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The Opinion of Slovene (Mother Tongue) Teachers on Distance Learning in Primary Schools

Tomaž Petek[1]

∽   The Slovene language has several roles in the educational process in the Republic of Slovenia, including its role as a subject in the curriculum in its own right. It is a basic general education subject in public primary schools and has the most hours of all of the subjects. All teachers were forced to teach remotely for the first time in the history of education (first during the 2019/20 school year and then in the 2020/21 school year) during the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic. The results of a survey comprising 348 teachers with the ability to teach the mother tongue at primary school level (grades 1–9 of primary school; 59% were class curriculum teachers and 41% were Slovene language teachers) show, among other things, that teachers mostly have a good attitude towards distance teaching and feel empowered for this type of teaching, although they feel that this method makes them mentally and physically more tired than teaching in the classroom. Among the advantages of distance teaching, teachers mention the greater use of modern information and communication technology, more use of e-material and the opportunity for formal monitoring of students. In their opinion, the biggest problems of distance teaching (of the Slovene language) include: lack of student participation; lack of non-verbal communication, thus creating difficulties in understanding; and technical issues. Most teachers believe that students acquire less knowledge or far less knowledge by distance education than they would from education in the classroom. Teachers who feel more empowered to teach remotely also have a better attitude towards teaching their mother tongue and are more satisfied with the communication aspect with students in distant teaching. Teachers who have received the necessary training for distance teaching as part of their work feel more empowered to teach this way than teachers who have not had such training.

Keywords: Slovene language, distance teaching, empowerment, advantages, disadvantages

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Mnenje učiteljev slovenščine (materinščine) o poučevanju na daljavo v osnovni šoli

Tomaž Petek

∿   Slovenščina ima v vzgojno-izobraževalnem procesu v Republiki Slove-
niji več vlog, med drugim tudi vlogo učnega predmeta, ki je temeljni
splošnoizobraževalni predmet v javni osnovni šoli in ima izmed vseh
predmetov največ ur. Vsi učitelji so bili prvič v zgodovini šolstva (najprej
v šolskem letu 2019/20, nato pa še v šolskem letu 2020/21) med epide-
mijo koronavirusa covid-19 prisiljeni poučevati na daljavo. Izsledki ra-
ziskave, v kateri je sodelovalo 348 učiteljev, ki imajo v osnovni šoli kom-
petence za poučevanje materinščine (59 % učiteljev razrednega pouka in
41 % učiteljev slovenščine), med drugim kažejo, da imajo učitelji, čeprav
čutijo, da jih delo na daljavo psihično in fizično bolj utrudi kot delo v raz-
redu, po večini dober odnos do poučevanja na daljavo in da se počutijo
opolnomočene za tovrstno poučevanje. Med prednostmi poučevanja na
daljavo učitelji omenjajo večjo uporabo sodobne informacijsko-komu-
nikacijske tehnologije, več uporabe e-gradiva in možnost formativnega
spremljanja učencev. Med največjimi težavami poučevanja (slovenščine)
na daljavo pa omenjajo: primere izmikanja in nesodelovanja učencev,
pomanjkanje nebesedne komunikacije in s tem oteženo razumevanje ter
tehnične težave. Večina učiteljev meni, da bodo učenci z izobraževanjem
na daljavo pridobili manj oz. precej manj znanja, kot bi ga s poučeva-
njem v razredu. Učitelji, ki se počutijo bolj opolnomočene za poučeva-
nje na daljavo, imajo tudi boljši odnos do poučevanja materinščine na
daljavo in so tudi bolj zadovoljni s komunikacijo z učenci na daljavo.
Učitelji, ki so imeli v sklopu službe potrebna izobraževanja za poučeva-
nje na daljavo, se počutijo bolj opolnomočene za poučevanje na daljavo
kot učitelji, ki takih izobraževanj niso imeli.

Ključne besede: slovenščina, poučevanje na daljavo, opolnomočenost,
prednosti, slabosti

Introduction

The Slovene language has different roles in the educational process in the Republic of Slovenia. Besides being the official and state language, it is also the first language for most students (or the second language/language of the environment), while in the curriculum, it also has the role of the language of learning in general subjects.[2] It is a basic general education subject and has the most hours of all subjects in primary school education (1,631.5).[3]

