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THE INFLUENCE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON STUDENTS' EMOTIONS

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly being integrated into modern education, transforming teaching, learning, and assessment methods. Beyond its evident cognitive benefits, AI also significantly impacts students' emotional development, including motivation, stress, sense of belonging, and empathy. This paper examines the complex relationship between the use of AI in teaching and students' emotions, presenting both positive and negative aspects, psychological and pedagogical implications, as well as recommendations for ethical and effective implementation.

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence, Education, Student emotions, Motivation, Stress, Emotional intelligence, Pedagogical implications, Digital literacy, Critical thinking, AI in teaching*

1. Introduction

The last decade has brought dramatic technological changes to the educational process. Artificial intelligence, initially applied in industrial, medical, and technological sectors, is now playing an increasingly prominent role in curricula, digital platforms, and learning applications. AI enables personalized teaching content, automated assessment, interactive simulations, and adaptive learning, but it also affects students' emotional states.

Research in educational psychology shows that emotions are a key factor for effective learning—positive emotions such as joy, curiosity, and enthusiasm increase motivation and improve memory retention, while fear, stress, and frustration can hinder knowledge acquisition. The way AI is integrated into teaching often determines students' emotional responses.

2. Positive emotional effects

2.1. Increased motivation and engagement

AI tools, through adaptive pacing, relevant content, and interactive activities, create a sense of individual care for each student (Johnson & Lester, 2021). Personalized approaches allow students to work according to their abilities, which increases intrinsic motivation and reduces the risk of frustration from tasks that are too easy or too difficult (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For example, an application that automatically adjusts task difficulty based on student performance provides a continuous sense of progress and maintains interest.

2.2. Encouraging creativity

Generative models allow students to create texts, images, musical compositions, or even interactive stories (McCormack, Gifford & Hutchings, 2019). This process not only develops a sense of achievement but also enhances creative self-confidence (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). For instance, when writing an essay, a student may receive suggestions for character development or plot ideas, helping them think more broadly and explore multiple styles.

2.3. Support for students with difficulties

Adaptive applications provide targeted support for students with different learning styles or difficulties in mastering the curriculum (Rose & Meyer, 2002). This includes visual explanations, audio narrations, or additional exercises tailored to individual pacing. Such an approach reduces anxiety and increases a sense of security, as the student does not feel pressured to keep up with the entire group.

2.4. Stress reduction

Automated and timely feedback is often perceived as fairer and more objective (Brookhart, 2017). When students receive clear and constructive feedback without unnecessary delays, fear of evaluation decreases, and readiness for further learning increases. For example, a digital platform can immediately indicate correct answers and provide brief explanations for incorrect ones, turning stress into an opportunity for learning.

3. Potential negative emotional effects

3.1. Dependence and reduced autonomy

Excessive use of AI can gradually reduce independent thinking and critical reasoning (Carr, 2010). Students may develop what is called emotional dependence on technology, where feelings of security and success are linked exclusively to digital support (Turkle, 2011). For instance, a student who constantly relies on automatically generated answers may lose motivation to seek their own solutions and strategies.

3.2. Social isolation

High levels of interaction with machines rather than with people can reduce the sense of belonging and social empathy (Putnam, 2000). This is particularly true when AI is used as the primary teaching assistant rather than as a supplementary tool. Reduced authentic interpersonal contact can affect students' ability to develop emotional intelligence and teamwork skills (Goleman, 1995).

3.3. Stress from surveillance

Progress tracking systems, analysis of facial expressions, voice tone, or eye movements can create a sense of constant monitoring (Zuboff, 2019). This "digital panopticon" is often associated with increased anxiety and reduced spontaneity in students (Lyon, 2018). For example, a student aware that every action is recorded and analyzed may become overly cautious and refrain from creative or unconventional responses.

3.4. Potential bias and unfairness

Algorithmic biases can lead to inaccurate or discriminatory evaluations, which may cause a sense of injustice (O'Neil, 2016). Biases may arise from incomplete or inappropriate data used to train AI (Noble, 2018). For example, an automated essay grading system may unconsciously favor a particular writing style or linguistic constructions that are not equally represented across all cultural and linguistic contexts.

4. Teacher perspective

The teacher plays a key role in mediating between the student and technology. Positive integration of AI involves using technology as a support tool, not a replacement for human interaction. Teachers should:

1. Encourage critical thinking about AI-provided information.
2. Recognize emotional reactions and intervene with students experiencing fear or insecurity.
3. Ensure a balance between digital and interpersonal communication.

5. Example of a lesson with AI

Subject: Macedonian language
Topic: Analysis of a poem
Goal: Develop analytical thinking and a critical approach to automated analysis.
Duration: 40 minutes

1. Introduction (5 min)
Objective: Students understand the concept of AI and its role as a support tool for poetry analysis.
Activities:

- Teacher explains AI briefly: "Artificial intelligence is technology that can analyze texts, identify rhyme, rhythm, and symbolism, but it does not replace our creativity and thinking."
- Explain lesson goal: Students read the poem, analyze it themselves, then compare their analysis with AI results.

Materials: Printed or digital poem, whiteboard/projector for AI demonstration
Emotional Aspect: Joy and curiosity in discovering new technology

2. Main Part (25 min)
Objective: Develop analytical and critical skills, compare human and AI analysis.
Activities:

1. Reading the poem (5 min) – individually, then aloud in groups
2. Note-taking (5 min) – record observations on rhythm, rhyme, symbolism, emotional impact
3. Using AI tool (10 min) – input poem; AI analyzes rhythm, rhyme, symbolism
4. Comparison (5 min) – students compare their notes with AI results; teacher prompts discussion: "Where do our conclusions match AI's?", "Where are there differences and why?", "How do you feel when AI gives different results than yours?"

Materials: Laptops/tablets with AI application, notebooks, interactive screen
Emotional Aspect: Joy and curiosity for new interpretations; mild anxiety if "AI knows better"; increased confidence when results align

3. Conclusion (10 min)
Objective: Reflect on emotional responses and analytical learning.
Activities:

- Circle discussion (5 min) – share impressions and feelings using AI
- Written reflection (5 min) – "What did I learn about poem analysis today?", "How did I feel when AI gave different results?"

Materials: Reflection sheets, pens
Emotional Aspect: Recognize personal progress, accept different interpretations; foster security and self-confidence

Teacher roles: Mentor, moderator, observer of emotional reactions

Expected outcomes:

- Students develop analytical and critical skills
- Understand differences between human and machine analysis
- Promote emotional intelligence and confidence in using new technologies

6. Psychological, pedagogical, and ethical Implications

AI is a significant resource in modern education, but it cannot replace the empathy, intuition, and human warmth that teachers bring to learning (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Education is not just information transfer but also emotional support, motivation, and interpersonal relationship building (Hattie, 2009). Students learn more effectively when they feel the teacher is engaged, interested, and caring (Wentzel, 2010).

From a psychological perspective, maintaining live teacher-student communication is crucial for trust, empathy, and social skills development (Goleman, 2006). AI can enrich teaching with adaptive

content and interactive activities, but it should function as a support tool, not a dominant factor (Selwyn, 2019). Overreliance on technology may risk pedagogical alienation and reduced social interaction.

Ethically, issues arise around data privacy, equal access, and algorithmic transparency (Floridi & Cowls, 2019). Data privacy requires clear rules about what information is collected, how it is stored, and who can access it (Zuboff, 2019). Equal access prevents digital inequality between students with and without technological resources (Warschauer, 2004). Algorithmic transparency ensures that teachers, parents, and students understand how systems make decisions and which data are used (O'Neil, 2016).

Ethical and pedagogically sustainable AI integration requires a combination of technological innovation and human responsibility, including ongoing teacher training, regulations to protect privacy, and promotion of digital ethics (UNESCO, 2021).

Recommendations

- **Integrate AI as support, not a replacement for the teacher:** Use AI to enrich teaching, while the teacher remains key for transmitting values, empathy, and critical thinking. AI can provide adaptive tests and automated feedback, with the teacher as mentor and discussion moderator (Selwyn, 2019).
- **Encourage collaboration and teamwork:** Technology should support, not reduce, interpersonal interaction. Group projects using AI as a resource (e.g., data collection or visual materials) develop communication, social empathy, and collective responsibility (Slavin, 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 2009).
- **Develop digital literacy and emotional intelligence:** Students need skills for critical analysis of digital content, recognizing bias, and responsible technology use (Hobbs, 2010), along with activities fostering emotional intelligence – understanding and regulating one's emotions and recognizing others' (Goleman, 1995).
- **Teacher training to monitor and guide students' emotional reactions:** Teachers should recognize signs of anxiety, frustration, or technology dependence (CASEL, 2020) and use AI to promote positive school climate (OECD, 2021).

7. Conclusion

AI has the potential to enrich education and increase student motivation, but it can also provoke anxiety, isolation, or dependence. The key lies in balanced implementation, where teachers use AI to foster creativity, critical thinking, and emotional stability in students.

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TEACHER COMPETENCIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTEGRATIVE SYSTEM AND TEAMWORK IN INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This paper discusses the competencies teachers need in order to effectively deliver instructional content aligned with the complex requirements of the integrative system in today's class teaching. Overall, such an approach demands from teachers not only solid subject-matter knowledge and curriculum planning skills, but also pedagogical, organizational, and evaluative competencies. Meeting these demanding requirements is possible only through continuous professional development, which also includes strengthening teamwork skills—an indispensable condition for the successful implementation of the integrative methodological system.

Keywords*: integrative system, teacher competencies, teamwork, class teaching*

1. Introduction

Teaching is a systematically organized activity, as systematicity represents one of its fundamental guiding principles. Every form of systematicity implies a coherent whole in which the elements are connected through cause-and-effect relationships.

Integrative teaching is a model used to establish connections between the instructional content of two or more school subjects. This approach removes the boundaries that traditionally separate different disciplines. Within integrative teaching, meaningful links are created between related aspects of various fields of study. The primary aim of this model is to connect complex issues across subjects, leading to an interdisciplinary synthesis of knowledge that enables students to develop a more holistic understanding of the world (Вилотијевић, 2006; Spasić Stošić & Tasić Mitić, 2018). To achieve this goal, teachers draw upon related content from different subjects, integrate it into a unified whole, and present it to students in a comprehensive manner.

The integrative approach is a thematic approach to teaching, as it connects and organizes thematic units and content that are similar or shared across different disciplines (Stojadinović, Zdravković & Vučkovski Minevska, 2022). It is not limited to the transmission of facts but is oriented much more toward problem-solving, formulating questions, and actively seeking answers from one's environment and surroundings (Станишић, 2015).

For the successful implementation of integrative teaching, it is essential that the teacher be equipped to plan and prepare integrative lessons, possess a spirit of inquiry and collaboration, demonstrate creativity, and recognize the importance of holistic learning of instructional content. The effectiveness of integrative teaching also depends on the teacher's personal initiative, creativity, and ability to cooperate. It is particularly important that the teacher engage personally with the topic being taught. Furthermore, teacher motivation is emphasized as a crucial factor in the successful realization of integrative teaching.

2. Teacher Competencies for the Implementation of Integrative Teaching

Teacher competence is a prerequisite for the effective implementation of integrative teaching. Competent teaching involves pedagogical, psychological, and didactic-methodological education background, as well as the teacher's general cultural development and the realization of the prescribed curriculum (Жупљанин, 2013). In the pedagogical literature, different authors identify teacher competencies according to various criteria. For instance, Glasser (2005) highlights three essential dimensions of teacher competence: professional competence, pedagogical-didactic-methodological competence, and work competence. Сузић (2005), on the other hand, proposes a model of twenty-eight competencies for the 21st century, grouped into four domains: cognitive, emotional, social, and work-action competencies.

The Rulebook on Standards of Teacher Competencies and Their Professional Development (2011) outlines categories of competencies related to: subject area, discipline and teaching methodology, teaching and learning, support for student personal development, as well as communication and collaboration. Each of these categories encompasses several domains: knowledge, planning, implementation, evaluation, and professional advancement. From the broad spectrum of competencies defined in the Rulebook, the following text highlights key elements from these domains that are particularly relevant to the implementation of integrative teaching.

In order for a teacher to implement integrative teaching, that is, to effectively apply this methodological system, they must possess adequate knowledge of the scientific discipline to which the subject they teach belongs, as well as an understanding of its connections with other scientific disciplines, in order to establish meaningful integrative links with other fields or subjects. Furthermore, to successfully design integrative lessons, the teacher must demonstrate a creative level of knowledge that enables knowledge transfer—that is, the ability to apply knowledge from one domain to another, thereby generating new understanding based on existing knowledge (Вилотијевић, 2000).

Overall, the knowledge acquired by teachers, primarily during their initial education, encompasses subject-specific, pedagogical-psychological, and didactic-methodological competencies. In this way, teachers develop applied-operational knowledge, that is, knowledge they utilize in concrete educational practice. Naturally, this foundation of knowledge and competencies is further expanded through continued professional work, which entails ongoing professional development and lifelong learning.

It is a fact that planning the teaching process using the integrative system is an exceptionally demanding task. Therefore, in addition to being familiar with the curriculum of the subjects they teach, teachers should also have a thorough understanding of the curricula of other subjects represented in class teaching, which are taught by other teachers, such as Religious Education, Civic Education, and Foreign Language.

It is crucial for teachers to plan lessons with respect for individual differences among students, creating a dynamic classroom environment based on interaction and the appreciation of diversity. This also requires the application of multicultural principles in the planning of integrative teaching.

Based on the Rulebook on Standards of Teacher Competencies and Their Professional Development (2011), it can be observed that, within the implementation of lessons designed according to the integrative system, a teacher should: connect instructional content with students' prior knowledge and experiences, as well as their present and future needs, using examples from everyday life, content from other fields, current achievements, and scientific developments; link and organize the content of one or more subjects into thematic units; apply various forms of work and activities in accordance with the knowledge and experiences that students possess; engage students in diverse activities and participate in teamwork.

Through the outlined aspects essential for the implementation of integrative teaching, the key elements of this system are encompassed: connecting instructional content, linking students' prior knowledge with new material, creating thematic units, and applying modern technology. In addition, within integrative teaching, the teacher should encourage all students to remain cognitively engaged and active. Cognitive engagement implies that "a student should think independently, process new knowledge, form judgments and conclusions autonomously, test what has been learned in practice, and

think critically about all matters“ (Јукић, 2005: 75). While these guidelines may appear overly ambitious for class teaching, teacher competence for the effective realization of the integrative system necessarily includes the ability to guide and foster students' cognitive activation.

A very important aspect of implementing integrative teaching concerns student motivation. In essence, motivation represents a key element in initiating integration within the teaching process. It drives learning and is determined by its direction, intensity, and persistence (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). Understood in this way, motivation must have a clearly defined orientation—that is, a goal toward which it is directed—the amount of effort a student is willing to invest in fulfilling their needs and interests, and the level of perseverance in maintaining this effort. The greater the intensity, the more effort a student will devote to accomplishing tasks. Persistence reflects the duration of maintaining a given level of effort in a particular direction. For the effective realization of integrative teaching, it is therefore necessary to create conditions that foster students' intrinsic motivation, which in turn contributes to building a positive classroom climate. In this way, the entire teaching process becomes both more productive and more effective.

Within the domain related to the assessment and evaluation of integrative teaching, teachers are expected to: monitor and evaluate the achieved horizontal and vertical connections between content; observe and assess different aspects of student learning and progress through the use of varied evaluation techniques; and evaluate their own work by analyzing and tracking student motivation, satisfaction, classroom engagement, independence, and perseverance. Each of these elements of teacher competence in the domain of assessment and evaluation contributes to the overall effectiveness of the teaching process based on the integrative system. It is particularly important to emphasize the role of self-assessment, as it fosters the teacher's development as a reflective practitioner.

In addition to the aspects already mentioned, for a teacher to successfully implement instruction based on the idea of integration, it is necessary that they: engage in continuous professional development within both the subject discipline and the fields of didactics and educational technology; enhance their pedagogical practice through the analysis of student achievement; broaden their knowledge of children's psychophysical and social development, as well as motivation; and develop skills for effective teamwork.

Another way in which teachers can enhance the quality of their instruction is by keeping up to date with scientific and professional literature, which is particularly important for the implementation of the integrative system. Another opportunity for professional development is participation in webinars. These courses not only provide insight into new and innovative solutions in the field of teaching but also enable teachers to share experiences with colleagues, thereby improving their own practice.

