: *Level 3- Results- Kirkpatrick's model*

Question	YES	NO
Have you changed your behavior in a positive way after classes and developed certain positive ideas for your future job?	92%	8%

4. Discussion

At the initial first level, we examine the degree of student satisfaction with online teaching of children's literature. The fact that at the initial level of Kirkpatrick's model 72% of students said that they were satisfied is good. However, 28% of students are not satisfied with online teaching of children's literature and this number is not negligible. The reasons are clear from their comments above, and it is

possible to summarize them in the novelty of the unexperienced online teaching, which meant a certain shock for both students and professors, the general oversaturation of online teaching (all other courses were online too), the non-dynamics of online lectures in literature, which, however, most requires a face-to-face dialogue. All this has been confirmed to us that the rapid, unexpected and 'forced' transition from face-to-face to remote teaching has entailed a number of challenges and constraints but also opportunities that need to be examined (Carillo & Flores 2020), and that was a big challenge for both: professors and students

According to Kirkpatrick's model, after examining the possible satisfaction / dissatisfaction of students, the level of knowledge acquired during an education should be examined, in terms of how much the level of their knowledge has or has not increased. This was a particular challenge in online teaching in general. The fact that 87% of students confirmed that they had acquired new knowledge is encouraging, but the result of 13% is not negligible again. The students' comments, however, point to the fact that many students did understand the ideology of children's literature, which the professors recognized as one of the most important aspects of the courses they took (Terviel & Atabey, 2020).

At the third level, in the context of Kirkpatrick's model which implies the application of knowledge, we examined whether there is a concrete application of the acquired knowledge after these courses. According to both authors of this paper, this is the most important part of this survey, because it shows that 92% of students have found the strong application of acquired knowledge (in their present opinions and future behavior as teachers) and only 8% of students did not find it. We are sure that most of our students after our courses did understand that many world classics of children's literature are not, actually, suitable for children, which may sound very strange to someone who doesn't really know the nature of children's literature in general. We sensed from their responses that these students have a clear current and future application of the knowledge from these courses and that these students, as future teachers, will approach to children's literature with a dose of great caution (Tajgozari & Alimorad, 2019).

At the fourth level of Kirkpatrick's model, we wanted to examine the effects of these courses, ie the specific effects and valorization of courses in children's literature and the approach to children's literature in general. 89% of our students do believe in their own positive contribution through knowledge of children's literature in their future work in terms of improving the knowledge of preschool children and / or children of early school age. Again, we have a number of 11% of students who do not believe in the stated positive effect of knowledge from children's literature courses. Unfortunately, we could conclude from the comments that the reasons are most often related to the general lack of motivation and the poor economic, political and social current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as certain own attitudes and opinions (Boubekeur, 2021; Ghounane, 2021).

5. **Conclusion**

The results of Kirkpatrick's model in this study showed that the COVID 19 pandemic caused a number of problems in the education system of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but that it must examine what consequences it caused on the processes of knowledge acceptance given the specificity of the course. In the context of children's literature courses, according to the results of this survey, the situation regarding online teaching of children's literature was not so bad, although it is important to mention that the expected number of students did not take the survey at all, and that one of the reasons and that one of the reasons may be the accumulation and congestion of online contents. On the other hand, the survey showed that online teaching of children's literature even has its advantages, because at least in Bosnia

and Herzegovina it is not always possible to have all the technical equipment and interesting Internet contents in all classes, especially in the context of syncretism and literature.

The survey also showed that many students still find it difficult to accept books in PDF format and that they do not experience the same pleasure of reading such books and the "real" ones they are used to. Although there are many books available online, the student still complains that many books, especially from Bosnian and Bosniak literature, are missing. All this clearly shows that there are problems, but that the advantages of online teaching of children's literature should be used, but that the combination of teaching children's literature in the classroom with all modern equipment (which, unfortunately, all Bosnian classrooms do not have all the time) is certainly the best solution.

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