The objectives of the Slovene course are demanding and complex, and their implementation depends on several factors, including the ability of the teacher, the developmental stage of the students, the complexity of the material, and the working conditions. Plut Pregelj (2004) emphasised that the best possible conditions must be created for the student to be active in the learning process and to gain new insights. These conditions are also emphasised by linguists and other researchers in recent studies (e.g., Rot Vrhovec, 2020; Paniagua & Istance, 2018; Vogel, 2015; Valenčič Zuljan & Blanuša Trošelj, 2014). Since distance learning is the so-called new reality, the result of these conditions in the virtual environment has not yet been explored in detail. Barbour (2019) states that the volume of education by distance learning is increasing dramatically, and the literature, especially in respect to research, is not keeping pace. Various authors (Bregar et al., 2020; Maher, 2014; Means et al., 2010) list the advantages and disadvantages of distance education, but there is not a great deal of scientific research on teachers' attitudes towards distance learning or their opinions regarding it. Rupnik Vec et al. (2020) has published an analysis of distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Slovenia. At the national level, the research was supported by the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, the main body in the field of education in the Republic of Slovenia. The findings show that students rated distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic as more demanding than classroom instruction, but also perceived it as interesting and creative. Students considered the negative aspects to be the lack of social contact with classmates and teachers, while many students also missed teachers providing explanations. Among high school and upper elementary school students, 30% considered that it was easier to learn via distance learning. Teachers also felt that distance work was demanding and stressful, but they managed to achieve most of the established learning goals. They were, however, critical in their self-assessment regarding teaching quality: 60% believed that the quality of their distance learning was slightly worse than live

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2   On the roles and position of Slovene in the educational process, see Petek (2013). On Slovene as a subject, see Primary School Programme. Slovene Language. Curriculum (2018) and Rot Vrhovec (2020).

3   Mathematics is in second place in terms of the number of hours (1,318 hours).

teaching and 10% considered that it was significantly worse, as distance teaching required completely different approaches than live teaching.

Krapše et al. (2019) state that "modern principles of learning and teaching are aimed at promoting a proactive role in the learning process, which puts the student and the teacher in a dynamic and collaborative relationship. Within the framework of such learning practice, the teacher creates conditions for a stimulating learning environment in which the student, in addition to knowledge, systematically builds up skills and abilities and forms his/her own model of values in a constructive dialogue between peers and adults. It is important for the management of the learning process how the teacher understands learning, as well as the point that he/she is familiar with the latest knowledge and paradigms about learning", adapted to the individual (Rihter & Potočnik, 2020). We agree with the authors, even when they say that quality education strongly depends on good teachers.

All teachers were forced to teach remotely for the first time in the history of education (first during the 2019/20 school year and then in the 2020/21 school year) during the Covid-19 pandemic. In a very short space of time, all phases of the lessons had to be adapted. Significant changes were needed in the planning of activities, but also in the implementation, testing and assessment of students' knowledge, in providing feedback,[4] etc. The National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, which is the central national research and development and counselling institute in the field of education, prepared guidelines for all teachers as an aid and support in the implementation of distance education.

Teachers dealt with the new situation in different ways. Since Slovene language as a subject in public primary school in the Republic of Slovenia can be taught by class curriculum teachers (in the first and second educational period) and Slovene language teachers (in the second and third educational period),[5] we conducted empirical research among these teachers on teaching Slovene language (mother tongue) remotely. We were interested in their opinions and experiences.

Slovene language (mother tongue) as a subject of the curriculum

The subject Slovene language is divided into two independent parts, i.e.,

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4   On the importance of feedback, see also Godec Soršak (2019).

5   According to so-called Bologna study (after completing the second level), the official professional title for a class curriculum teacher is 'master professor of teaching at class level' (with English) (formerly: a class teacher) and a Slovene language teacher is a 'master of Slovene studies' (formerly: professor of Slovene).

language and literature lessons, with 60% of all hours devoted to reading non-fiction texts and 40% to reading fiction texts (with the exception of the first grade, in which the ratio is 50:50)[6] (Primary School Programme. Slovene Language. Curriculum, 2018). Students need to be aware of the differences between the two fields (ibid.), but Saksida (2008) states that this should not lead to the complete independence of either of them.

The purpose of language lessons is to develop communication skills in the Slovene (literary) language, which means practical and creative mastery of all communication activities and the basics of the language system. In literature lessons, students encounter literary texts and, in addition to communicative ability, they also develop experiential, imaginative, creative, evaluative and intellectual abilities (Primary School Programme. Slovene Language. Curriculum, 2018).

The teacher must lead the learning process taking into account the importance of the subject and the amount of material that must be transmitted to students in such a way as to ensure the development of each student, while also taking into account the principles of individualisation and the differentiation of lessons,[7] as well as being an example to all students throughout the learning process. The teacher must encourage students to ask questions, solve problems and undertake research, as well as to plan their own learning and to monitor and evaluate it (adapted from Krapše et al., 2019). In order for a teacher to achieve this, he or she must establish a stimulating learning environment, which represents a unique challenge (involving both burden and fear) for each teacher.

Distance learning of Slovene language during the Covid-19 pandemic

In the 2019/20 school year, due to the closure of all educational institutions, a very unpredictable period began in which schools had to switch to distance

6   Primary general education in the territory of the Republic of Slovenia is organised into 455 primary schools and 319 branch schools (Kustec et al., 2020). More detailed data on the number of hours of Slovene in public primary schools in the Republic of Slovenia show that in the first three-year period, 700 hours per year are devoted to this subject (399 hours for language lessons and 301 hours for literature lessons). In the second three-year period, 525 hours are available (315 hours for language lessons and 210 hours for literature lessons), and in the third three-year period 406.5 hours (86.5 hours for language lessons and 57.5 hours for literature lessons). Slovene is the most frequent of all subjects in the timetable: 6 times per week in the first grade, and 7 times per week in the second and third grades (according to the current curriculum, students should learn reading and writing techniques by the end of the second grade and should revise these by the end of the third grade). From the fourth to the sixth grade, Slovene is on the timetable 5 times per week, i.e., every day; in the seventh grade, 4 hours per week are available; in the eighth grade it accounts for 3.5 hours per week, and in the ninth and final grade, it represents 4.5 hours per week (Primary School Programme. Slovene Language. Curriculum, 2018).