3. Teacher Competencies for the Implementation of Teamwork

In scholarly literature, a team is often described as a type of formal organization of a shared work or business process, united by common goals and the interests of its members, as well as a shared mission and tasks (Maddux, 1992). Teamwork, in turn, is defined as a collaborative process that enables individuals to achieve outstanding results (Scarnati, 2001). Further, the literature emphasizes that a team is characterized by a common goal or purpose, where all members are able to develop effective interpersonal relationships in order to contribute to the achievement of the defined objective. A team should operate in an environment that fosters the exchange of knowledge and skills. Many authors (Bradley & Frederic, 1997; Luca & Tarricone, 2001; Oliver, 2001) believe that one of the essential elements of teamwork is the focus of individuals on a shared goal. Across these definitions, the term "shared" is consistently highlighted, relating to collective work and collective objective.

Teamwork in schools represents an important means of supporting the organizational process of learning, that is, it assumes that teachers should gain experience through collaboration, and that, by using the newly acquired knowledge, they are able to improve their instructional practice (Elkjaer, 2003). This definition may serve as a basis for conceptualizing teamwork among teachers in primary education when designing instruction founded on an integrative system. If we begin with the premise that a team is a small group oriented toward shared goals and interests, then in this context teachers

constitute a group striving to implement instruction in accordance with the requirements of integration. The aim is the creation of well-planned and well-executed teaching, as well as the intellectual engagement of students. Within contemporary instruction based on the integrative approach, for a teacher to be effective, it is essential that they perceive themselves as part of a team and actively engage in teamwork within the educational process (Gerlach, 2002).

In the following section, we will present several research projects that highlight how collaboration within teams can serve as an important resource for teachers' professional development and for enhancing instruction based on the idea of integration. The literature (Little, 2003; Minnett, 2003) emphasizes that teacher collaboration in teams entails joint planning, preparation, implementation, and evaluation of teaching. In practice, this means that teachers exchange ideas and communicate with one another regarding the delivery of lessons, thereby achieving higher-quality instruction. Instruction improves when teachers are given the opportunity to apply ideas developed through teamwork, particularly in collaboration with colleagues both within and beyond the school context (Lieberman & Miller, 2000). These authors highlight the positive effects of teamwork, noting that teaching grounded in team collaboration and the integrative system fosters greater productivity in lesson design, a richer recognition of diversity and variety, and an enhanced capacity to adapt to contemporary educational demands (Talbert & McLaughlin, 2002). Within the framework of integrative teaching, recognizing and bringing together diverse perspectives into a coherent whole is of particular importance.

In addition, it is important to emphasize the key characteristics of teamwork that are essential for the implementation of an integrative approach to teaching. These include: commitment to team success and shared goals—team members should be dedicated, motivated, and engaged, with the aim of achieving the highest possible standards; cohesion among team members—the team should foster an environment in which collective contributions exceed what individuals could accomplish on their own; interpersonal skills—these involve the ability to engage in open discussion on all matters with fellow team members; open communication and constructive feedback—active listening and recognition of individual contributions are vital, and members should be willing both to give and to receive constructive criticism while providing authentic feedback; appropriate team composition—this is fundamental to creating a successful team, as members need to be fully aware of their specific roles and understand what is expected of them in terms of contribution; commitment to team processes, leadership, and accountability—each member must take responsibility for their input and its impact on the team (Васић, 2004).

Based on the above, it can be concluded that mastering the skill of teamwork enables the development of professional competence and equips teachers to adopt new methodological approaches in the instructional process. By forming a team, teachers collectively generate innovative ideas for implementing teaching grounded in the integrative system. This approach requires well-developed social and intercultural competencies, including the ability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, communicate effectively, and demonstrate a willingness to work toward shared goals (Ђурановић, 2007). Moreover, these competencies are manifested in specific emotional and cognitive abilities—such as flexible behavior and communication, empathy, motivation to adapt, and openness to alternative perspectives (Hrvatić, 2007). In short, a team functions most effectively when the knowledge and expertise of its members are complementary and are applied in alignment with the objectives they seek to achieve.

Teamwork among teachers emerges as a necessary practice within the contemporary educational system, particularly when delivering instructional content designed according to the principles of integration. Given the complexity and multifaceted nature of implementing the integrative system in the teaching process, such collaborative work can significantly enhance the effectiveness of applying this methodological approach in class teaching.

Teacher teamwork begins with the formation of a group and a working or team meeting, during which specific expectations and goals are shared. It is important to note that each team member should share some of their prior experiences within the teaching process, particularly those shaped according to the principles of integration. The first stage involves defining a specific instructional unit to be implemented using the integrative system. Following this, teachers should identify the advantages and

limitations of applying this system to the selected instructional unit. Teamwork entails that each teacher assumes responsibility for a portion of the work in which they feel sufficiently skilled and competent. In practice, this means that each teacher selects a domain aligned with their preferences or expertise. For example, a teacher with an interest in musical arts or natural sciences contributes to the team by providing information and ideas within that domain. Collaborative work among teachers includes joint preparation for the delivery of the instructional unit, shared allocation of tasks, coordinated implementation according to the agreed-upon plan, joint analysis, and shared responsibility for the outcomes (Бjедов, 2004).

In the following section, we will present several conceptual methodological approaches for teacher teamwork through the application of the integrative system in lesson implementation. It is important to emphasize that the goals defined within the team, in these cases, are short-term and relate exclusively to the execution of one instructional unit.

One possible example could be an integrative day centered around a single theme—for instance, “Spring.” Prior to implementation, several teachers meet in a team meeting to determine how they will plan and deliver the chosen instructional theme. During this meeting, teachers also assign roles: one teacher may be responsible for the Serbian language part, another for science and social studies, a third for the arts, a fourth for folk traditions, and so on. Naturally, during the team meeting, teachers collaboratively propose solutions for all areas and, according to their own affinities, select one area to focus on. Each teacher then prepares their designated area, which is implemented in the lesson based on the concept of interdisciplinary connections. During instruction, teachers rotate between classes using a station method: the teacher responsible for one area, after completing the lesson with their own class, moves to another class, while another teacher takes their place. After four instructional periods, each teacher will have delivered their area in every class. It is then essential to conduct an evaluative discussion, in which each teacher provides feedback on how their area was implemented across the different classes.

The creation of a lesson unit based on the integrative system, with the application of teamwork, is feasible when the teachers of a particular grade collaboratively study the lesson unit and prepare the lesson, while one teacher conducts the actual lesson. Teachers who are not delivering the lesson attend the class as observers. Two variants can be distinguished in this context: the teacher delivering the lesson may conduct it only with their own class, or the teacher may deliver the lesson across all classes. After the implementation of the lesson unit, it is important to carry out an evaluation through an open discussion. In cases where teachers choose the first variant, delivering the lesson in only one class, it is possible to attempt a subsequent implementation enriched with new suggestions and ideas to enhance the effectiveness of applying the integrative system.

In class teaching, it is possible to form a team of teachers in which the school pedagogue acts as the team leader. In this role, the pedagogue provides theoretical guidance to teachers on how to plan, prepare, and implement lessons based on the integrative system. Naturally, within this model, it is also essential to define which lesson unit the teachers intend to implement according to the requirements of integration. The pedagogue should also attend the lessons in order to provide feedback during the evaluation discussion, highlighting any shortcomings and helping teachers improve their instructional practice.

The presented models are depicted as teacher teams formed within a single school. However, teacher teams can also be established outside schools as well. In this context, several conceptual solutions can be proposed. A teacher team can also be formed through the collaborative efforts of several teachers from different schools. In this case, it is necessary for the teachers to meet in a team meeting, where they will define which lesson unit they will prepare and implement in their respective classes. This model can be applied in two variants: one teacher conducts the lesson while colleagues observe; or the lesson is conducted without the presence of colleagues. The first variant of such collaborative work can be challenging to implement, as teachers need to coordinate their schedules, which is particularly difficult given that each teacher has other classes and is based in a different school. Despite this organizational challenge, this form of teacher teamwork can be highly beneficial for enhancing teaching practice. Therefore, this model involves implementing a lesson based on the correlation-integrative

system in one school, where one teacher conducts the lesson while other team members are present in the classroom. On the following day, another teacher implements the lesson in their own school with the presence of their colleagues. Once the planned lessons across the schools have been delivered, the teachers meet to conduct an evaluation. During this evaluation, teachers are expected to provide suggestions, praise, and constructive criticism regarding the lessons that were implemented.

The second variant of this type of team collaboration is simpler to implement. The essence is that teachers from several schools jointly define the objective and collaboratively prepare the lesson unit during a team meeting. Each teacher then implements the lesson unit in their own school, after which they meet for an evaluative discussion.

Teacher teamwork can also be facilitated through the use of modern technology, specifically via the internet. In the professional literature examining contemporary management practices, the concept of a virtual team is presented as a viable option for modern work environments. A virtual team represents a form of temporary collaborative engagement among experts or organizations, aimed at increasing productivity and competitiveness; once specific objectives or projects are achieved, the team members disband (Kramer, 2001). This model of teamwork can be applied in class teaching when implementing a lesson unit based on the integrative system.

In a virtual working environment, teachers collaborate while remaining physically separated, as they are located in different places. They communicate through the internet, video conferencing, and other communication tools in order to successfully exchange information and knowledge, collaborate, and coordinate their activities (Мојић, 2003). Such a virtual team of teachers can be formed across multiple cities, with team meetings conducted via computer. After the meeting, teachers deliver their lessons and may also record their classes to present them to colleagues. Evaluation can be conducted online or through face-to-face meetings, allowing teachers to share their experiences regarding the implemented lessons. This mode of work, which is not constrained by boundaries, physical space, or time, promotes and enhances professional interaction and communication, which in turn positively impacts the quality of teaching.

4. Conclusion

Even the most carefully designed curricula and the best working conditions—both of which are undeniably important—mean nothing if a teacher does not perform their duties responsibly and professionally. Success in working with students largely depends on the teacher’s personality, skillfulness, creativity, pedagogical expertise, and work ethic. First and foremost, a teacher must possess a solid foundation of knowledge in the natural sciences, social sciences, arts, and related skills in order to effectively plan and implement integrative teaching. Equally important are competencies in didactics and methodology, which provide the professional knowledge necessary for the application of integrative teaching (Стојадиновић, 2017). Namely, a teacher creates classroom situations based on scientific and professional knowledge, representing specific perspectives while also considering and responding to the views and needs of students in a timely manner. In this context, a competent teacher must be capable of planning and implementing certain innovations aimed at enhancing the teaching process, thereby contributing to the overall development and progress of students.

Teamwork is a form of instructional practice that can effectively make the complex integrative system more accessible for implementation in class teaching. Teamwork involves the division of tasks based on the individual abilities and preferences of teachers. When teachers collaborate to create a lesson unit grounded in the integrative system, this not only fosters crucial teacher interaction but also generates highly creative approaches to instructional methodology. The solutions developed by team members can potentially be far more effective than those that an individual teacher might devise independently (Pavlović Breneselović, 2010). Teachers who engage in teamwork continuously enhance their ability to produce desirable educational outcomes.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the implementation of teacher teamwork in the planning and delivery of lesson units based on the integrative system not only facilitates the exchange of productive

ideas but also serves as an effective form of professional development for each team member. This, in turn, positively impacts the growth, learning, and overall progress of students.

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THE VALUE OF MULTICULTURAL INTELLIGENCE FOR AN EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

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Abstract

Multicultural intelligence is a key competence in modern education, enabling teachers to understand, respect, and engage effectively with diverse cultural perspectives. It integrates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, allowing teachers to adapt their practices, communicate empathetically, and foster inclusive learning environments. Multicultural intelligence emphasizes active engagement, cultural awareness, and the creation of equitable educational experiences for all participants. This conceptual paper explores the role of multicultural intelligence in promoting empathy, tolerance, and collaboration among students. It highlights strategies for integrating multicultural perspectives across subjects, including literature, history, arts, science, and mathematics, demonstrating how such approaches enrich learning and prepare students to navigate a culturally diverse world. By fostering understanding and respect for differences, teachers help develop socially responsible, open-minded, and globally competent individuals. Overall, multicultural intelligence serves as a foundation for effective, student-centered education, transforming diversity into a pedagogical resource and strengthening the quality and inclusivity of the educational process.

Keywords: *multicultural intelligence, intercultural education, diversity, competence, citizenship*

1. Introduction

In the contemporary educational landscape, classrooms are increasingly characterized by cultural diversity, reflecting the broader globalization of society. Students bring with them a range of languages, traditions, values, and life experiences, which influence how they learn and interact. While this diversity presents opportunities for enriched learning, it also poses challenges for teachers in terms of communication, classroom management, and fostering an inclusive environment.

Multicultural intelligence has emerged as a key competency for addressing these challenges. It encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, enabling teachers to understand cultural differences, respond empathetically, and adapt their teaching strategies to meet the needs of all students. This paper explains the role of multicultural intelligence in creating effective and inclusive educational processes. It highlights the interrelation of multicultural, cultural, and emotional intelligence, and suggests strategies for integrating multicultural perspectives across different subjects. By fostering empathy, communication, and tolerance, multicultural intelligence not only enhances academic outcomes but also prepares students to become socially responsible, open-minded, and globally competent citizens. The paper aims to provide teachers with a theoretical framework and practical insights for cultivating multicultural competence in the classroom, contributing to a more equitable, dynamic, and student-centered educational experience.

2. Theoretical overview of multicultural intelligence

Multicultural intelligence can be defined as the ability to effectively understand, respect, and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. It represents a multidimensional dimension that integrates knowledge, emotional awareness, and adaptive behavior within intercultural contexts. This type of intelligence extends beyond passive acceptance of diversity, demanding a conscious and

reflective engagement with cultural cues to foster genuine understanding and inclusive relationships (Dzerviniks, Ušča, Tarune, & Vindaca, 2024). Multicultural intelligence comprises three interrelated dimensions that form a holistic framework of multicultural competence. These dimensions allow teachers to comprehend cultural diversity at an intellectual level and to engage with it authentically and constructively, thereby making the educational process more equitable and effective for all students

- The cognitive dimension involves an individual's knowledge and awareness of cultural similarities and differences. It encompasses understanding the values, norms, communication styles, and worldviews characteristic of various cultures. Teachers with well-developed cognitive multicultural intelligence can identify cultural factors that influence students' learning preferences, motivation, and classroom behavior, allowing them to tailor instruction effectively.
- The emotional dimension includes empathy, openness, and the ability to manage emotions in intercultural interactions. It enables teachers to approach cultural diversity with sensitivity and respect, while avoiding stereotypes and ethnocentric judgments. Emotional multicultural intelligence supports the cultivation of trusting relationships and a positive classroom climate, where every student feels acknowledged, respected, and included (Rogers, 2024).
- The behavioral dimension refers to the ability to adapt verbal and nonverbal behaviors to diverse cultural expectations. It involves flexibility in communication, responsiveness to different perspectives, and the promotion of inclusive participation. Teachers who demonstrate behavioral multicultural intelligence exemplify respect for diversity through their actions, instructional strategies, and classroom management, creating an environment in which all students can thrive (Directory, 2025).

2.1 Relationship between multicultural, cultural, and emotional intelligence

Multicultural, cultural, and emotional intelligence are closely interrelated constructs that together contribute to the development of effective interpersonal and educational competence. Although they share certain conceptual similarities, each focuses on a specific aspect of human interaction within diverse environments.

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is commonly defined as the capability to function effectively in environments characterized by cultural diversity. It highlights the importance of understanding and adapting to various cultural systems, communication patterns, and social norms. As a multidimensional construct, cultural intelligence integrates cognitive understanding, motivational drive, and behavioral adaptability, enabling individuals to navigate intercultural interactions successfully. Unlike emotional intelligence, which focuses primarily on recognizing and managing emotions, cultural intelligence emphasizes the ability to operate effectively across culturally diverse settings. It entails a deep awareness of and responsiveness to the values, beliefs, and communication styles inherent in different cultural groups (Rogers, 2024). Cultural intelligence holds particular significance in the educational context, where teachers need to navigate increasingly complex cultural landscapes while effectively managing the learning process. This necessitates a strategic and reflective approach that embeds cultural intelligence into all dimensions of educational practice — from the teaching and learning process to decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution (Directory, 2025).

Multicultural intelligence (MCQ), on the other hand, expands the concept of cultural intelligence by integrating broader social, ethical, and pedagogical perspectives. It goes beyond the ability to adapt to different cultural contexts and encompasses a commitment to equity, social justice, and intercultural collaboration. This form of intelligence involves not only recognizing and understanding cultural differences but also valuing them as meaningful resources that enrich learning, creativity, and collective problem-solving. Within the educational sphere, multicultural intelligence highlights the importance of inclusivity, empathy, and the creation of an environment where students from diverse backgrounds can feel respected and empowered to participate fully. It encourages teachers to move from passive awareness toward active engagement — fostering dialogue, mutual respect, and intercultural understanding. While cultural intelligence primarily focuses on adaptation and effective functioning across diverse contexts, multicultural intelligence extends this framework by fostering collaborative learning, authentic intercultural relationships, and a profound appreciation of diversity as a source of educational enrichment. (Mahdi, 2021).