7   For more information about this, see Valenčič Zuljan and Kalin (2020); Tomlinson (2010); Strmčnik (2001).

education in an extremely short period of time.[8] A similar situation emerged in the 2020/21 school year, when schools had to organise distance education again.[9] The results of the latest research, which was conducted during the initial period of remote education (e.g., Rupnik Vec, 2020; ZASS, 2020) show that it is necessary to improve the training of teachers in certain fields, to improve equipment in schools, to make even greater effort, and to address the preparation and implementation of the educational process in order to ensure greater quality, fewer disparities between students, and the provision of equal opportunities for all.

In the circumstances in which school classrooms were replaced by a digital learning environment, as Kavčnik Kolar (2020) notes, Slovene language teachers, too, had to face the challenges of how to keep students in touch with the Slovene language, how to maintain their level of acquired knowledge, how to encourage them to work independently at home, how to maintain the collaborative aspect of lessons,[10] and how to plan Slovene language lessons under the challenging circumstances. The basic tools for this are offered by modern internet technology, which supports the work of teachers and students in the process of the advancement of knowledge (remotely). In order to support teachers in distance teaching, curricula were digitised at the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia. In the first phase, these so-called interactive curricula enable the simultaneous presentation of: learning objectives, content, standards of knowledge for three-year periods, minimum standards of knowledge and didactic recommendations for a specific segment; an individual topic for all three educational periods (grades 1–9); segments that appear in several educational periods; segments for any selected/specified selection of segments; and individual parts with the capability of being copied or filtered by keywords/

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8   During the Covid-19 pandemic, four models of teaching were planned for primary education in the Republic of Slovenia. They were prepared by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport in cooperation with the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia and the National Institute of Public Health, and they represent the foundation for the organisation and implementation of lessons in the future. Model A foresees that all students are educated in school. Model B foresees that all pupils are educated in school in accordance with the recommendations of the National Institute of Public Health (www.nijz.si). Model C foresees that students from the first to the third or fifth grade are educated at school (if space and staff conditions permit), and all other students are educated remotely. Model D foresees that all students are educated at a distance (Kustec et al., 2020). Activation of a particular model for schools is determined at the national level, and the decision is made by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia or the Minister responsible for education (Kustec et al., 2020).

9   The central professional institutions responsible for education in the Republic of Slovenia – the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia – issued a document in 2020 entitled *Education in the Republic of Slovenia in Conditions Related to Covid-19. Models and Recommendations*, in which they defined: 1) starting points for the preparation of education models; 2) models for teaching implementation; 3) recommendations to schools on how to deal with the Covid-19 disease; and 4) technical and system support for lessons.

10   For more on collaborative learning forms in Slovene, see Rot Vrhovec (2015).

section/objectives (this is especially useful in cross-curricular teaching and vertical integration). In interactive curricula, the objectives of selected segments that should be given priority in distance teaching are specifically highlighted (with an exclamation mark "!"). Gradually, other priority objectives for all segments will be indicated. Green highlighting indicates particular content and objectives that are easier to deal with in distance teaching.[11] As we are interested in the experiences of teachers using distance teaching (Slovene language) and their opinions, we conducted empirical research, the results of which are presented below.

Research questions

In the present research, we were interested in: 1) the attitude of teachers who teach the Slovene language towards distance education; 2) how satisfied they are with their computer abilities; 3) how satisfied they are with the communication aspect of students being taught remotely; 4) whether they have adequate equipment for distance teaching; 5) whether they have the necessary training for distance teaching; 6) what modern technology they use (e.g., ZOOM, Teams, Meet, online classrooms, email, etc.) and how frequently; 7) which field – language or literature – they find more demanding to teach remotely and why; 8) how they choose UN learning content that is suitable for distance education; 9) what types of learning methods and forms they use in distance teaching; 10) in what way they individualise and differentiate the learning material in distance teaching; 11) which types of e-learning materials proved to be the best; 12) how and in what way they give feedback to students; 13) which of the professional bodies they cooperate with if the student does not respond; 14) how they assess knowledge; 15) what assignments are submitted by the students and whether they are linguistically appropriate; 16) whether they observe that students are unmotivated and fail to work if there is no assessment involved; 17) whether the quality of the submitted assignments changes through distance education and whether they feel that students gain as much knowledge as they would in school lessons; 18) how they inform parents about the work of students; 19) whether they feel that distance teaching makes them more mentally and physically tired than teaching in the classroom, and how many hours per day they spend preparing materials, video calls, records and lessons; 20) the advantages and difficulties in teaching Slovene language remotely.[12]

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11   Source: Circular of the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia Concerning Support in the Implementation of Distance Teaching (www.zrss.si).
12   We were also interested in a comparison between the two profiles of teachers: class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers who have the necessary training to teach their mother tongue in primary school.

Method

Participants

The authorial online survey questionnaire *Distance Teaching of Slovene Language (Mother Tongue) in Primary School from the Point of View of Teachers – Challenges and Dilemmas*[13] was completed by 348 teachers, of which 59% were class curriculum teachers and 41% were Slovene language teachers. The respondents also answered a question about their length of service. Most of the teachers (30%) have 19–30 years of service or 7–18 years of service (30%), followed by teachers with more than 30 years of service (22%). Just 11% of the teachers have 1–3 years of service, and 7% have 4–6 years of service. By statistical region, most of the teachers (24%) teach in the Central Slovenia region, followed by teachers from Southeast Slovenia (12%), Upper Carniola (11%), Drava (9%), the Savinja region (8%), the Mura region (7%), Central Sava, Gorizia, Coastal-Karst (6%), and the Littoral-Inner Carniola region (5%). The fewest teachers are from the Carinthia (4%) and Lower Sava regions (2%).

Research method and data processing and presentation

We employed a descriptive and causal, non-experimental method of pedagogical research, and the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software tool was used for data analysis. In addition to the basic descriptive statistics, we used non-parametric tests to verify the hypotheses, given that all of the variables except age were nominal or ordinal. The chi-square test of independence was used to verify the correlation of two nominal variables, the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to verify the correlation of two ordinal or one ordinal and one ratio variable, and the Mann-Whitney U-test was used to verify the differences between the two groups of teachers regarding the ordinal variables.

Results and discussion

We first present the results of basic, descriptive statistics that provide answers to the research questions, and then the results of hypotheses testing.

In **Part 1** of the survey questionnaire, we verified the **teachers' attitudes towards distance teaching**. On a 5-point rating scale (very poor, bad, good, very good or excellent), the teachers first expressed their attitude towards teaching Slovene language remotely. Most of them (54%) answered that it was good, 23% said that their attitude was very good, 14% that it was bad, 6% that it was

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13   The survey questionnaire was available at https: // www.1ka.si/a/317825, from 22. 12. 2020 to 2. 2. 2021. Its composition is evident when interpreting the results of the research.

excellent, and 2% that it was very bad. According to the same rating scale, most of the teachers (51%) rated themselves as well equipped for distance teaching, 33% answered that they were very well equipped, 10% poorly equipped, 5% very poorly equipped, and 1% extremely poorly equipped. Most of the teachers were satisfied with distance communication (65%), 7% were very satisfied, and 17% were undecided; the rest were either dissatisfied (10%) or very dissatisfied (1%).

In **Part 2,** we were interested in the **organisational and technical aspect** of distance teaching. The employer (school) provided 65% of the teachers with appropriate technical equipment for distance teaching, while 35% of the teachers stated that they did not receive such equipment. A total of 66% of the teachers had the necessary training for distance teaching, while 34% did not have such training. Most of the teachers mentioned the following type of training: MS Teams, ZOOM, Meet, online classroom, One Note and various online tools (Mentimeter & Kahoot). Most of the teachers use ZOOM for distance teaching, followed by MS Teams and Arnes online classrooms, while many also use email. Some 59% of the teachers used modern distance teaching technology for every lesson, 25% for every other lesson, 11% occasionally (every third lesson), and 5% rarely (every fourth lesson). None of the teachers stated that they would never use the tools mentioned above.

In **Part 3,** we were interested in the **didactic aspect of teaching**. As many as 63% of the teachers answered that language lessons were more demanding with distance teaching, while 37% thought that literature lessons were more demanding. When they were asked how they chose content from the curriculum that they considered suitable for distance teaching, most (38%) answered that it was their own decision, 20% followed an interactive curriculum, and the rest combined similar content. The most common forms of teaching are classroom led teaching, individual work and group work, and the least common is pair work. In terms of teaching methods, the best represented are explanation, text work and conversation, while the least represented methods are those involving demonstrations, roleplay and graphic work. The teachers are also aware of the importance of implementing differentiation and individualisation. Most of them (38%) give individual feedback, 29% offer additional individual assistance along with supplementary and additional classes, while 17% assign differentiated tasks. Most of the teachers give feedback orally via video conferencing (81%), followed by written feedback through online classrooms (65%), and finally written feedback by email (50%). So-called i-textbooks (interactive textbooks with interactive elements and constructions) proved to be the best e-learning material (69%), followed by d-textbooks (digitised textbooks, i.e., e-editions of printed textbooks) (30%), while only 1 % of teachers use an e-portfolio. If students do not respond remotely, the teachers receive the most assistance (37%) from the

school counselling service, followed by colleagues who have fewer responsibilities, e.g., teachers in after-school services (22%), while school management rarely gets involved (7%). Regarding the assessment of knowledge, the majority of the teachers (64%) answered that they did not assess students according to the recommendations, followed by teachers who gave verbal assessments (24%). Only 9% of the teachers assessed knowledge in a different way (authentic assignments and speech assignments), and 2% used certain programs, applications and tools. None of the teachers assessed written tests by distance learning.