Emotional intelligence (EQ), originally conceptualized by Goleman (1995), refers to the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions — both one's own and those of others. It encompasses emotional awareness, empathy, and self-regulation as essential components of effective interpersonal functioning (Benić, 2025). Within multicultural and culturally diverse contexts, emotional intelligence serves as a foundational capacity that enhances one's ability to engage respectfully and sensitively with others. In education, emotional intelligence significantly contributes to the development of both multicultural and cultural intelligence, as it enables teachers to interpret emotional cues accurately, respond empathetically, and manage classroom dynamics constructively. Teachers with high levels of emotional intelligence can more easily deal with challenges related to diversity, mediate conflicts, and foster an atmosphere of trust, cooperation, and psychological safety that benefits all students (Segal, Smith, & Robinson, 2024).

In essence, emotional intelligence serves as the emotional foundation, cultural intelligence as the cognitive-structural framework, and multicultural intelligence as the applied, integrative competence that unites both emotional and cognitive aspects within educational and social practice. Together, they empower teachers to transform diversity into a source of enrichment, innovation, and mutual understanding in the learning process (Khan, Wang, Malik, & Ganiyu, 2020). Research supports the view that emotional and cultural intelligences are complementary capacities that jointly enhance intercultural competence and adaptive performance (Crowne, 2013). Studies also show that integrating emotional awareness and cultural adaptability contributes to improved communication, collaboration, and learning outcomes in diverse educational settings (Ng, Dyne, & Ang, 2012).

3. The value of multicultural awareness and adaptability in the modern classroom

In today's globalized educational landscape, multicultural awareness and adaptability have become essential competencies for both teachers and students. Classrooms are increasingly characterized by cultural diversity, where learners bring a variety of languages, traditions, values, and prior educational experiences. This diversity enriches the learning environment, yet it also demands a conscious and reflective effort from teachers to transform it into a constructive and inclusive educational resource. Multicultural awareness entails recognizing and valuing the presence of diverse cultural identities within the classroom. It involves understanding how students' cultural backgrounds shape their perceptions, communication styles, motivation, and learning approaches. Developing this awareness enables teachers to identify and overcome unconscious biases, stereotypes, and assumptions that may hinder equitable participation and academic success (Sharma, 2025).

Adaptability further enhances multicultural awareness by enabling teachers to adjust their teaching methods, communication approaches, and classroom management strategies to meet the diverse cultural and individual needs of their students. Adaptable teachers demonstrate flexibility in perspective, integrate multiple viewpoints, and employ differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse learning preferences and expectations. Together, multicultural awareness and adaptability foster intercultural empathy—the capacity to understand and relate to others' experiences from their cultural standpoint. Such empathy promotes collaboration, reduces prejudice, and nurtures mutual respect among students. Consequently, the classroom becomes a dynamic environment that fosters not only knowledge acquisition but also the development of social cohesion, civic responsibility, and democratic values. Teachers who demonstrate these competencies cultivate learning environments that promote active participation, equity, and meaningful intercultural dialogue—fundamental elements of an effective and learner-centered educational process. (University, 2024).

3.1 The role of the teacher as a mediator of cultures

In a multicultural educational environment, the teacher assumes a pivotal role as a mediator of cultures. A cultural mediator is an individual who facilitates communication and understanding between people from different cultural backgrounds. He acts as an intermediary, helping to bridge the gap between diverse groups by interpreting languages, explaining cultural norms, and resolving conflicts that may arise due to cultural differences (Europea, 2024). The teacher's role extends beyond traditional

instruction, encompassing the responsibility to bridge diverse cultural perspectives, foster mutual understanding, and cultivate a learning environment in which all students feel respected, included, and motivated to learn. Acting as a cultural mediator means that the teacher not only transfers knowledge but also facilitates intercultural dialogue and social inclusion within the classroom.

Teachers who embrace this mediating role understand that education is deeply influenced by cultural context. They recognize that each student's worldview, communication style, and learning behavior are shaped by their cultural background. As cultural mediators, teachers actively encourage intercultural communication by fostering openness, curiosity, and empathy. They model interaction and demonstrate how diverse perspectives can coexist and enrich collective understanding. Through structured discussions, collaborative projects, and inclusive instructional materials, teachers foster students' intercultural competence—the ability to engage effectively and respectfully across cultural boundaries (Belgium, 2024).

Furthermore, teachers play a crucial role in managing and resolving disputes that may stem from cultural misunderstandings or biases. They promote equality and ensure that every student has an equal voice in classroom activities. In this way, the teacher becomes not only a facilitator of learning but also a guardian of social harmony and inclusion (Ulbricht, 2022). The teacher's function as a mediator of cultures strengthens the overall quality of the educational process. It transforms the classroom into a dynamic, intercultural community where diversity is recognized as a pedagogical resource rather than a challenge. Through their mediating role, teachers help shape empathetic, open-minded, and globally competent individuals—essential qualities for success in today's interconnected world.

3.2 Communication, tolerance, and empathy in multicultural intelligence

Effective communication, tolerance, and empathy represent the foundation of multicultural intelligence and are indispensable for successful interaction in diverse educational environments. They enable teachers and students to transcend cultural barriers, build mutual understanding, and create an atmosphere of trust and respect. In a multicultural classroom, communication is not merely the transmission of information but a dynamic process of meaning-making shaped by cultural values, social norms, and emotional awareness.

Within the framework of multicultural intelligence, communication skills encompass the capacity to express and interpret messages with awareness and sensitivity to cultural diversity. This includes awareness of verbal and non-verbal communication patterns, tone, gestures, and context. At its core, intercultural communication focuses on understanding how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds interact and aims to provide guidance that facilitates effective communication across cultures (Kochoska, Gramatkovski, & Sivakova-Neshkovski, 2022). Teachers with developed intercultural communication skills adjust their language, examples, and teaching style to ensure clarity and inclusiveness. They promote dialogue, encourage active listening, and create opportunities for students to express themselves in culturally authentic ways. Clear and respectful communication helps prevent misunderstandings, reduces prejudice, and strengthens classroom relationships.

Tolerance is a crucial element of multicultural intelligence, fostering peaceful coexistence by promoting respect for diverse perspectives and cultures. An inclusive environment fosters mutual understanding and acceptance while creating the foundation for peaceful coexistence and meaningful collaboration among culturally diverse groups (Bryan, 2024). Tolerance does not imply passive acceptance; rather, it involves an active effort to identify common ground within what may initially seem incomprehensible, ambiguous, or unfamiliar, accompanied by a genuine desire to understand this diversity. It should not be construed as an uncritical submission to the opinions, views, or beliefs of others. Instead, tolerance represents a proactive, ethical approach to constructive and respectful engagement with individuals from different cultural, national, or religious backgrounds (Tsoraev, 2014). Tolerance is one of the most immediate outcomes of multicultural education. When students are exposed to different cultures, traditions, and belief systems in a respectful and open environment, they learn to appreciate diversity rather than fear it. Tolerance enables them to recognize that differences are

not barriers but opportunities for learning and cooperation. In this way, the classroom becomes a microcosm of a democratic society—one where inclusion, equity, and respect are central principles.

Empathy is a form of identification and a psychological capacity that allows an individual to understand another person's consciousness without necessarily adopting their perspective. It can be conceptualized in three interrelated dimensions: the first involves emotions, moods, and affective states; the second pertains to motives, desires, and aspirations; and the third encompasses opinions, attitudes, and cognitive representations (Stefanovska, 2020). In the educational context, empathy plays a crucial role in fostering multicultural intelligence. By recognizing and responding to students' emotions, motivations, and perspectives, teachers can create an inclusive learning environment. Empathy strengthens communication by fostering awareness and understanding of others' feelings and viewpoints. In the context of education, empathy enables teachers to recognize the unique challenges faced by students from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds and to respond with sensitivity and support. Empathetic teachers validate students' feelings, appreciate their cultural heritage, and use these insights to adapt their teaching approaches accordingly (Chung & Bemak, 2002).

Together, communication, tolerance, and empathy form the emotional and relational core of multicultural intelligence. These competencies empower teachers to act as cultural bridges—connecting diverse perspectives and fostering collaboration among students. The integration of communication skills, tolerance, and empathy in teaching practice not only enhances learning outcomes but also contributes to the development of compassionate, open-minded, and globally responsible citizens.

5. Incorporate multicultural themes across subjects

Incorporating multicultural themes across different subjects is a powerful approach to embedding diversity, inclusiveness, and intercultural understanding into the overall educational experience. Rather than limiting multicultural education to specific events or individual lessons, this approach integrates cultural perspectives throughout the entire curriculum, making diversity a natural and continuous part of learning. The following table illustrates how multicultural education can be integrated across different subject areas. It highlights specific strategies that teachers can employ to incorporate diverse cultural perspectives and demonstrates the corresponding skills and competencies that students can develop as a result. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also fosters empathy, critical thinking, and global awareness, preparing students to engage effectively in a culturally diverse world.

By embedding multicultural perspectives across all disciplines, teachers help students see that culture shapes every aspect of knowledge and human creativity. This holistic approach nurtures curiosity, respect, and global awareness. It prepares students not only for academic success but also for responsible participation in a culturally diverse world, where understanding and collaboration across differences are essential.

Subject/Area	Approach to multicultural integration	Educational outcomes / Skills developed
Language & Literature	Include texts written by authors from diverse cultural backgrounds; explore worldviews, traditions, and encourage discussions about cultural values, identity, and experiences through storytelling	Students develop empathy, critical thinking, and cultural awareness while enhancing language skills and appreciating diverse worldviews.
Social Studies	Present historical and social events from multiple perspectives; discuss cultural diversity, global interdependence, and social justice.	Students develop critical thinking, tolerance, and respect for different cultures while understanding interconnections among societies.
Natural Sciences	Highlight scientific contributions and discoveries from different cultures; explore how cultural contexts influence scientific and environmental understanding.	Students recognize that science is a universal human endeavor influenced by cultural contexts and learn to appreciate global contributions to knowledge.
Art Education	Explore artistic styles, symbols, and techniques from various cultural traditions through creative projects.	Students appreciate aesthetic diversity, express cultural values creatively, and respect different artistic heritages.
Music Education	Incorporate songs, musical instruments, and rhythms from diverse cultures, highlighting music as a universal medium of expression and communication.	Students experience cultural unity through music, develop auditory sensitivity, and foster appreciation for global musical traditions.
Physical Education	Incorporate traditional games, dances, and physical activities from diverse cultures to encourage teamwork and collaborative skills.	Students learn respect, collaboration, and inclusion through shared physical activities that celebrate cultural diversity.
Mathematics	Explore numeration systems, measurement concepts, and problem-solving approaches from various civilizations.	Students understand mathematics as a shared human achievement and develop respect for diverse intellectual traditions.

Table 1. Multicultural Integration Across Subject Areas

Conclusion

Multicultural intelligence represents a crucial competence in modern education, enabling teachers to effectively navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by culturally diverse classrooms. By integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, teachers can understand cultural differences, foster empathy, and promote classroom tolerance. Its application across subjects enhances student engagement, critical thinking, and global awareness, transforming diversity into a valuable educational resource. Teachers, acting as cultural mediators, transform diversity into a pedagogical asset, bridging differences and encouraging collaboration. Such an approach not only enhances academic outcomes but also supports the development of socially responsible, open-minded, and globally competent citizens. Multicultural intelligence serves as a foundation for student-centered education, where diversity is recognized as a resource rather than a challenge. Cultivating multicultural intelligence supports the development of socially responsible, open-minded, and globally competent individuals, preparing students to thrive in an interconnected and diverse world, reinforcing social cohesion, equity, and mutual understanding within and beyond the classroom.

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OTHERNESS AND GENDER IN THE LITERATURE CLASSROOM IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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Abstract

This study explores the literary construction of Otherness within the Macedonian high school curriculum, focusing on three canonical works: Chekhov's Uncle Vanya, Balzac's The Magic Skin, and Cervantes' Don Quixote. Through qualitative observation of classroom discussions and interpretive analysis, it examines how identity is forged against the figure of the outsider, tracing the persistence of exclusion across emotional, social, and gendered dimensions. From the alienated longings of Chekhov's characters to the class anxieties of Balzac's hero and the quixotic ideals of Cervantes' knight, Otherness emerges not as a static label but as a dynamic tension through which power, desire, and belonging are negotiated. Feminist critique sharpens this inquiry, exposing the subtle yet enduring ways in which patriarchal structures inscribe womanhood as the perpetual Other.

Keywords: Otherness, Literature curriculum, Literature classroom

Introduction

The notion of Otherness is as old as human civilization itself. From the earliest records of antiquity, we witness how language, culture, and belief became lines of demarcation between those who belonged and those cast aside as different. The ancient Greeks, upon hearing foreign tongues, dismissed them as the incomprehensible chatter of "barbarians," reducing entire peoples to the status of outsiders—those who did not speak as they did, who did not belong. In this construction of the Other, exclusion was not only possible but justified: as Sarkanac observes, the barbarian could be treated with violence, the enslaved and the woman condemned to indifference, denied the rights of citizenship and the dignity of equality.

Through the Middle Ages, the contours of Otherness shifted but did not soften. Religious dissenters, homosexuals, and women branded as agents of darkness carried the burden of exclusion. Later epochs found new Others: unfamiliar cultures, heretics, foreigners at the edges of empires, all marked as existential threats or as objects of suspicion. This pattern persists even in the modern age. The early twenty-first century still fabricates new categories of outsiders – illegal migrants, asylum seekers, political exiles, Muslim "terrorists," Balkan "invaders", all figured as Others against which the stability of the self-proclaimed center is defined.

This persistence of Otherness makes its study not only relevant but urgent. In the wake of renewed feminist struggles and ongoing debates on identity and belonging, the question of how the Other is represented acquires fresh resonance. And yet, despite its presence in philosophy, politics, and everyday discourse, literature, the most fertile of human cultural expressions, remains underexplored through this lens. Scholarly attention has rarely paused to consider how Otherness is imagined, inscribed, and perpetuated within the texts that shape collective consciousness. Even less has it investigated the literary

curriculum, where young readers in secondary schools encounter prose works that may, silently and powerfully, frame their perceptions of the "Other."

This study, therefore turns its gaze to the representation of Otherness in prose literature studied in Macedonian language classes in high schools. By examining a purposeful sample of three curriculum-approved books, the study aims to explore Otherness; to trace the shadows cast by identity itself, and to ask what kind of futures might be possible when the margins are no longer merely margins, but voices in their own right.

2. Literature review/Broader research context

The concept of Otherness has emerged as one of the central concerns of cultural and literary theory at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Its trajectory as a theoretical term reveals a rich crossing of intellectual traditions—first appearing in hermeneutics and psychoanalysis before finding broader resonance within poststructuralist thought. In hermeneutics, the Other is conceived as a projection of the Self, a necessary interlocutor through which identity takes shape, while in psychoanalysis, the relation is inverted: the Self is itself always a projection of the Other (Biti, 1997: 73). This dialogic tension has provided scholars with fertile ground to rethink subjectivity, difference, and the very act of interpretation.

As the term gained broader usage, its meaning multiplied, generating new definitions, expansions, and contextual deployments. Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949) is one of the earliest works to position Otherness explicitly within the framework of gender studies. Beauvoir insists that in a male-dominated culture, woman is not recognized as an autonomous subject but rather as the Other against which man defines himself. She is rendered insignificant, derivative, and secondary, positioned as the inessential, while man is constructed as the essential, the Subject, the Absolute. By framing woman in relation to man rather than the reverse, Beauvoir exposes an asymmetry that underpins not only gender relations but the very cultural logic of domination. Her work, situated within post-war Western feminism, opens a path to understanding Otherness as a structural condition of power.

Parallel to this, in the field of colonial and postcolonial theory, Otherness finds powerful articulation in the works of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said. Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks (1952) explores how colonial systems impose racialized hierarchies, coding Blackness as Other within a white-dominated cultural matrix, thereby producing psychological alienation and a fractured selfhood. Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) takes these questions further, revealing how the West systematically constructs the East as its Other—exotic, backward, threatening—an imagined opposite through which Western identity defines itself as rational, modern, and superior. These seminal works enrich the discourse by situating Otherness within structures of race, class, nation, and empire, demonstrating its reach beyond the individual psyche into the vast networks of cultural and political domination.

Building on these intellectual foundations, Juri Lotman (2006: 191) further elaborates the opposition between the Self and the Other, or between Us and Them, through the powerful binaries of black and white, or good and evil. He concludes that the opposition of "own" versus "foreign" is often perceived as a variant of moral contrasts such as "just" versus "wrong" or "good" versus "bad." In this framework, what is foreign is imagined as inherently wrong or threatening, a fundamental distortion that nurtures exclusion and fear. This conceptualization echoes deeply in cultural narratives, reinforcing how difference becomes synonymous with fault or danger.

Noam Chomski (2007: 133) offers a scathing commentary on similar dynamics in the colonial context. He points to the colonial attitude of "we", the colonizers, toward "they," the indigenous peoples, whom they derisively label as merciless savage Indians who nearly eradicated them. Chomski extends this biting irony to include the racialized treatment of Black populations and Chinese immigrants, exposing a pattern of dismissiveness, violence, and dehumanization inherent in the colonial "us versus them" rhetoric. These perspectives best show how the construction of the Other is not just a cultural or theoretical abstraction but a lived political reality with devastating consequences.

Thus, from its roots in hermeneutic and psychoanalytic theory to its expansion within modern discourse, the term Otherness has evolved as a prism through which power relations and cultural identities can be interrogated. It signifies more than mere alterity: it reveals the asymmetries at the heart

of representation, the ways in which narratives of belonging and exclusion are woven into both social structures and literary texts. For literature, this opens the possibility of reading not only for what is said, but also for how Otherness is inscribed: who speaks, who is silenced, and how the margins teach us to see the center anew.

3. Methods

The study employs a qualitative methodology with a comparative approach aimed at 1) Analyzing the phenomenon of Otherness in prose literary works studied in the classes in Macedonian language, at a high school level, and 2) The elaboration on the notion of Otherness during these classes. The research design is descriptive, focusing on the collection of data aimed at detailed description.

The purposeful sample consists of three literary works and three teachers, chosen intentionally by the researcher to serve the study's objectives. The selected texts include Chekhov's Uncle Vanya (analyzed with 1st year students), Balzac's The Magic Skin/The Peau de Chagrin (analyzed with 1st year students), and Cervantes' Don Quixote (analyzed with 2nd year students).

Data collection involved a thematic analysis of the selected works and a systematic and direct observation of teachers and students during Macedonian language lessons in three high schools: "Taki Daskalo" – Bitola, "Kuzman Shapkarev" – Bitola, and "Josip Broz-Tito" – Bitola. Observations were conducted over a one-month period from November 21 to December 21, 2023. The language lessons were carefully observed using observation protocols developed by the researcher, which served as tools to gather accurate and comprehensive data for subsequent analysis. The analysis adopts a general qualitative interpretive-inductive method, allowing patterns and meanings related to Otherness to emerge organically from the observed data.

4. (Analysis), results and discussion

Classroom observations focused on how students engaged with the selected works: Miguel de Cervantes's novel Don Quixote, Anton Chekhov's psychological drama Uncle Vanya, and Honoré de Balzac's novel The Magic Skin. It is important to note, however, that while the concept of Otherness was never directly named or emphasized by the teacher, the pedagogical methods implicitly guided students toward its underlying dynamics.

Observations of the class sessions on Uncle Vanya revealed students at work on the text. The teacher's use of the "Five Whys" technique encouraged students to investigate opposing questions, like "Why is it so?" and "Why is it not so?", which inherently led them to uncover binaries such as is–is not, sad–happy, and dissatisfied–satisfied (Lotman, 2006). This interactive approach implicitly introduced Otherness as a dynamic tension within human experience and literary characterization, rather than a fixed academic label.

During these lessons, students observed that the characters are deeply unhappy, with their pain often stemming from unmet desires and feelings of alienation generated through relationships with others. This was analyzed using a framework informed by Freudian psychology, which locates sources of suffering in tensions between the self, the external world, and the social Other (Freud, 1988). Discussions highlighted specific examples: Vanya's unrequited love for Elena, Astrov's emotional distance, and Sonya's loneliness, all illustrating the intersection of marginalization and emotional wellbeing.

It is also interesting to note that class dialogue centered on the female characters, Elena and Sonya, marking a shift from earlier literary works where women were often marginal or merely symbolic. Students demonstrated awareness of the patriarchal cultural frames that have historically positioned women as "Other." Feminist critiques shared in class challenged the reduction of women to objects of desire or moral sentiment, highlighting debates around hyperfeminism and nationalism and the struggle for women's visibility and agency in literature and society (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Showalter, 1977).

In studying Balzac's The Magic Skin, students worked directly with the text and participated in class discussions focused on the critique of bourgeois materialism and social stratification. They explored how the protagonist, Raphael, experiences a form of implicit Otherness through his poverty and exclusion from the affluent elite, mirroring real social divisions between "us" and "them." Classroom

dialogues reflected on critiques, such as those by Chomsky (2007), suggesting that democracy often hides persistent power imbalances and control mechanisms that perpetuate these divisions. Raphael's pact with the magic skin, which grants wishes at the cost of his lifespan, was discussed not only as a literary symbol but as a metaphor for human desire and the limits of social mobility in unequal systems.

The female characters in The Magic Skin also made for a vivid class discussion, again without directly invoking the term 'Otherness.' Fedora was depicted as manipulative and selfish, which students identified as an example of stereotypes used to justify patriarchal marginalization. Pauline, by contrast, was viewed as an embodiment of modesty and genuine love, which challenged negative tropes and aligned with feminist efforts to reclaim women's moral and social identities beyond caricature (Showalter, 1977; Tong, 1998). These discussions revealed students' understanding of how the novel's gender dynamics reflect and reinforce patriarchal power structures, and how feminist criticism offers tools to critique and rethink these portrayals.

Observations of classes on Don Quixote focused on students' exploration of the protagonist's delusional reality and his interaction with the socio-historical norms of 17th-century Spain. Students analyzed Don Quixote's transformation of ordinary inns into castles and common farm girls into ladies, engaging with the concept of an individual's internal world clashing with external, shared reality. The classroom discussions implicitly addressed the Othering of difference by examining how the world and its inhabitants react to Quixote's refusal to conform to prevailing sanity and social structures.

4.1. Further Discussion and a Feminist Perspective

One could argue that Don Quixote shines a spotlight on the construction of Otherness through the contrasting figures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. This iconic duo embodies an interplay of opposites – madness and sanity, fantasy and reality, idealism and pragmatism, that illustrates how cultural stereotypes and ideological narratives shape perceptions of Self and Other (Lotman, 2006; Taylor, 2004). Don Quixote, the quixotic dreamer, chases chivalric fantasies, while Sancho, his loyal squire, navigates the world with earthy wisdom and skepticism. Their relationship is profoundly dialogic and symbiotic: Sancho anchors Don Quixote's illusions with practical sensibility, and in turn, Don Quixote lifts Sancho beyond mundanity toward something noble and transformative (Vitória, 2016; SparkNotes, 2025). This dynamic reflects identity as relational and perpetually contested, undercutting any notion of fixed or stable selves.

In Uncle Vanya, Otherness is more intimately tied to emotional suffering and social estrangement, most acutely expressed in gendered terms. Elena and Sonya reveal how patriarchal structures cast womanhood as the eternal Other—framed as objects of desire, sources of emotional turbulence, and bearers of marginalization (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Their Otherness is no abstract theory but a palpable condition shaped by power hierarchies and cultural norms in both Balkan and global contexts. Feminist perspectives enrich this reading by challenging reductive portrayals, contesting the invisibility and instrumentalization of women, and emphasizing the complexity and agency ignored in patriarchal narratives (Showalter, 1977).

Likewise, The Magic Skin stages Otherness in socio-economic terms. Raphael's outsider status in the bourgeois order embodies the persistent "us versus them" divide typical of hierarchical societies (Chomski, 2007). The story's women—the manipulative Fedora and the modest Pauline—mirror contrasting gendered stereotypes that feminist criticism interrogates. Fedora exemplifies the trope of the femme fatale, weaponizing beauty within patriarchal confines, while Pauline's humble virtues reclaim a dignified, nuanced femininity (Showalter, 1977; Tong, 1998). Their portrayals reflect historical patterns of female marginalization and the ongoing feminist project to highlight women's multifaceted moral and social identities.

Across these works, Otherness emerges as a prism through which identity, power, and social relations are refracted—provoking reflection on the fluidity of human difference and the ethical need to transcend simplistic binaries. Feminist readings further underscore how gendered Otherness is both constructed and contested, urging a more equitable engagement with the diverse voices and experiences that literature can reveal.

A feminist lens reveals that the Other is most enduringly gendered. Across these texts, women occupy positions of desire and disruption, their bodies and voices framed as tests of male identity. Elena and Sonya in Uncle Vanya embody the quiet endurance and frustrated agency of women whose lives are shaped by patriarchal expectations; Fedora and Pauline in The Magic Skin are cast as archetypes—the dangerous seductress and the redeeming angel—through which male ambition and anxiety are played out. Even in Don Quixote, where gender recedes behind the spectacle of madness and idealism, the chivalric fantasies that drive the hero are steeped in the romanticization of female virtue. Feminist critique unsettles these portrayals, refusing the comfort of archetype and insisting on the complexity of women's subjectivities. It reminds us that to confront Otherness is also to confront the historical silencing of women, and that every act of reading can become an act of resistance—a reclaiming of the margins not as shadows of the center, but as centers in their own right.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of these three texts and the class observations demonstrate that Otherness is not merely a theoretical construct but a lived and felt reality: emotional, political, and profoundly human. Each work stages encounters with the unfamiliar, whether in the restless hearts of Chekhov's characters, the perilous temptations of Balzac's bourgeois world, or the dream-chasing defiance of Cervantes' errant knight. Yet beneath their differences lies a shared pattern: the Self becomes legible only through its relation to the Other. In the classroom, this recognition implicitly invites students to question the moral comfort of binaries, to see how language and narrative can both wound and awaken. Literature, in this sense, becomes an ethical arena, urging readers to move beyond inherited hierarchies toward a more capacious understanding of identity – one where difference is not a threat but a possibility.

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LIBRARY – KINDERGARTEN COLLABORATION IN FOSTERING EARLY READING HABITS

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"The soul is healed when you are with children." – Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky.

Abstract
Collaboration between libraries and kindergartens plays a vital role in fostering a love of reading during early childhood. These collaborations create an environment that supports early literacy by introducing children to books and promoting the development of reading habits from a young age. Interactive practices such as reading aloud, storytelling, and creative workshops not only spark curiosity and interest in literature but also contribute to children's emotional, social, and cognitive development. By working together, librarians and educators design programs and resources tailored to children's needs, ensuring continuous support in reading and learning. Through these integrated approaches, strong foundations are built for lifelong reading habits and the cultivation of future readers.

Keywords: *libraries, kindergartens, reading, fostering a love of reading, early childhood development, library programs for children.*

Introduction

The term literacy in the Macedonian language refers to the knowledge and skill of reading and writing. Reading represents an analytical-synthetic process, a cognitive activity that simultaneously unites several stages, leading the learner to master reading techniques properly and to develop the ability to comprehend what has been read. (Kitanova, 2016). There are various models of the reading process, which have been the subject of numerous scientific studies. Typically, the models are divided into three main categories: *bottom-up*, *top-down*, and interactive models. (Dascalova, 2010). Reading is a vital skill that enables individuals to develop, acquire, and share knowledge. Therefore, it is crucial to cultivate reading habits from an early age, fostering children's interest, desire, and curiosity for reading. The development of reading habits in children is best supported by parents engaging them in various book-related and reading activities. Later, when children become part of the community—especially in kindergartens—these preschool institutions, together with libraries, play a key role, alongside parents, in instilling a love of books in children. Libraries are responsible for adapting their resources to the needs of children, including adjusting the space, equipment, and library materials to suit children's age, needs, and potential intellectual development. In addition to library resources—such as space, equipment, and materials—libraries also need to implement new programs, projects, and activities aimed at children from an early age. This includes collaboration with preschool institutions through a range of initiatives—such as trainings, consultations, idea exchanges, and projects—designed to cultivate and strengthen children's abilities in reading, storytelling, empathy, and more. For this purpose, the education of librarians is very important, as they need to possess pedagogical and psychological competencies required for working with children and for designing new projects, activities, and programs that will contribute to the development of children, as well as to the growth of both educational institutions—libraries and kindergartens. Libraries worldwide develop a variety of programs for children, parents, educators, teachers, and other professionals working with children, to enhance reading skills and foster a lasting interest in and love for reading. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the numerous activities that libraries worldwide practice in their work with children.

Why Cooperation Between Libraries and Kindergartens is Important

Cooperation between libraries and kindergartens is important for several reasons. First and foremost, it fosters the early development of reading habits in children. Through collaboration between libraries and kindergartens, children can become familiar with books from an early age and develop an interest in reading, which forms the foundation for their future academic growth. Reading books and stories helps children develop language skills by expanding their vocabulary and enhancing text comprehension. Visits to libraries and workshops organized by libraries can inspire children to ask questions, explore new ideas, and develop creative thinking.

Activities such as group readings, storytelling aloud, or similar workshops teach children socialization skills, teamwork, cooperation, listening, and sharing ideas with their peers. Through collaborative programs, parents are engaged and motivated to read with their children, an important factor in cultivating family reading and learning practices. In their daily work with children, kindergarten staff have the opportunity to utilize library resources to plan or implement high-quality educational programs for the children. This means they can use library materials such as picture books, children's books, encyclopedias, and more to create themes for daily activities in kindergartens. Educators can utilize books containing ideas for educational games, puzzles, and activities designed to enhance children's cognitive skills. Libraries possess materials covering these aspects and can share them with educators. Libraries offer a variety of services and programs that provide children with access to information and education, which entails fulfilling the rights of children as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including:

- The child has the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds;
- Ensuring children have access to a wide range of appropriate library materials in various media;
- Assisting children in developing information literacy skills when using digital media;
- Implementing cultural and recreational programs focused on reading and literacy;
- Organizing diverse activities for children, parents, and educators;
- Removing barriers that children face and advocating for their freedom and safety;
- Encouraging children to become confident and competent individuals and citizens;
- Facilitating partnerships within the local community to jointly offer programs and services for all children and their families, including marginalized groups and those in economically disadvantaged situations.

Cooperation of Libraries Worldwide with Other Educational Institutions

The development of the first libraries dedicated to children and young people emerged toward the end of the 19th century. The earliest notable examples were American children's libraries, followed by libraries in France, the most prominent being the Bibliothèque de l'Heure Joyeuse in Paris, established in 1924. In the 1930s, the children's library in London had 10,000 registered children and was known for its exceptional collaboration with local primary schools. During the 1920s, Stockholm had a network of 29 children's libraries. In the Soviet Union, the most well-known children's library was the Soviet National Library *Lenin*, established in 1942, which was renowned for its reading rooms for children and young people.

United States of America

- *International Children's Digital Library (ICDL)* – This project existed and operated for more than 20 years, aiming to provide children worldwide with access to digital resources, specifically books for children, in 61 languages. The project began in 2002 at the University of Maryland in the USA, in collaboration with the Internet Archive. In implementing the project, children aged 6–14 also

participated alongside experts. Involving children proved to be an excellent choice, as their input helped create a website tailored to children of different ages. The primary goal of the project was to enhance children's understanding of global diversity, promote basic human values, and offer literature for education and leisure." Through this project, children had the opportunity to connect with libraries and reading, especially those who could not physically visit a library, such as children with disabilities or children living in rural areas without nearby libraries. The Library of Congress invited all national libraries worldwide to participate in the project and contribute to the creation of the digital collection. Users could access the collection for free, using an interface suitable for children aged 3–13. Materials were classified according to cover color, favorite characters, and book length. Advanced search options were also provided, as the collection was intended not only for children but also for parents, educators, librarians, publishers, and anyone interested in children's literature. Unfortunately, due to a lack of funding, the project ceased operations in April 2021.

- *Storytime* – This is one of the most popular and widespread programs for children in libraries across the USA and the United Kingdom. Story-reading activities conducted by librarians for children often include songs, rhymes, games, and short thematic exercises. The program aims to develop early reading skills, improve attention, and foster an interest in books from an early age. Additionally, there are supplementary activities such as **"***Craft Time,"* where children create something based on the story that was read.

- *1,000 Books Before Kindergarten* – This program motivates parents or caregivers to read 1,000 books to their children before they start attending kindergarten or school. The goal of the program is to foster a love of books and enhance children's cognitive skills. The program operates in a way that libraries provide a wide selection of books, picture books, and digital applications to track reading progress. When a child reaches certain milestones, they receive books or certificates as a reward.