In **Part 4,** we were interested in the **teachers' observations regarding the work of students and cooperation with parents in distance teaching.** According to the teachers surveyed, the assignments submitted by students were mostly appropriate (55%), while 45% of the teachers stated that they were deficient. A total of 64% of the teachers stated that students tended to follow language rules when writing, while 36% stated that students did not follow language rules when submitting assignments. Some 55% of the teachers noticed that students were not motivated to work if there was no assessment involved, while 45% considered that this was not the case. A total of 45% of the teachers believed that the assignments students undertook and submitted remotely were comparable to the situation as it was when distance education commenced, 36% of them considered that the situation was worse with the extension of distance education and that students were falling behind, while 19% believed that the assignments were better and that the students were making progress. We were also interested in seeing whether the teachers informed parents about the students' work. The majority (70%) answered that they contacted them if necessary and as part of regular parent evening events, 20% said that they notified them once per week, while 7% said that they did not inform parents about the students' work because they trusted them to check online classrooms and to work with the child.

In **Part 5,** we looked at the **teachers' opinions about their own distance teaching**. As many as 86% of them answered that they felt that distance teaching made them mentally and physically more tired than teaching in the classroom. Most of the teachers (38%) stated that they spent nine to ten hours per day teaching remotely, followed by teachers who worked five to eight hours per day (33%), and then by those who worked more than ten hours per day (25%). Among the advantages of teaching remotely, the teachers mentioned the greater use of modern information and communication technology (64%), more use of e-material (22%), and the opportunity for formal student monitoring (14%). Amongst the biggest problems in distance teaching (Slovene language), the teachers mentioned: lack of student participation (31%), lack of non-verbal communication and, consequently, difficulties in understanding (29%), and technical problems (13%).

In the context of the research, we were also interested in a comparison between the two profiles of teachers, class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers who have the necessary training to teach their mother tongue in primary school (the former in the first and second three-year period, and the latter in the second and third three-year period).[14] We therefore established several hypotheses and verified them using statistics. The results are presented below.

- H 1: There is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers in relation to distance teaching of Slovene language.

As Table 1 shows, the average rating of attitudes towards teaching Slovene language remotely was 3.25 for class curriculum teachers and 3.11 for Slovene language teachers. However, the result of the Mann-Whitney test is not statistically significant (U = 13374.0; p = .144), so we cannot claim that there is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers in relation to distance teaching of Slovene language. Hypothesis 1 cannot be confirmed.

Table 1

Teachers' attitudes towards teaching Slovene language by distance learning

	No.	Average	No. deviation	Median	Mann-Whitney test	
					U	p
Class curriculum teachers	204	3.25	.849	3.00	13374.0	.144
Slovene language teachers	143	3.11	.752	3.00		

- H 2: There is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers regarding their satisfaction with their own digital abilities.

As Table 2 shows, the average rate of satisfaction with their own digital abilities was 3.36 for class curriculum teachers and 3.29 for Slovene language teachers. However, the result of the Mann-Whitney test is not statistically significant (U = 13932.0; p = .431), so we cannot claim that there is a difference regarding

14 Article 5 of the *Rules on the Level of Education of Teachers and other Professionals in Educational Programmes of Primary Schools*: "A teacher of Slovene from the first to the fifth grade may be one who has completed: a university study programme or a second-cycle master's programme (teaching at grade level) or classroom teaching. A teacher of Slovene in the sixth grade and in the third period can be one who has completed: a university study programme of Slovene or a master's study programme of the second level of Slovene language and literature or Slovene studies."

satisfaction with their own digital abilities between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers. Hypothesis 2 cannot be confirmed.

Table 2

Satisfaction of teachers with their own digital competencies

	No.	Average	No. deviation	Median	Mann-Whitney test U	p
Class curriculum teachers	204	3.36	.765	3.00	13932.0	.431
Slovene language teachers	143	3.29	.637	3.00		

- H 3: There is a difference of opinion between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers as to which area is more demanding for distance teaching.

Table 3 shows that 79.4% of the class curriculum teachers believe that language lessons are more demanding for distance teaching, and 20.6% believe that literature lessons are more demanding. Among the Slovene language teachers, 62.2% believe that language lessons are more demanding for distance teaching, and 37.8% believe that literature lessons are more demanding. The result of the chi-square test is statistically significant (χ^2 = 11.547; p = .001), so we can say that there is a difference of opinion between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers regarding which area is more demanding for distance teaching. Hypothesis 3 can be confirmed.

Table 3

Teachers' opinion regarding which area is more demanding for distance teaching

		Education			
		Class curriculum teachers		Slovene language teachers	
		No.	%	No.	%
Which area do you find more demanding for distance teaching?	language lessons	162	79.4	89	62.2
	literature lessons	42	20.6	54	37.8
Total		204	100.0	143	100.0

Note. * χ^2 = 11.547; p = .001.

- H 4: There is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers in how they assess knowledge.

As Table 4 shows, among the class curriculum teachers, 17.6% assess knowledge verbally, while there are no teachers who assess knowledge in writing. Only 1.0% assess knowledge using certain programs, applications and tools, while 5.9% assess knowledge in a different way, and 75.5% do not assess knowledge according to the recommendations. On the other hand, among the Slovene language teachers, 31.3% assess knowledge verbally and 0.7% assess knowledge in writing. Only 4.2% assess knowledge using certain programs, applications and tools, while 13.9% assess knowledge using a different method, and 50.0% of the teachers do not assess knowledge according to the recommendations. The result of the chi-square test is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 26.186$; $p < .001$), so we can say that there is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers in how they assess knowledge. Hypothesis 4 can be confirmed.

Table 4
Types of knowledge assessment

		Education			
		Class curriculum teachers		Slovene language teachers	
		No.	%	No.	%
	verbally	36	17.6	45	31.3
	in writing	0	.0	1	.7
How do you assess knowledge?	using certain programs, applications, tools	2	1.0	6	4.2
	in a different way (authentic assignments, speaking assignments)	12	5.9	20	13.9
	I do not assess knowledge according to the recommendations	154	75.5	72	50
Total		204	100.0	144	100.0

Note. * $\chi^2 = 26.186$; $p < .001$

- H 5: There is a difference of opinion between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers as to whether students gain as much knowledge through distance education as they would in the classroom.

As Table 5 shows, among the class curriculum teachers, 2.5% think that students gain the same amount of knowledge, 52.2% think that students gain a

little less knowledge, and 45.3% think that students gain far less knowledge. On the other hand, among the Slovene language teachers, 1.4% think that students gain the same amount of knowledge, 45.1% think that students gain a little less knowledge, and 53.5% believe that students gain far less knowledge. However, the result of the chi-square test is not statistically significant (χ^2 = 2.488; p = .288), so we cannot claim that there is a difference in opinion between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers as to whether students gain as much knowledge through distance education as they would gain in the classroom. Hypothesis 5 cannot be confirmed.

Table 5

Teachers' opinion on whether students gain the same amount of knowledge through distance education as they would in the classroom

		Education			
		Class curriculum teachers		Slovene language teachers	
		No.	%	No.	%
Do you think that students gain as much knowledge through distance education as they would in the classroom?	yes	5	2.5	2	1.4
	no, a little less	106	52.2	65	45.1
	no, far less	92	45.3	77	53.5
Total		203	100.0	144	100.0

Note. * χ^2 = 2.488; p = .288.

- H 6: There is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers as to whether they inform parents about the students' work.

As Table 6 shows, among the class curriculum teachers, 28.1% inform parents once a week, 7.9% trust parents to check online class work and work with their child, and 64.0% contact parents if necessary. On the other hand, among the Slovene language teachers, 13.2% inform parents once a week, 6.9% trust parents to check online class work and work with their child, and 79.9% contact parents if necessary. The result of the chi-square test is statistically significant (χ^2 = 11.607; p = .003), so we can say that there is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers as to whether they inform parents about the students' work. Hypothesis 6 can be confirmed.

Table 6

Frequency and manner of informing parents about the students' work

		Education			
		Class curriculum teachers		Slovene language teachers	
		No.	%	No.	%
Do you inform parents about the students' work?	Yes. They are given a report once a week.	57	28.1	19	13.2
	No. We trust them to check online class work and work with their child.	16	7.9	10	6.9
	If necessary I contact them (parents' evenings).	130	64	115	79.9
Total		203	100.0	144	100.0

*Note. * $\chi^2 = 11.607$; $p = .003$*

- H 7: There is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers as to whether they feel that distance teaching makes them more mentally and physically tired than teaching in the classroom.

As Table 7 shows, among the class curriculum teachers, 88.7% feel that distance teaching makes them more mentally and physically tired than teaching in the classroom, while 82.5% of the Slovene language teachers feel the same way. However, the result of the chi-square test is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.222$; $p = .136$), so we cannot claim that there is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers as to whether they feel that distance teaching makes them mentally and physically more tired than teaching in the classroom. Hypothesis 7 cannot be confirmed.

Table 7

Teachers' opinion on whether distance teaching makes them more mentally and physically tired than teaching in the classroom

		Education			
		Class curriculum teachers		Slovene language teachers	
		No.	%	No.	%
Do you feel that distance teaching makes you more mentally and physically tired than teaching in the classroom?	Yes	181	88.7	118	82.5
	No	23	11.3	25	17.5
Total		204	100.0	143	100.0

*Note. * $\chi^2 = 2.222$; $p = .136$*

- H 8: There is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers in how many hours per day during the week they spend preparing materials, video calls, records and lessons, etc.