Italy

- *Born to Read – Nati per Leggere* is a program established in 1999 to encourage parents to read to their children from an early age. The program provides specially selected books and reading guidance for parents and caregivers. The initiative aims to encourage reading, foster a passion for books, and develop a strong connection between children and literature. This program is an initiative of several organizations, including the Italian Pediatric Association, the Association of Librarians, and the Center for Health Education. The program targets children aged 0–6 and includes a variety of activities, such as workshops and readings in libraries or bookstores organized by librarians, volunteers, and pediatricians. It also provides advice and instructions for parents, for example, information about the importance of reading. The core idea is that reading from an early age stimulates child development, enriches vocabulary, and enhances emotional and cognitive intelligence. The program also has a significant social aspect, as it helps children develop communication skills and connect with their parents through shared storytelling. *Nati per Leggere* is very successful and widely accepted across Italy, and its example has inspired similar initiatives in other countries.

Portugal

- *Bebeteca* is a program in Portugal aimed at promoting reading among very young children, including their families. he concept of a bebeteca, derived from 'baby' and 'library,' refers to dedicated library spaces designed for parents and children aged 0–3 to enjoy reading and listening to stories, tales, or fables together. The program encourages parents to start reading to their children from an early age. Activities are designed to strengthen the bond between parents and children through shared reading and play. The program also provides opportunities for children to engage with their peers, promoting the growth of social and communicative abilities. *Bebeteca* is an excellent example of how libraries can play a vital role in early childhood development, creating a positive environment for learning and enjoyment.

Republic of North Macedonia

Libraries in North Macedonia provide and implement a wide range of programs, projects, and activities aimed at young children, focusing on their development, introducing them to libraries, books, and reading, and fostering motivation and interest in reading. Among these activities are meetings with children's authors, book promotions targeted to their age group, educational lectures, and programs on children's rights in collaboration with other institutions such as kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, faculties, universities, municipalities, and more. Additionally, there are creative workshops, children's music and theater performances, creative writing workshops, literary readings, and many other activities designed for children. Each year, the first week of October is dedicated to children under the motto *Children's Week* or *Week of the Child*. The first day of this week is celebrated as *Universal Children's Day*. On this occasion, a large number of libraries in North Macedonia organize projects and activities that pay special attention to children and help introduce them to the world of books.

Conclusion

In recent years, an increasing number of scientific studies have focused on topics related to early literacy, the development of reading habits in preschool-aged children, and the role of libraries in promoting reading. Research has also examined forms of cooperation between libraries and kindergartens, parents, schools, universities, and other institutions. One study found that regular library membership and visits within families significantly contribute to raising awareness and establishing the habit of parents reading to their children. The study's results emphasize the importance of library services in encouraging and sustaining reading habits among children aged 6 to 18. In 2021, a study was conducted in a kindergarten in the Bronx, focusing on regular use of library services and shared reading activities. The results showed a significant improvement in the educational achievements of children who regularly participated in library reading activities. Therefore, cooperation between libraries and kindergartens, as well as with all other cultural and educational institutions, is extremely important. Such collaboration provides numerous benefits for preschool-aged children, their parents, their communities, and society as a whole, emphasizing the importance of each country taking special care of its future generations.

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CONCEPTS AND MODELS OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION WITHIN SOCIAL PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

Education plays a crucial role in the development of individuals and society, yet traditional systems often fail to address the diverse needs of students. Alternative educational models have emerged as a response, offering flexible, individualized, and holistic approaches that promote active learning, creativity, and social inclusion. This paper explains prominent models of alternative education—Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, Freinet, and the Jena Plan—and their relationship to social pedagogy, with a focus on the comprehensive development of the child beyond academic achievement. Montessori encourages independent work and sensory development; Waldorf integrates art, music, and movement to engage multiple intelligences; Reggio Emilia treats the environment as a "third teacher" and fosters exploration; Freinet emphasizes self-directed learning, cooperative work, and practical experiences; and the Jena Plan promotes mixed-age collaboration and democratic participation. These models are particularly beneficial for children with special educational needs (SEN), including those with autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, dyslexia, and other developmental challenges, by providing individualized learning, adapted curricula, and safe, supportive environments. Key principles across these models include fostering emotional intelligence, promoting social interaction, cultivating self-confidence, encouraging creativity, and adopting inclusive practices. The paper highlights the potential of alternative education to enhance the inclusivity, quality, and sustainability of learning environments, demonstrating that integrating alternative approaches into traditional education can contribute to equitable, adaptive, and future-oriented educational systems.

Keywords: *pedagogy, inclusion, education, flexibility, development.*

1. Introduction

Education plays a fundamental role in the development of each individual and in shaping society as a whole. Although traditional educational systems remain the dominant model worldwide, they often fail to address the specific needs and learning styles of all students. As a result, there has been an increasing emphasis on exploring alternative approaches that promote flexibility, individuality, and holistic development.

Alternative educational models have emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional, rigid systems. They are grounded in progressive pedagogical theories that highlight the importance of active learning, learner autonomy, and the integration of education with real-life experiences. In essence, alternative education encompasses a variety of pedagogical frameworks that emphasize creativity, personal growth, and social inclusion.

Within this framework, **social pedagogy** plays a crucial role. It seeks to foster the comprehensive development of the individual while promoting inclusive educational practices that accommodate diverse life circumstances. The connection between alternative education and social pedagogy lies in their shared objective—to create learning environments that respect individual differences, enhance social development, and minimize barriers to learning.

This paper aims to examine the concept and significance of alternative education, its pedagogical principles and models, and its relationship with the theoretical foundations of social pedagogy. By analyzing various alternative educational models, this paper aims to illustrate the interconnection

between these two fields and their potential to contribute to more equitable, accessible, and high-quality education for all learners.

2. Concept and characteristics of alternative education

The introduction of alternative forms of education represents the first step toward the pluralization of education, a process that reflects the broader goal to which many European countries aspire. However, it is essential to note that school pluralism primarily refers to the coexistence of private and alternative schools, while the terms “private” and “alternative” education are not synonymous. The term “private education” often denotes educational institutions that operate outside the framework of public education—that is, education implemented and financially supported by entities other than the state (Damjanić, 2015). Alternative education initially emerged as a response to growing dissatisfaction with public schools, which often failed to adapt to societal and global changes. It developed as a reaction against the rigidity and stereotypes of the traditional school system, the lack of supportive teacher–student relationships, and the imbalance between didactic and educational goals (Admin, 2022). That is why, at the beginning of the 20th century, several models of school reform emerged, and together with those developed in the 1960s and 1970s, many of them have endured to this day. These diverse approaches are collectively referred to as alternative educational models. Alternative schools are established and structured for various purposes. According to Mary Anne Raywid, there are three main types of alternative schools:

1. **Corrective schools**, which are primarily designed for students at risk.
2. **Innovative schools**, which focus on introducing new curricula, applying non-traditional teaching methods, fostering educational partnerships, and creating a positive psychosocial classroom climate.
3. **Transformative schools**, whose goal is to promote systematic changes in education by ensuring diversity and flexibility through a range of learning opportunities (Milutinović & Zuković, 2012).

Developed countries continue to seek new solutions and mechanisms for implementing bottom-up educational reforms. Acknowledging the internal dynamics of schools has greatly shaped approaches to educational development and contributed to the emergence of new concepts in alternative education. The alternative education model has been evolving globally for over a century, supported by extensive literature and numerous international studies (Admin, 2022).

This type of education incorporates a wide range of approaches and models that redefine teaching methods, curriculum organization, and the function of the teacher compared to traditional schooling. Its main characteristics include:

- An individualized approach to learning.
- Holistic development of the student’s personality.
- Reduced formality and rigidity in teaching methods.
- Increased student autonomy in selecting learning content.
- Active involvement of parents and the community in the educational process.

3. Alternative education through the prism of social pedagogy

The core principle of alternative education is to provide a dynamic learning environment where students advance at their own pace and follow their individual interests, without the constraints of conventional school rules. Following Mary Anne Raywid’s framework of the three types of alternative schools, the connection between alternative education and social pedagogy becomes clear, as both concepts work together to promote a higher-quality and more accessible educational process. The

modern concept of social pedagogy emphasizes the holistic development of the individual within a social context, considering both personal needs and broader societal factors that shape people's lives. This discipline extends beyond traditional educational frameworks, promoting social inclusion, support, and integration. Its focus encompasses not only learning but also the emotional, social, and ethical development of the individual. Social pedagogy aims to promote social justice by reducing inequality and marginalization through educational and social interventions, while fostering active citizenship and community participation. It applies a preventive approach that offers early support, focusing on vulnerable groups such as children, youth, migrants, and individuals with special needs. Inclusion and integration are key principles that promote diversity, acceptance, and equal opportunities for all individuals to reach their full potential. Social pedagogy emphasizes personal relationships and social interaction as the basis for learning and social development, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and empathy. It draws on knowledge from psychology, sociology, education, law, and cultural studies, and collaborates with professionals such as social workers, psychologists, and teachers. Rooted in ethical principles and values such as justice, respect, empathy, and dignity, social pedagogy aims to enhance society by promoting the development of individuals and communities (Kraus & Hoferková, 2016).

Alternative education encompasses a range of pedagogical approaches that differ from traditional systems in terms of teaching methods, goals, and practices. All share a common aim: to create a flexible, individualized learning environment where students can progress without the constraints of standard assessments and rigid rules. For students facing academic challenges, learning disabilities, behavioral issues, or irregular attendance, alternative programs provide opportunities to employ innovative methods in supportive settings, enabling them to achieve success. Despite the diversity of alternative schools and programs, they are often distinguished by flexible schedules and adapted curricula (Aron, 2006). Alternative education and social pedagogy are interconnected through several key principles:

• Individualized approach – both emphasize students' diverse needs, abilities, and learning styles.

• Inclusivity and social justice – providing opportunities for marginalized students or those who do not thrive in traditional settings.

• Critical thinking and autonomy – flexible curricula encourage independent thought and decision-making.

• Emotional and social support – education addresses not only academic knowledge but also the emotional and social development of learners.

4. Types of alternative educational models

The drive for school transformation, which began in the early 20th century, continues to this day, with its principles most clearly reflected in various models of alternative schools. This paper will examine some of the most prominent alternative education models.

4.1 Montessori pedagogical concept

Montessori pedagogy is a widely implemented alternative educational approach. Even more than a century after its inception, it remains relevant, grounded in universal human values such as dignity, peace, and freedom (Здружение, 2017). Montessori's model is rooted in the principles of reform pedagogy, emphasizing active learning, hands-on activities, greater freedom, and the rejection of practices that position the child as a passive observer (Matijević, 2001). Its greatest contribution lies in promoting the child as an active participant in the educational process. Montessori pedagogy goes beyond classroom materials or teacher-led instruction; it reflects an approach that respects children's unique nature and creates conditions for them to grow freely and realize their full potential.

Maria Montessori viewed each child as "his or her own builder," perceiving the world through individual senses and experiences. Sensory engagement enables children to interact with their

environment and form relationships with others. Developing the senses, beginning with motor skills, is central to her pedagogy. The correct execution of fine and gross motor movements, integrating sensory and movement education, serves as "a criterion for the healthy mental, spiritual, physical, and social development of the child" (Seitz, 1997).

The core principle of Montessori pedagogy is the child's freedom to choose activities, topics, tasks, schedules, and materials. A child can fully engage in learning only when they experience freedom in their actions and have ready access to materials. This freedom, however, is not unlimited; meaningful boundaries must be established: "just as a house without walls is not a house, freedom without boundaries is not freedom" (Schafer, 2015). Montessori emphasized that for a child to reach their full potential, it is essential to establish clear standards for the learning environment and define adult behavior toward children. Only a well-prepared environment can provide "everything the child needs for physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional adaptation" (Philipps, 1999).

4.2 Concept of Waldorf (Steiner) Pedagogy

Schools and preschools worldwide follow various models of holistic education, with Waldorf pedagogy becoming particularly prominent in recent decades. This approach has grown increasingly attractive to both parents and educators in our region. According to Waldorf pedagogy, the aim of education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge, but the development of abilities and engagement in activities that foster a meaningful and well-rounded life. This approach is also applied to children with special educational needs. Since its inception, Waldorf pedagogy has emphasized an open curriculum, interdisciplinary connections, age-based instruction, and an individualized approach to all students. Educational methods and content are adapted to the child's age, as well as their physical and spiritual needs and abilities (Damovska, 2005).

Waldorf pedagogy emphasizes the nurturing of each child's individuality. This is achieved through small-group work, where parents and educators collaborate to observe the child, monitor development, and adapt teaching methods to both individual and group needs. A structured rhythm provides security, while the curriculum remains flexible to meet the child's needs. Children are offered a variety of artistic and practical activities—such as drawing, painting, sculpting, woodworking, gardening, crafts, music, and household tasks—allowing them to explore interests and develop diverse skills. Activities are designed to engage the child physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, addressing multiple forms of intelligence (Domić, 2021).

In Waldorf pedagogy, instruction follows natural cycles, with special emphasis on the changing seasons. Children spend time outdoors daily, regardless of the weather, and engage directly with nature. Kindergartens are typically located near forests, parks, or feature spacious yards. Toys and art materials are crafted from natural resources such as wood, wool, and wax, while interiors are thoughtfully arranged to create a safe, homelike environment. Interiors are carefully designed to create a safe, homelike environment. Family values are emphasized, with parents actively participating in activities, while collaboration among children, families, and educators forms the cornerstone of the kindergarten (Domić, 2021). Waldorf pedagogy provides an innovative approach that fosters the child's development in harmony with their natural abilities and interests. It promotes creativity, self-confidence, and a love of learning, while developing critical thinking, social skills, emotional stability, and overall harmonious growth—encouraging learning without the stress of tests and grades.

4.3 Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach

The Reggio Emilia approach emerged after World War II, when the community of Reggio Emilia in Italy developed a new educational model distinct from traditional methods. It promotes innovative, democratic, and inclusive education, viewing children as active, creative, and intelligent participants capable of exploring, discovering, and constructing meaning in multiple ways (Hargraves, 2020). A key figure in the Reggio Emilia approach is Loris Malaguzzi, a young teacher and psychologist who became its main theorist. He developed a pedagogy based on the belief that each child is unique and can express

interests in diverse ways. Children learn best through interaction, exploration, and expression via multiple media, such as drawing, sculpture, and storytelling. Rather than following a traditional classroom hierarchy, this approach fosters a collaborative environment, establishing partnerships among children, teachers, and families, with active participation shaping the children's learning experiences (Flavin, 2020).

The Reggio Emilia program emphasizes practical, hands-on learning, allowing children to explore and learn through direct interaction with objects and their environment. The goal is to create a "home-like" setting where natural learning occurs using all available resources, including the natural environment, peers, materials, and educators. This approach supports children's independent discovery and exploration, fostering self-respect, respect for caregivers, animals, living things, and the Earth through activities such as recycling, composting, growing, and preserving (Гренцер-Елис, 2019).

The Reggio Emilia approach is recognized as one of the most innovative models for early childhood education and continues to shape contemporary practices. It evolves constantly, inspiring educational institutions worldwide. In 2006, the Loris Malaguzzi International Center was established in Reggio Emilia to study and promote his methodology. Today, many schools globally adopt or integrate this philosophy into their curricula.

4.4 The pedagogical concept of Celestine Freinet

Celestin Freinet, a prominent proponent of reform pedagogy, is recognized for his original educational approach, which remains influential among educators and policymakers. (Matijević, 2001). He advocated for increased autonomy for teachers and students, allowing them to jointly decide on learning content, its breadth and depth, and the methods and forms of work that encourage resource and experience exchange. In Freinet's schools, teachers design operational programs only after meeting the children they will teach. Weekly activity plans are central, allowing students to plan their work in subjects such as language, mathematics, art, or the school printing house. The individual student plan, described as a "didactic agreement jointly agreed upon by the teacher, the student, and the parent", aims to help children express themselves, organize, develop, and learn independently. Effective coordination of weekly plans between teachers and students relies on cooperation and mutual trust (Jagrović, 2007).

A key feature of Freinet's pedagogy is the view of school as a place of work, where "the memorization of numerous facts is not valued, but rather the training for independent learning and the use of various media" (Matijević, 2001). Through organized work activities, students explore the world independently, while teachers foster discipline and responsibility. Class self-management, cooperative learning, independence, and discovery-based education in a stimulating environment are central elements of Freinet's approach, promoting children's holistic development and affirming school as a place that nurtures educated and skilled individuals.

The spatial arrangement and material conditions in Freinet classrooms are designed to meet children's diverse needs for work, play, and learning. Classrooms provide areas for individual, paired, group, and project-based activities. Traditional layouts with desks arranged for frontal teaching are avoided, with the organization of space guided by the needs of students and teachers to support a variety of activities (Jagrović, 2007).