As Table 8 shows, among the class curriculum teachers, 2.9% spend up to five hours on preparation, 35.8% spend five to eight hours on preparation, 35.5% spend nine to ten hours on preparation, and 26.0% spend more than ten hours on preparation. On the other hand, among the Slovene language teachers, 4.9% spend up to five hours on preparation, 29.4% spend five to eight hours on preparation, 43.4% spend nine to ten hours on preparation, and 22.4% often spend more than ten hours on preparation. However, the result of the chi-square test is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3.761$; $p = .288$), so we cannot claim that there is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers in how many hours a day during the week they spend preparing materials, video calls, records and lessons, etc. Hypothesis 8 cannot be confirmed.

Table 8

Number of hours per day that teachers spend during the week preparing materials, video calls, records and lessons, etc.

| | | Education | | | |
| | | Class curriculum teachers | | Slovene language teachers | |
		No.	%	No.	%
How many hours per day during the week do you spend preparing materials, video calls, records and lessons, etc.?	up to five hours (less than if I worked at school according to the timetable)	6	2.9	7	4.9
	from five to eight hours	73	35.8	42	29.4
	from nine to ten hours	72	35.3	62	43.4
	often more than ten hours	53	26.0	32	22.4
Total		204	100.0	143	100.0

Note. * $\chi^2 = 3.761$; $p = .288$

- H 9: Teachers who feel better equipped to teach at a distance also have a better attitude towards teaching Slovene language at a distance.

As Table 9 shows, the value of the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between the assessment of those teachers who feel equipped for distance teaching and the assessment of the teacher's attitude towards distance teaching of the Slovene language is 0.420, which represents a positive and medium strong

correlation that is also statistically significant (p < .001). We can therefore say that teachers who feel more equipped to teach by distance learning also have a better attitude towards teaching Slovene language remotely. Hypothesis 9 can be confirmed.

Table 9

Teachers' attitude towards distance teaching of Slovene language in relation to their own empowerment for distance teaching

		How empowered do you feel to teach at a distance?
What is your attitude towards teaching Slovene language by distance learning?	Spearman's correlation coefficient	.420
	p	< .001
	No.	347

- H 10: Teachers who feel better equipped to teach at a distance are also more satisfied with the communication with students remotely.

As Table 10 shows, the value of the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between the assessment of how the teacher is equipped for distance teaching and the assessment of satisfaction with the communication with students in remote teaching is .313, which represents a positive and medium strong correlation that is also statistically significant ($p < .001$). We can therefore say that teachers who feel better equipped to teach remotely are also more satisfied with the communication with students in distant teaching. Hypothesis 10 can be confirmed.

Table 10

Teachers' satisfaction with communication with students in distant teaching in relation to their own sense of being better equipped to teach remotely

		How well equipped do you feel when you teach remotely?
How satisfied are you with the communication with students remotely?	Spearman's correlation coefficient	.313
	p	< .001
	No.	347

- H 11: Teachers who are more satisfied with the communication with their students in remote teaching also have a better attitude towards teaching Slovene language through distance learning.

As Table 11 shows, the value of the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between the assessment of communication with students in remote teaching and the assessment of the attitude towards distance teaching of Slovene language is 0.399, which represents a positive and medium strong correlation that is also statistically significant ($p < .001$). We can therefore say that teachers who are more satisfied with the communication with their students in distance teaching also have a better attitude towards teaching Slovene language by distance teaching. Hypothesis 11 can be confirmed.

Table 11

Teachers' attitude towards distance teaching in relation to satisfaction with communication with students through distance learning

		How satisfied are you with the communication with students remotely?
What is your attitude towards teaching of Slovene language remotely?	Spearman's correlation coefficient	.399
	p	< .001
	No.	347

- H 12: Teachers who have received the necessary training for distance teaching as part of their service feel better equipped for distance teaching than teachers who have not had such training.

As Table 12 shows, the average rate of a sense of being better equipped for distance teaching was 3.38 for teachers who received the necessary training for distance teaching as part of their service, and 3.23 for teachers who did not have such training. The result of the Mann-Whitney test is statistically significant ($U = 11707.0$; $p = .017$), so it can be said that teachers who have received the necessary training for distance teaching as part of their service feel better equipped to teach remotely than teachers who did not have such training. Hypothesis 12 can be confirmed.

Table 12

Training for distance teaching in relation to a sense of being better equipped for distance teaching

Did you have the necessary training for distance teaching as part of the service?	No.	Average	No. deviation	Median	Mann-Whitney test U	p
Yes	229	3.38	.720	3.00	11707.0	.017
No	117	3.23	.700	3.00		

• H 13: Older teachers have a poorer attitude towards teaching Slovene language remotely.

As Table 13 shows, the value of the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between age and the assessment of attitude towards distance teaching Slovene language is -.129, which represents a negative and weak correlation and is statistically significant ($p = .009$). We can therefore say that older teachers have a worse attitude towards teaching Slovene language by distance teaching. Hypothesis 13 can be confirmed.