4.5 The pedagogical concept of Peter Petersen (Jena Plan)

The Jena Plan, developed by pedagogy professor Peter Petersen, presents an alternative approach to upbringing, education, and school organization. Petersen modeled school activities on family life, believing that this alignment allows schools to meet all aspects of a child's development. The child is placed at the center of attention, with the learning process viewed from the child's perspective, guiding the organization of teaching and learning (Damjanić, 2015). Key principles of the Jena Plan include:

- Vertical grouping of students in age-heterogeneous classes instead of traditional grades;

• Individual learning combined with collaborative group activities;

• Thematic, project-based learning integrating multiple areas of knowledge;

• Dialogue and democratic learning, where students participate in decision-making and function as a small democratic community;

• Practical experience and self-assessment, with teachers serving as mentors rather than authority figures.

Petersen promotes intergenerational learning, with students taught in mixed-age groups that include children with special needs. The Jena Plan emphasizes support, care, and teamwork for students facing learning challenges, while fostering emotional bonds, socialization, active parent involvement, and collaboration among children of different ages (Bobić, 2016). To support social learning, Petersen organizes classes by combining three grade levels: the first consists of students from the first, second, and third grade, the second group of children from the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, and finally a group consisting of students from the seventh and eighth or eighth, ninth, and tenth grade (Matijević, 2001). Mixing students from different ages provides diverse learning opportunities and enables them to plan, understand, and independently manage their learning process. The main goal is to foster cooperation rather than competition, directly promoting self-regulated learning. In this system, older students work alongside younger ones respectfully, revisiting and consolidating material they have previously mastered. In these schools, students both demonstrate and live by a culture of mutual support. (Damjanić, 2015).

5. The role of alternative education models in the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN)

Modern education aims for inclusivity and equal access for all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN). Inclusive education strives to engage all children, irrespective of their abilities or social and cultural differences, with a focus on equality and the universal right to education. Through activities and projects, it promotes values such as equality, justice, and solidarity, fostering an environment of inclusion and togetherness (Naraian, 2013). Educators in inclusive settings must engage in continuous professional development—through workshops, seminars, and training—to address inclusive practices, the needs of children with SEN, and the latest teaching methods, ensuring their knowledge and skills remain up to date.

A key goal of inclusive education is to ensure that children with SEN have the same opportunities as their peers, through adapted curricula, diverse pedagogical approaches, and additional resources and support (Popadić, 2016). Alternative pedagogical models—such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Jena Plan, Waldorf, and Freinet—support inclusive education by providing flexibility, individualized learning, and environments that respect children's diverse abilities and learning styles.

Alternative education models support individualized learning, adapting to each child's needs and pace—particularly important for children with autism spectrum disorders, dyslexia, ADHD, and other developmental challenges. Individualized approaches allow children with SEN to progress according to their unique abilities, through adapted methods, materials, and activities that promote optimal development and success (Cvjetićanin, 2017).

The Montessori approach allows children to work independently with developmentally appropriate materials, while the Jena Plan offers mixed-age activities that enable children with SEN to learn from peers without the stress of comparison or competition. Alternative education models provide environments adapted to children's diverse needs. The Reggio Emilia approach treats space as a "third teacher," creating an interactive, visually stimulating environment that encourages exploration and supports children with cognitive and sensory difficulties (O'Brien, 2023). Waldorf schools incorporate art, music, and movement into the learning process, supporting children who face challenges with traditional methods. These models emphasize emotional intelligence, social interaction, and teamwork, fostering cooperation over competition and creating inclusive settings where children with SEN feel

valued. The Jena Plan promotes democratic relationships, giving children with SEN an active role in the school community and boosting self-confidence. Avoiding traditional tests and assessments further reduces anxiety and allows children with SEN to thrive. Each alternative educational model uniquely promotes inclusion, and incorporating them into conventional education can enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of learning settings.

Conclusion

Within social pedagogy, alternative educational models play a central role, prioritizing the comprehensive development of children over mere academic performance. They promote learning based on individual abilities, social interaction, and emotional intelligence, which are essential for fostering inclusive and equitable societies. Approaches such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Freinet, Jena Plan, and Waldorf create environments that respect diversity and encourage inquiry, collaboration, and independent thinking. These models provide flexible teaching, adapt to individual needs, and foster creativity, supporting the successful inclusion of children with special educational needs. By integrating traditional methods with modern approaches, technology, and enhanced support for teachers and students, alternative education can improve the education system and contribute to innovative, inclusive, and sustainable learning. The future of education relies on flexibility, equity, and accessibility, and alternative approaches provide a solid foundation for achieving these objectives.

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PROPER DEVELOPMENT AND PREVENTION OF OVERWEIGHT THROUGH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DURING PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES

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Abstract

In today's world, childhood obesity is becoming increasingly common, even from an early age. Although the general public is aware that excessive body weight in children is not a healthy condition, it is rarely treated as a serious threat to health and quality of life. Childhood obesity can lead to long-term health consequences such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, fatty liver, and other chronic conditions. In addition to physical complications, it also carries significant psychological consequences, including low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and exposure to bullying and social isolation. This paper aims to explore the prevalence of childhood obesity, its consequences, and the need for early prevention through education, healthy nutrition, and physical activity.

Keywords: childhood obesity; physical education; physical activity; prevention; school interventions

1. Introduction

In modern society, one of the key areas of education is physical education from an early age. Physical activity refers to any bodily movement that contributes to improving or maintaining physical fitness, general health, and well-being. It is practiced for various reasons, such as strengthening the musculature and cardiovascular system, improving athletic abilities, regulating body weight, and preventing various health conditions.

Regular physical activity has a positive effect on the immune system and plays a crucial role in preventing so-called "lifestyle diseases" such as heart and cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and excessive body weight. Beyond the physical benefits, physical activity significantly contributes to mental health by reducing stress and depression and boosting children's self-confidence.

For this reason, physical education from an early age is essential in today's modern lifestyle. Children spend increasing amounts of time in sedentary positions—at school, in front of televisions, computers, or mobile devices—which can lead to improper posture and the development of various physical deformities. Integrating physical activity into children's daily lives from the earliest age contributes to the development of healthy lifestyle habits, socialization through sports, reduced risk of deformities, character building, development of teamwork and friendships, and overall improvement of their health and well-being.

2. Theoretical Background of the Research

Childhood obesity is defined as excessive body weight relative to a child's height. Unlike adults, where obesity is typically measured using the standard Body Mass Index (BMI) formula, for children there are special growth charts based on age and gender that help determine whether a child is overweight. What is particularly important to emphasize is that obesity significantly shortens life expectancy and therefore represents a serious health risk—especially when it begins in childhood.

Obesity is considered one of the most insidious chronic diseases because its consequences are not immediately visible. A child may gradually gain weight without any noticeable effects, while health problems only emerge after years of the body being burdened with excess weight. In addition to the physical strain on the body, obesity disrupts sugar and fat metabolism and causes changes in certain hormones, further compromising the child's health.

Studies show that more than one-third of children aged six to eight—typically second-grade students—are either overweight or obese. Most of these children live outside the Skopje region. Although recent years have shown a plateau in the increase of overweight children, the situation remains alarming. Health professionals emphasize that the best prevention lies in healthy eating habits and regular physical activity, recommending at least one hour of daily physical exercise to maintain a healthy weight in children.

According to data from the Institute of Public Health (IPH), in 2016, 36.1% of all second-grade children (aged six to eight) were overweight or obese. In 2017, that figure rose to 37.4%, and in 2018, it was 36.9%. Looking only at the percentage of children diagnosed as obese: 17.9% in 2016, 16.9% in 2017, and 18.6% in 2018. According to the European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI) of the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2016, North Macedonia ranked 10th out of 40 countries included in the study.

Preventing the development of obesity in children is now a global health priority. Since obesity is considered a multifactorial disease, effective prevention strategies must address all relevant aspects—personal, environmental, and socioeconomic. The early years of life are critical for the formation of habits, which is why preventive approaches must begin during this period to influence lifestyle choices and reduce the risk of becoming overweight or obese.

For young children, preventive strategies should primarily target parents and caregivers, as well as schools, the social environment, media, and the broader community. Since children spend a significant portion of their time in educational institutions, schools are an ideal setting for implementing interventions that promote healthy eating and an active lifestyle. Increasing physical activity in schools can be achieved by encouraging children to move and play during breaks and by expanding the number of mandatory physical education classes. In this way, the school becomes not only a place of learning but also a foundation for building a healthier and higher-quality life.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Problem Statement and Research Overview

In recent years, the number of children with excessive body weight at the early stages of education has been steadily increasing, posing a serious health and social issue—both globally and within the Republic of North Macedonia. This growing trend is becoming alarming and clearly indicates the need for systematic research and the implementation of specific preventive and intervention measures.

3.2 Research Objective

The aim of this action research is to identify the key factors contributing to excessive weight among primary school students and to explore effective and applicable methods for increasing children's interest in regular physical activity. The research also aims to highlight the benefits of physical activity as a preventive tool, while proposing concrete activities that can be incorporated into the regular curriculum or extracurricular programs within schools.

3.3 Research Hypotheses

The main hypothesis of this research is that students' interest in physical activity is directly influenced by the human, financial, and organizational resources provided by the school. From this central hypothesis, the following specific assumptions emerge:

There is insufficient investment in equipment necessary to attract students' interest and to foster a desire for increased physical activity.

There is a need to develop organizational mechanisms and skills that enable the monitoring and evaluation of physical activity development among all students.

Teachers should be better informed and educated about the benefits of physical education for students' health and its importance for their overall development.

3.4 Organization, Implementation, and Data Collection

The research was conducted in two primary schools in Bitola: *"Todor Angelovski"* and *"Kole Kaninski"*. Data was collected through student surveys, observation of their physical activity, and consultations with students' parents.

4. Challenges We Face

One of the major challenges is identifying effective methods to increase the motivation for physical activity among overweight students. These students often cannot perform all activities at the same intensity and pace as their peers who do not struggle with weight issues, which further hinders their motivation and active participation. Previous studies indicate that this is one of the key barriers to establishing regular physical activity within this group.

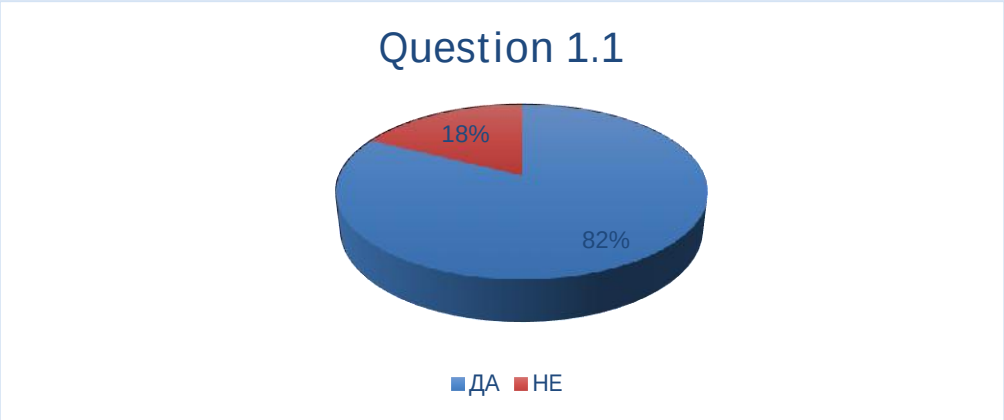
Teachers face the need for increased support—from both the school and the parents. With greater autonomy and more resources provided by the school, teachers would be able to more effectively focus on the individual progress of each student. This is especially important because each child has specific needs and varying physical capabilities, as well as different health conditions that must be considered when planning and implementing physical education lessons.

5. Analysis and Interpretation of Research Results

5.1 Analysis of the Initial Situation and Implementation of Interventions

To determine the current state of awareness regarding the risks and health hazards associated with excessive weight among students, a survey was conducted among teachers. The goal was to gather as much information as possible and gain insight into their perceptions and experiences related to the health issues of overweight students.

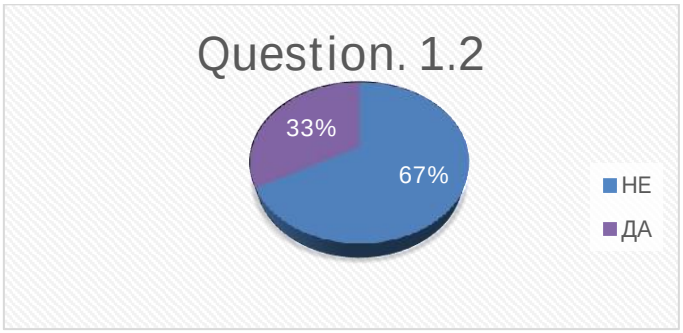
Question 1.1:
"Do you believe that students with excessive body weight, given their current lifestyle and habits, are exposed to health risks and problems both now and in the future?"



In response to this question, 82% of teachers stated that students with excessive body weight are at significantly higher risk of developing health problems, both in the present and in the future. In contrast, 18% believe that these students are not likely to experience any serious health issues.

Question 1.2:

"Do you think that students with excessive body weight tire more easily or experience limitations when performing certain exercises or games during physical education classes?"



According to the survey, 33% of teachers believe that overweight students tire more quickly and face certain limitations when engaging in various physical activities during physical education classes. On the other hand, 67% of teachers stated that these students do not experience significant limitations and do not fatigue more than their peers with normal body weight.

Question 1.3:

"How important is physical activity for children in development in order to reduce excessive body weight?"

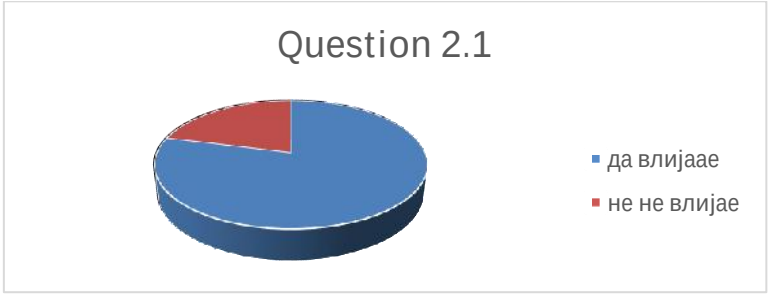


In response to this question, 86% of surveyed teachers agreed that physical activity directly contributes to the prevention of excessive body weight in children. Meanwhile, 14% believe that nutrition plays a more significant role in weight control.

The next survey we conducted focused on teaching methods and their impact on children. Three questions were included in this survey, the first of which was:

Question 2.1:

"To what extent do you believe that the role of parents and teachers influences the fight against excessive body weight in students?"



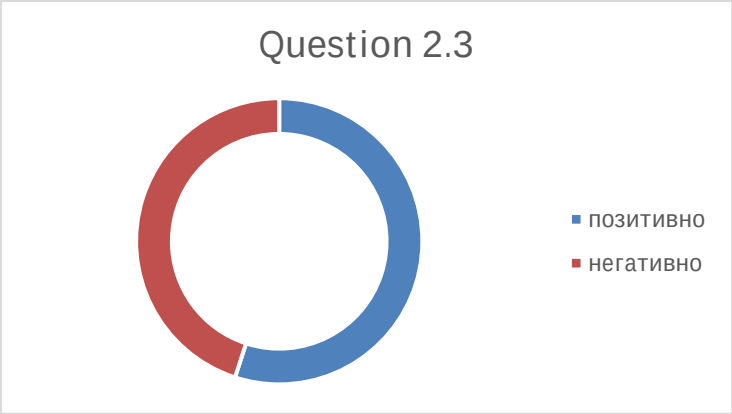
Question 2.2:

"Do you think that students need more than 30 minutes of physical activity per day?"

The survey results showed that 90% of teachers believe that students require more than half an hour of daily physical activity. Conversely, only 10% believe that 30 minutes of activity per day is sufficient to prevent excessive weight gain.

Question 2.3:

"Do you believe that organizing additional physical activities would have a positive impact on children with excessive body weight?"



In response to this question, 55% of teachers agreed that additional physical activities would positively impact children with excessive body weight. Conversely, 45% believe that increased physical activity might have a negative effect on this age group.

Based on the information and responses from the surveys, a plan was developed to establish open communication between the school, parents, and students. The goal was to consult with them regarding their interest and willingness to engage in physical activities that could positively influence the prevention of excessive weight and encourage children to participate more actively in physical exercise.

5.2 Analysis and Results of Interventions

The implementation of the interventions led to positive changes among the students, which can be observed through the following aspects:

- Students demonstrate a sense of involvement in activities, which motivates them to participate more actively.
- A sense of equality develops among all students, regardless of their body weight or physical abilities.
- Improvements in concentration and overall engagement during lessons are noted.
- Students gain greater self-confidence and begin to trust more in their own abilities.
- Social skills improve through team games and group activities.