Table 13

Teachers' attitude towards distance teaching Slovene language in relation to age

		Age
What is your attitude towards teaching Slovene language by distance teaching?	Spearman's correlation coefficient	-.129
	p	.009
	No.	340

• H 14: Older teachers feel less well equipped to teach remotely.

As Table 14 shows, the value of the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between age and the assessment of a sense of being well equipped for distance teaching is -.291, which represents a negative and weak correlation and is also statistically significant ($p < .001$). We can therefore say that older teachers feel less well equipped to teach by distance learning. Hypothesis H 14 can be confirmed.

Table 14

Older teachers' sense of being well equipped for distance teaching

		Age
How well equipped do you feel to teach by distance learning?	Spearman's correlation coefficient	-.291
	p	< .001
	No.	340

Conclusion

Slovene plays several roles in the educational process in the Republic of Slovenia, including its role as a subject in its own right in the curriculum. It is a basic general education subject in public primary schools and has the most hours of all of the subjects. We conducted empirical research, in the context of which primary school teachers (N = 348) who have the necessary training to teach their mother tongue – class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers (the former for the first and second three-year period, and the latter for the second and third three-year period) – answered a survey questionnaire. In the first part, we verified the attitudes of the teachers towards distance teaching, in the second part we were interested in the organisational and technical aspect of distance teaching, in the third part we studied the didactic aspect of teaching, in the fourth part we were interested in the teachers' observations about students' work and cooperation with parents in distance teaching, and in the fifth part we verified the opinions of the teachers about their own work (distance teaching).

More than half of the teachers surveyed have a good attitude towards distance teaching (scoring 3 out of 5), and more than half of them believe that they are well equipped for this type of distance teaching (scoring 3 out of 5). Regarding communication with their students at a distance, 72% of the teachers are satisfied or very satisfied. A total of 65% of the teachers stated that their employer provided them with the appropriate technical support, and 66% had the necessary training for distance teaching. Most of the teachers use ZOOM for distance teaching, followed by MS Teams and Arnes online classrooms, while many also use email. When they were asked how they choose content from the curriculum that is suitable for distance teaching, most of the teachers (38%) answered that it is their own decision, while 20% follow an interactive curriculum and the rest combine similar content. The most common forms of teaching are classroom led, individual and group work, and the least common is pair work. In terms of teaching methods, the best represented methods are explanation, work with

text and conversation, while the least represented are demonstrations, roleplays and graphic work methods. The teachers are also aware of the importance of implementing differentiation and individualisation. Regarding the assessment of knowledge, the majority of the teachers (64%) answered that they did not perform assessments according to the recommendations, followed by teachers (24%) who made verbal assessments. Only 9% of the teachers assessed knowledge in a different way (authentic assignments and speech assignments), while 2% used certain programs, applications and tools. As many as 86% of the teachers answered that they felt that distance teaching made them mentally and physically more tired than teaching in the classroom. Most of them (38%) stated that they spent nine to ten hours per day on distance teaching, followed by teachers who worked five to eight hours per day (33%) and those who worked more than ten hours per day (25%). Among the advantages of distance teaching, the teachers mentioned greater use of modern information and communication technology (64%), more use of e-material (22%) and the opportunity for formative monitoring of students (14%). Among the biggest problems in respect to distance teaching (Slovene language), the following are mentioned: lack of student participation (31%), lack of non-verbal communication thus creating difficulties in understanding (29%), and technical problems (13%).

Using various statistical calculations, we verified and established the following hypotheses. There is a difference between class curriculum teachers and Slovene language teachers in how they assess knowledge and whether they inform parents about the students' work. Teachers who feel better equipped to teach remotely also have a better attitude towards teaching their mother tongue by distance teaching and are more satisfied with the communication with their students in distant teaching. Teachers who are more satisfied with the communication with their students in distant teaching also have a better attitude towards teaching Slovene language remotely. Teachers who have received the necessary training for distance teaching as part of their service feel better equipped for distance teaching than teachers who have not had such training. We also found that older teachers have a poorer attitude towards teaching Slovene language remotely and feel less well equipped for this kind of teaching.

We find that teachers who teach their mother tongue have responded very well to the challenges of distance teaching, and although they feel that this makes them more mentally and physically tired than teaching in the classroom, they have a good attitude towards this type of teaching, which is probably partly due to the fact that they feel better equipped for distance teaching work (teaching). The results of the research are also important when it comes to the practical aspect of distance learning, because such research, especially regarding the opinion of mother tongue

teachers on teaching Slovene by distance learning, is not yet available. Through the results presented in this discussion, teachers can learn about the opinions of other teachers who are in the same situation as themselves. They will be able to adopt ideas or examples of good practice from them, get information on how different problems (substantive, organisational and technical, amongst others) are solved by their colleagues who teach the same subject and are in a similar situation, gain insight into different didactic aspects of distance learning, learn about the experiences of other teachers regarding work with parents in distance learning, and discover what other teachers across the country think about the nature of their own work by distance learning. As we learn from each other all the time, comparisons between class curriculum primary school teachers and Slovene language teachers who teach their mother tongue in public primary schools using the same curriculum will also help them to improve their own practice.

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