From the school's perspective, the following outcomes were observed:

- Increased availability of resources and opportunities for physical activity.
- Active participation and commitment in the fight against excessive body weight among students.
- Promotion of overall health improvement and encouragement of healthy lifestyle habits within the school community.

6. Conclusion

According to estimates, there are more than 150 million children worldwide with excessive body weight, and if necessary, preventive measures are not taken, this number is expected to increase to 250 million by 2030. Physical education during the early years of primary education represents a fundamental phase in the development of a child's cognitive and motor skills. This initial phase forms the foundation for further success in education.

For more effective development of children at this age, the role of the physical education teacher is crucial, as they implement the educational process according to modern methods and principles. In many countries, this approach has proven successful, with a significant reduction in the percentage of childhood obesity and physical deformities.

The benefits of physical education are numerous and significant:

Improvement of healthy growth and development in children.

Development of daily habits for systematic exercise and body care.

Prevention of physical deformities such as scoliosis, kyphosis, and others.

Positive impact on the cardiovascular and respiratory systems.

Strengthening of the musculoskeletal system.

Encouragement of self-confidence, work habits, and persistence.

Training for teamwork and development of respectful attitudes towards classmates.

During this period of primary education, parents also play an important role. Every parent should be fully aware of the importance of physical education in shaping their child's personal and psychological qualities. Parents should be regularly informed about their children's achievements in lessons and extracurricular activities to provide joint support for their development.

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Appendix A: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

This research is conducted at Primary School "Todor Anđeleski" – Bitola and Primary School "Kole Kaninski" – Bitola, with the aim to assess the current situation regarding physical education among students and the role of the physical education teacher.

The questionnaire contains questions that should be answered by circling the appropriate option, as well as providing comments, opinions, and suggestions. The collected information will be used exclusively for the purposes of this research.

Thank you for your cooperation!

GENERAL INFORMATION

The questionnaire is filled out by:

Classroom teacher
Physical education teacher

Level of education:

Higher education
Master's degree
Doctorate (PhD)
Other: _____

Work experience:

Up to 10 years
Up to 20 years
Up to 30 years
Over 30 years

Gender:

Male
Female

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that students with overweight and their current lifestyle and functioning are exposed to health problems, both now and in the future?

   Yes
   No

2. Do you think that students with overweight get tired faster or have any limitations when performing exercises or games during class?

   Yes
   No

3. How important is physical activity for developing children in order to reduce increased body weight?

   Not so important
   Very important

4. Do you think that the role of parents and the role of teachers influence the fight against overweight among students?

   Influences
   Does not influence

5. Do you think that students need more than 30 minutes of physical activity daily?

   Yes
   No

6. Do you think that organizing additional physical activities would have a positive impact on children with overweight?

   Positive
   Negative

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This research is conducted at the school to assess the current situation regarding physical education among students and to provide concrete recommendations for improvement.
The questionnaire contains questions to which you should respond by circling the appropriate answer, as well as provide comments, opinions, and suggestions. The information obtained will be used exclusively for the purposes of this research.
Thank you for your cooperation!

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. The questionnaire is filled out by:

   Parent of a child in primary school (lower grades)
   Parent of a child in upper primary school (higher grades)

2. Gender:

   Male
   Female

QUESTIONS

3. Do you agree that physical education classes should be conducted not only by the class teacher but also by a specialized physical education teacher?

   Yes
   No

4. If you answered "Yes," please explain why:

5. If you answered "No," please explain why:

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A PRACTICAL GUIDE OF USING AI MODELS IN THE ESL/EFL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly changing how languages are taught and learned. Recognizing this, this paper explores practical and research-based ways AI can support English language learners (and teachers!) in developing key skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the paper draws on recent studies (2022–2025) and classroom experiences to show how AI tools can make learning more personalized and engaging for ESL and EFL learners of all levels. Examples include AI-assisted conversations, grammar games, and writing partners that help students practice and improve in real time. While challenges such as overreliance and ethical concerns remain, the activities suggested show AI's strong potential to enhance motivation, fluency, and confidence when used as a partner to teachers rather than a replacement.

***Keywords**: Artificial Intelligence, EFL, ESL, TESOL, AI in Education*

1. Introduction

A growing body of research shows that artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming education. And AI's influence in language education, in particular, has become even more pronounced as cutting-edge models and tools are integrated into both ESL and EFL classrooms. By 2025, the most effective applications combine advanced speech recognition, personalized learning pathways, and interactive practice environments, offering educators new ways to support diverse learners while automating routine assessment and feedback tasks. Recognizing this, this paper aims to describe some practical ways in which AI models can be used in the language classroom to improve students key language acquiring skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing, as well as to improve their vocabulary and grammar skills.

2. Literature review

The relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) and education has been explored for decades (Beck et al., 1996; Salem, 2000). Yet, with the rapid advancement of AI and language processing models such as ChatGPT, scholarly interest in this area has grown markedly (Anders, 2023). As a result, AI-generated texts with their unique characteristics and their implications for education and test-takiing have become an increasingly significant and intriguing area of research (Baker & Smith, 2019; Tahiru, 2021; Shalevska, 2023).

Since 2023, institutions globally have witnessed unprecedented adoption rates of AI-based systems for teaching, learning, and administration. Surveys reveal that over 90% of faculty and administrators plan to expand their use of AI technologies in education within the next two years, citing efficiency gains, easier integration, and improved learning outcomes as key drivers (Ellucian survey, as cited in AWS, 2025; Lee et al., 2024). Generative AI course enrollment is rising sharply, suggesting both demand for AI literacy and the normalization of these tools in curricula

2.1. AI in Second or Foreign Language Teaching

The incorporation of AI in ESL and EFL learning environments spans adaptive learning systems, chatbots, automated assessment, pronunciation apps, and intelligent feedback tools. Systematic reviews (e.g., Ponniah & Zakaria, 2024; Alhusaiyan, 2025) document that AI enhances learning outcomes, especially through personalized instruction adaptable to individual strengths and weaknesses. For instance, AI-powered platforms provide tailored feedback and practice tasks, raising proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills (Garcia et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2020 in). Innovations

such as Natural Language Processing (NLP) and machine learning are highlighted as central to these advances. However, successful integration depends on both technological infrastructure and the professional development of teachers (Shalevska, 2024; Hockly, 2023).

AI applications have demonstrated effectiveness in improving specific language skills, notably speaking and writing. For example, Torkhani (2025) found that EFL students using the Talkpal.AI app in Kuwait significantly improved their fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. In writing instruction, large language models like ChatGPT support feedback and evaluation, but best practices suggest blended approaches: incorporating analog tasks to maintain academic integrity and a growth mindset (Babanoğlu, 2025; SSRN, 2024; Wang & Liu, 2023 in). Interactive AI elements such as gamified tasks and chatbots are linked to higher engagement and motivation (Fryer & Carpenter, 2020 in), and broader access to authentic language material.

Speaking outcomes improve with AI; for example, one study noted pronunciation test scores rising from 46.03 to 76.46 and another reported ELSA Speak scores moving from 77.20 to 83.49 (Marjun & Sintang, 2022). Writing performance gains can also occur when AI tools offer detailed, adaptive feedback (Wu-Yuin et al. 2023)

Other potential benefits include enhanced learner engagement and motivation due to the use of personalized content (Abdelhadi, 2025). AI models can also play a valuable role in promoting contextualized learning, as they are capable of presenting vocabulary within meaningful discourse rather than in isolation. As noted by Meurers et al. (2020), the ability of AI systems to simulate authentic language use provides learners with interactive and immersive opportunities to enhance their vocabulary development.

Yet, emotional outcomes vary: while some studies observe improvements in emotional regulation and reduced anxiety, one study documents increased foreign language anxiety (Shazly (2021). Listening and receptive skill benefits also appear less consistent (Almehmadi, 2024) and ethical concerns are often noted (Shalevska, 2025; Trachtenberg, 2023; Shalevska & Kostadinovska-Stojchevska, 2024).

3. Methods

This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach to synthesize literature and professional experiences regarding the use of AI in language classrooms. The methodology aligns with systematic literature review best practices, as outlined by Page et al. (2021), and includes the following elements:

a. Literature Review Protocol: The review draws upon recent systematic and empirical studies of AI integration in language teaching, focusing on research published from 2022 to 2025 (Li, 2025; Lee, 2025).

b. Experience-Based Synthesis: Insights are combined with the researcher's own observations of various AI platforms, such as generative language models, and automated assessment platforms implemented in real classroom settings (Sanako, 2025; Lee, 2025).

4. Results and discussion

Below are research-informed activities for each of the six essential language skill areas. Each activity makes use of current AI models or platforms, and is illustrated with strategies or examples that teachers can use directly in the classroom.

4.1. AI-based activities that focus on students' listening skills

4.1.1. Activity: AI-Generated Listening Comprehension

- **How AI is used:** Students ask an AI (e.g., ChatGPT or Gemini) to generate a short audio story or dialogue on a chosen topic. The teacher or AI then reads it aloud using built-in text-to-speech features or external voice tools.

- **Procedure:**

1. Students choose a topic (e.g., “at the airport,” “ordering food”).
2. The AI creates a short dialogue with comprehension questions.
3. Students listen twice, then discuss answers in pairs.

- **Learning Outcome:** Students improve comprehension of authentic dialogues and learn to identify key details and gist.

4.1.2. Activity: “Guess the Speaker’s Mood”

- **How AI is used:** AI generates short dialogues or monologues with emotional tone indicators (e.g., frustration, excitement, sadness etc.)
- **Procedure:**
    1. The AI produces short scripts with mood cues removed.
    2. Teacher or AI voice reads them aloud.
    3. Students guess the mood, justify their reasoning, and check AI’s explanation.
- **Learning Outcome:** Students learn to detect emotions and implied meaning through listening.

4.1.3. Activity: Interactive Listening Quests

- **How AI is used:** Students engage in an AI-guided listening “quest” (e.g., ChatGPT narrates a mystery story and gives audio clues).
- **Procedure:**
    1. AI narrates part of a story and gives students a choice of actions (“Do you go left or right?”).
    2. Students listen, choose an option, and the AI continues the story accordingly.
- **Learning Outcome:** Students develop active listening skills and inference through narrative interaction.

4.2. AI-based Activities that Focus on Reading and Comprehension

4.2.1. Activity: AI Reading Buddy

- **How AI is used:**

  Students read a short AI-generated story or article at their level and interact with the AI to clarify meaning, ask vocabulary questions, or summarize key ideas.

- **Procedure:**
  The teacher prompts an AI (e.g., ChatGPT or Gemini) to “Write a short story about friendship for English learners.”
    1. Students read the text individually or in pairs.
    2. They ask the AI comprehension questions (“What does this word mean?” or “Why did the character feel sad?”).
    3. Students then summarize the story in their own words and compare their summary with the AI’s version.
- **Learning Outcome:**

  Students develop comprehension strategies (skimming, scanning, inferring) and learn to use AI as a reading support tool to clarify meaning and structure.

4.2.2. Activity: AI-Generated Reading Quiz

- **How AI is used:**

  AI creates a short reading passage and automatically generates comprehension questions of different types (true/false, multiple choice, open-ended).

- **Procedure:**

  1. The teacher prompts AI: “Create a 200-word article about climate change and 5 comprehension quiz questions.”
  2. Students read and answer the questions as they are displayed on a smartboard/ projector.
  3. The model explains the answers.

- **Learning Outcome:**

  Students practice reading for comprehension and receive immediate AI feedback with explanations.

4.2.3. Activity: AI Role-Play Reading Circles

- **How AI is used:**

  Prompted by the teacher, AI provides a short story or article and assigns reading roles to students (e.g., Summarizer, Questioner, Vocabulary Finder, Predictor).

- **Procedure:**

  1. AI generates a short reading text suited to the class’s level and topic.
  2. Each student (or group) receives a “role” generated by the AI (e.g., “You find difficult words and ask others to define them”).
  3. After reading, students share findings.

- **Learning Outcome:**

  Students strengthen comprehension and collaborative discussion skills by engaging with the text from multiple analytical perspectives.

4.2.4. Activity: AI-Powered Reading Simplifier

- **How AI is used:**

  AI rewrites or summarizes authentic English texts (e.g., news articles) at an appropriate reading level for students.

- **Procedure:**

  1. Teacher or students paste a short authentic article into AI.
  2. Ask AI: “Simplify this article for English learners at A2/B1 level.”
  3. Students read both versions and identify what changed (vocabulary, sentence structure).

- **Learning Outcome:**

  Students improve reading comprehension by comparing authentic and simplified texts, building awareness of how language complexity affects understanding.

4.2.5. Activity: “Level-Up Reading Challenge”

- **How AI is used:** AI adapts a single text into multiple difficulty levels (A2 → B1 → B2), creating a tiered reading challenge.

- **Procedure:**

1. The teacher copies a short authentic article (e.g., BBC Learning English or a short story). Ask AI: *"Simplify this article into three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced."*
2. Divide students into teams. Each team starts at Level 1 and "levels up" after answering comprehension questions correctly.
3. The first team to reach Level 3 wins.

- **Learning Outcome:** Students develop reading fluency, vocabulary awareness, and confidence through scaffolded, gamified progression.

4.3. AI-based Activities that Focus on Speaking Skills

4.3.1. Activity: AI Conversation Partner

- **How AI is used:** Students practice real-time conversation with AI on a chosen topic using voice input (available in ChatGPT or Gemini apps).
- **Procedure:**
    1. Students select a topic (e.g., "daily routines").
    2. They converse with AI using voice mode for a set amount of time.
    3. AI provides gentle corrections or vocabulary suggestions.
- **Learning Outcome:** Students improve oral fluency and pronunciation through guided AI conversation.

4.3.2. Activity: Pronunciation Challenge

- **How AI is used:** AI provides example sentences that challenge students' pronunciation and provides pronunciation feedback using speech recognition features.
- **Procedure:**
    1. The teacher chooses a pronunciation aim. They prompt the model to create sentences.
    2. AI models the sentence (text + audio).
    3. Students repeat and AI evaluates accuracy.
- **Learning Outcome:** Students improve pronunciation through repetition and instant AI feedback.

4.4. AI-based Activities that Focus on Writing Skills

4.4.1. Activity: AI Writing Partner

- **How AI is used:** Students write paragraphs or emails and ask AI (e.g., ChatGPT or Claude) for suggestions on improving coherence and tone.
- **Procedure:**
    1. Students draft a paragraph.
    2. They paste it into AI and ask, "How can I make this clearer and more natural?"
    3. Students review and revise, guided by the teacher.

- **Learning Outcome:** Students learn to self-edit and refine written communication.

4.4.2. Activity: Collaborative Story Building

- **How AI is used:** AI co-writes a story with students, alternating paragraphs.

- **Procedure:**
    1. Prompted by the teacher, AI begins a short story ("Once upon a time…").
    2. Students continue, then AI adds the next part.
    3. At the end, students summarize the full story.
- **Learning Outcome:** Students practice sequencing, cohesion, and creative writing.

4.5. AI-based Activities that Focus on Vocabulary Building

4.5.1. Activity: AI Word Explorer

- **How AI is used:** Students ask AI for explanations, collocations, and example sentences for new words.
- **Procedure:**
    1. Students input new words from a text – usually a list of key words provided by the teacher.
    2. AI provides definitions, synonyms, and usage examples.
    3. Students create their own sentences and compare with AI's.
- Learning Outcome: Students deepen understanding of word meaning and context.

4.5.2. Activity: AI Context Game

- **How AI is used:** Prompted by the teacher, AI generates sentences with missing words. Students guess the correct vocabulary.
- **Procedure:**
    1. AI generates open-cloze sentences (e.g., "She was very ___ when she heard the news.").
    2. Students guess, discuss in groups, then check with AI.
- **Learning Outcome:** Students learn to infer word meaning from context.

4.5.3. Activity: AI Lexical Challenge

- **How AI is used:** AI runs a vocabulary quiz or "word ladder" game (e.g., transform *cold* by changing one letter → *cool* → *fool* → *food*).
- **Procedure:**
    1. Students play vocabulary games generated by AI.
    2. AI provides hints or challenges.
- **Learning Outcome:** Students expand vocabulary through active, playful engagement.

4.5.4. Activity: "Decode the Message!"

- **How AI is used:**

  AI creates encrypted or scrambled reading texts that students must "decode" by understanding meaning and context.
- **Procedure:**

1. The teacher asks AI:

   "Write a short article (around 120 words) about recycling for B1-level learners, but replace 10 key words with emojis or blanks."

2. Students read and guess the missing words.
3. Once they finish, they ask AI to reveal the original text and compare.
4. Award points for correct guesses and best context-based reasoning.

- **Learning Outcome:** Students strengthen contextual reading and vocabulary inference skills in a game-like puzzle format.

4.6. AI-based Activities that Focus on Grammar

4.6.1. Activity: Grammar Detective

- **How AI is used:** Prompted by the teacher, AI produces sentences with intentional grammatical errors. Students identify and correct them.
- **Procedure:**
  1. The teacher prompts AI: "Give me 5 sentences with (Present Simple) that include common grammar mistakes."
  2. Students correct them and check answers with AI and the teacher.
- **Learning Outcome:** Students improve awareness of common grammar issues.

4.6.2. Activity 2: Grammar Transformation Race

- **How AI is used:** AI prompts students to transform sentences (e.g., active → passive, direct → indirect).
- **Procedure:**
  1. AI provides example sentences.
  2. Students transform them and get instant AI feedback.
  3. AI times or scores performance for fun competition.
- **Learning Outcome:** Students master grammatical transformations through interactive drills.

4.6.3. Activity: "Grammar Story Builder"

- **How AI is used:** AI helps students co-create a story while enforcing specific grammar targets (e.g., past simple, conditionals, reported speech).
- **Procedure:**
  1. The teacher prompts AI: *"Let's write a story together using only past tense verbs for A2 learners. Prompt students with story sentences one by one."*
  2. They divide students into teams. Each team adds one sentence to the story following the grammar rule.
  3. After each round, AI is prompted to check if the grammar rule was followed.
  4. AI gives points or praise for correct usage and funny creativity.
  5. Students continue until the story is complete and share the final AI-edited story as a class text.
- **Learning Outcome:** Students apply target grammar forms in creative, contextualized writing.

5. Conclusion

AI has become a powerful ally in the language classroom, offering new ways to engage learners and personalize instruction. The examples and studies reviewed in this paper show that, when used thoughtfully, AI can strengthen all areas of language learning, thus helping students build confidence, accuracy, and motivation. However, its success depends on balance: teachers remain essential in guiding, contextualizing, and humanizing the learning process. As AI continues to evolve, teachers should focus on integrating it ethically and creatively, and future research should focus on personalized AI models that aid EFL and ESL instruction for students of all ages.

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DEVELOPING SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR INCLUSIVE AND EFFECTIVE INTERACTION

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Abstract

Social communication is a fundamental component of human interaction, enabling individuals to exchange information, ideas, emotions, and meanings within diverse social contexts. Effective social communication is essential for building and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships, fostering inclusion, and promoting understanding across cultural, social, and economic differences. This study explores the role of social communication in education and the critical function of the social pedagogue in developing these skills among students. Social pedagogues act as mediators, mentors, and facilitators, employing strategies such as workshops, role-playing, counseling, and inclusive programs to enhance verbal and nonverbal communication, active listening, empathy, assertiveness, and conflict resolution skills. The development of these competencies supports students' personal growth, improves social interactions, and prepares them to navigate complex interpersonal and professional situations. Furthermore, the study emphasizes social communication as a tool for intervention, highlighting principles such as relevance, transparency, inclusiveness, empathy, interactivity, cultural sensitivity, and sustainability. By strategically applying these principles, social pedagogues can foster positive social change, resolve conflicts, and promote active participation within communities. This study demonstrates that the cultivation of social communication skills through targeted pedagogical interventions contributes not only to individual development but also to broader societal cohesion, collaboration, and equity.

Keywords: *social communication, social pedagogue, communication skills, inclusion, interpersonal interaction*

1. Introduction

Social communication is a fundamental mechanism by which interpersonal relationships are established, developed, and maintained. It represents a process of exchanging ideas, thoughts, feelings, and information that not only facilitates understanding between individuals but also builds the foundation for healthy and sustainable relationships. In everyday life, social communication plays a central role in connecting people. Effective communication is the key to creating harmony and understanding, whether it concerns family, friendships, or professional relationships. In a modern society characterized by cultural diversity, economic inequality, and rapid technological advancements, the social pedagogue plays a crucial role in building bridges between different groups. His work demands a high degree of commitment, empathy, and professionalism to promote inclusiveness, understanding, and effective conflict resolution while placing special emphasis on enhancing social communication. The social pedagogue acts as a mediator, mentor, and facilitator who comprehends the complexity of interpersonal relationships. As a specialist in recognizing the social needs of diverse groups, he develops strategies to foster connection and cooperation among them. Through his work, the social pedagogue supports individuals and groups in overcoming barriers that hinder effective communication. He engages in conflict resolution, helps create a positive environment based on respect and trust, and promotes the importance of empathy and active listening.

One of the most important aspects of a social pedagogue's work is enhancing communication among groups from diverse social, cultural, or economic backgrounds. To achieve this, the social pedagogue employs different strategies, methods, and approaches to connect individuals, foster their ability to solve

problems independently, and enable them to actively participate in building a more inclusive society. The commitment to enhancing communication across diverse groups is crucial to fostering a society founded on understanding, tolerance, and collaboration. As a cornerstone of social cohesion and integration, the social pedagogue plays an indispensable role in the pursuit of a more equitable and inclusive society.

2. Concept and meaning of social communication

Social communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, and meanings among people within a social context. It represents a fundamental component of human existence and functioning, as it is through communication that interpersonal relationships are created, maintained, and transformed. Social communication encompasses a range of verbal and nonverbal skills that enable individuals to effectively engage in and navigate various social interactions (Barrow, 2023). It involves an act through which one person provides or receives information from another concerning needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states. The information or content (the message) is transmitted in a specific form by the sender (encoder) to a particular destination (receiver or decoder). Communication is also defined as a process through which we convey and construct meaning in an attempt to achieve mutual understanding. For this process to be effective, it necessitates a diverse set of skills, including listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analyzing, and evaluating (Vladimirova, 2017). Communication occurs within the family, school, workplace, community, and broader social structures. Moreover, well-developed social communication skills facilitate the development of advanced linguistic abilities that are crucial for abstract thinking, deductive reasoning, and comprehending the interconnections among concepts (Barrow, 2023). The development of social communication begins at birth through face-to-face interaction and leads to the competent use of language and the competent and flexible use of nonverbal communication. Social communication consists of:

- social interaction (speech style and context, culture, problem-solving, social tasks - joining peer groups, cooperative games, etc.);
- social cognition (theory of mind - the ability to understand one's own and others' mental states and act accordingly, reasoning, inference, executive functions - organizing, planning, problem solving);
- pragmatics (nonverbal communication - body language, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, gaze, and verbal communication - requests, responses, comments, responsibility, maintaining the topic) and
- language processing (language comprehension, spoken and written language expression, morphology, syntax, semantics, phonological skills) (Dilberović, 2023).

Social communication is a broad term that describes how both verbal and nonverbal communication are used in social situations. In its most basic sense, it is the way people interpret and communicate with each other. It is often referred to by various terms, including pragmatics, pragmatic language, social language, social skills, functional communication, and interpersonal communication (Therapy, 2022).

Key elements in defining social communication are:

- The process of exchange: communication involves sending, receiving, and interpreting messages, whether they are verbal (words) or non-verbal (gestures, facial expressions);
- Interaction within a social context: Social communication occurs within a specific environmental, cultural, and social framework that shapes its meaning and interpretation.
- The transfer of meanings: communication is a process through which people share and create shared meanings.
- Dynamism: social communication is dynamic and adapts to changing circumstances, social rules, and cultural values.

Social communication involves the creation, exchange, and transformation of information among individuals, groups, and social organizations. Many dimensions of social communication could include the following divisions - horizontal and vertical communication; verbal (through language) and nonverbal communication (gestures and other forms of expression); formal (through official channels of communication) and informal communication, intentional and unintentional communication, centralized (in which there is a coordinator, who occupies a central position in the group) and decentralized communication (where all members of the group can freely communicate with each other), and personal and impersonal communication (Oleksiak & Warwas, 2023).

2.1 Social communication skills

Social communication skills play a key role in building and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships in personal, professional, and social life. They represent a set of abilities that enable effective interaction with other people, the expression of one's own ideas and emotions, as well as understanding the needs and feelings of others. Among them are the following social communication skills.

Verbal communication refers to speech, that is, the way in which language is used in everyday speech. It involves the use of clear and appropriate language in expressing thoughts and ideas. Content can be conveyed from one person to another through various channels, such as speech, writing, and other forms of expression. Language skills are essential abilities that everyone can and should develop to enhance personal growth and improve relationships and interactions with others. Since the primary goal of verbal communication is the accurate transmission of information, it is crucial to understand the interlocutor’s perspective and adjust one’s manner of expression accordingly (Vladimirova, 2017). Equally important in verbal communication is the ability to adapt one’s speech to the situation, audience, or context, while expressing thoughts constructively and unobtrusively.

Nonverbal communication involves the recognition and use of nonverbal cues, including facial expressions, gestures, body movements, eye contact, vocal intonation, and posture. What is commonly referred to as body language is, in fact, a form of unconscious nonverbal communication. The body employs both reflexive and deliberate movements to convey messages to those attuned to receiving them. According to some research, 55% of communication is attributed to body language, gestures, and eye contact, 38% to tone, color, volume of voice, and 7% to the content of the words used in the communication process (Vladimirova, 2017).

Active or effective listening is a key skill for social communication that involves paying attention to the other person without interrupting, and showing interest and understanding of what is being said. This skill does not just mean listening to what the other person is saying, but also hearing what they really have to say. Active listening facilitates understanding of the speaker’s message and significantly enhances motivation within any conversation. This skill encompasses paraphrasing, asking clarifying questions, and demonstrating empathy. The ability to actively listen means absorbing not only the surface facts but also delving deeper into the content. This is the essence of active listening, ensuring that communication becomes a two-way process rather than a one-sided exchange. “Active listening encompasses an essential part of the process, by providing feedback to the one who initially conveys the message” (Влашчева, 2011).

Assertiveness is a social communication skill that helps interlocutors learn how to express their thoughts and feelings clearly and respectfully, without being aggressive or passive. Assertiveness involves expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in an honest and socially acceptable manner, while respecting the rights of other people. An assertive individual respects the opinions and perspectives of others, even if they do not necessarily agree with them. With assertive behavior, a person maintains their own boundaries and dignity in situations in which there is a real danger of being manipulated. Therefore, assertive communication is highly valuable in challenging situations and is an essential skill for managing, preventing, and resolving conflicts. People who apply it act confidently and securely in what they do, with complete control over the situation (Станојковска, 2020).

Empathy is the ability to recognize, understand, and experience the emotions, needs, and perspectives of others. It is the foundation for building healthy interpersonal relationships and is one of the most important aspects of social communication. Empathy is an important social-emotional skill that requires self-awareness and active listening, which leads to improved communication (Лау, 2021). It plays a crucial role in nurturing meaningful connections with others and is a fundamental element of effective social communication. This skill helps to recognize the feelings of others, that is, to "get into someone else's shoes," without taking on the weight of the emotional state. Empathy is associated with the skill of reading signals, understanding the feelings, attitudes, and perspectives of the other person, as well as showing concern and understanding for their emotional state. Communicating in a way that fosters trust and support, genuine understanding, and sharing feelings increases the possibility of effective communication.

Conflict resolution is a skill that enables effective handling of disagreements, differences, and conflicts in a way that preserves communication, builds trust, and achieves constructive outcomes. This skill is essential in everyday social interactions, as conflicts are an inevitable part of interpersonal relationships. It also facilitates understanding, prevents the deterioration of relationships, and encourages constructive interaction. This skill not only creates harmonious relationships but also helps in personal and professional growth, preparing people to deal with challenges in interpersonal relationships maturely and effectively (Radola, 2016).

Digital communication is based on interactions between potential internet users and the information provider. The term "digital communication" refers to any (communication or marketing) action that is oriented towards promoting products and/or services through digital media. Digital literacy is a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to the use of digital devices such as desktops, laptops, smartphones, and similar devices. For successful professional work in any field, young professionals need to master appropriate basic and advanced communication skills adapted to new digital collaborative platforms and work tools built on traditional methods, which have been used for decades. In this way, a culture is created that fosters an approach to digital development with digital productive tools and flexible communication practices with access to new opportunities for more effective work and efficient communication in the new digital era (Киров, 2020).

The development of social communication skills is a complex process that involves learning and acquiring various abilities that enable individuals to communicate effectively, collaborate, and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. These skills are crucial for success in personal life, professional life, and society as a whole (Кочоска, 2025).

2.2 The role of the social pedagogue in the development of communication skills

Viewed from a scientific bio-psychosocial, pedagogical-social, and psycho-pedagogical perspective, social pedagogy can be defined as an "integrative science, i.e., an integral discipline" (Marburger, 1987). Modern social pedagogy is the science, theory, and practice of preventing and alleviating the difficulties of social integration of people with behavioral disorders, especially by providing special assistance in education, both to individuals and to certain social groups (Uzelac, 1995). The profession of social pedagogues is an integral part of the classification in which they belong to the group of experts in education and rehabilitation. The recognizable identity of this profession is determined by the competencies, based on specific theories and knowledge, and ethical and professional values. The very fact that the social pedagogue with his function plays an important role within society, is emphasized by the fact that "the study program in social pedagogy prepares experts for scientific research and practical work for primary prevention, detection, diagnosis, early interventions and treatment, processing and subsequent care for children, young people and adults at risk or behavioral disorders and their social environment, in the function of education, socialization, rehabilitation and social integration" (Kochoska & Anastasov, 2020). The competencies that a social pedagogue should possess can be divided into two groups:

1. **Core competencies**

- Knowledge (bio-psycho-social paradigms).

- Understanding (individual and social phenomena).
- Assessment (characteristics of individuals and communities).

2. **Specific competencies**

- Communication and thinking.
- Collaboration (with different stakeholders).
- Preparation, management, and evaluation of projects.
- Analytical and research work for the needs of practice (Kochoska & Anastasov, 2020).

Communication is the basis for the development of a person as a social and conscious being. It enables the transfer of information, ideas, and feelings between people, thus improving the educational and social climate. It is one of the important specific competencies of the social pedagogue. In this context, his role is also crucial for the development of communication skills among students and in the wider social environment. The social pedagogue has a wide scope of action, which includes counseling and mediation between the student, teacher, and parent, building bridges of cooperation and understanding. In the area of communication, the social pedagogue focuses on encouraging and developing verbal and non-verbal skills, as well as listening and assertive expression skills. His approach includes individual work with students, group activities, and creating an environment that encourages open and positive communication. One of the primary tasks of a social pedagogue is to identify barriers that hinder communication among students, such as low self-esteem, fear of public speaking, or lack of empathy, and through individual work and group activities, he trains students in communication skills.

Developing communication skills has numerous benefits for students, including improving students' self-confidence and empathy; reducing conflicts in the school environment; encouraging open and constructive dialogue between all stakeholders in the educational process; and preparing for future social and professional challenges (Practice, 2022). To achieve these goals, the social pedagogue uses various methods for developing communication skills, such as:

- Workshops and interactive sessions that encourage teamwork and develop the ability to cooperate among students through their activities.
- Role-playing allows students to practice different communication scenarios in a safe environment.
- Counseling, in which individual sessions help students overcome personal barriers to communication.
- Inclusive programs that provide support for students with special educational needs or students from marginalized groups (Team, 2024).

The role of the social pedagogue in the development of communication skills is essential for creating a positive environment in the school and in the community. Through carefully planned activities and an individual approach, the social pedagogue can contribute greatly to building self-confident and socially competent individuals. To strengthen this role, support from the educational system is needed, as well as continuous cooperation between the social pedagogue, teachers, and parents.

3. Social Communication as a Tool for Intervention

Social communication is an essential part of human relationships and plays a key role in the formation and functioning of social communities. Its significance is much more than a simple exchange of information because it can also be a powerful instrument for intervention, enabling problem-solving, changing behavior, and improving social conditions (Njoroge, 2023). Intervention through social communication implies the strategic use of communication methods and tools to achieve specific goals. The most significant ones are the following:

- Disseminating information to raise awareness about a specific issue, such as health issues, climate change, or social injustice.
- Using communication strategies to encourage positive changes in individual and collective behaviors.
- Using communication skills to defuse tensions and find solutions to conflict situations.
- Encouraging communities to become active and participate in solving common problems.

3.1 Principles of intervention in social communication

The principles of effective intervention in social communication are the basis for designing effective communication strategies that can contribute to positive changes in individual and collective behavior (Ogbanga, 2024). Respecting these principles allows the social pedagogue to be more effective in his work, to build positive and trusting relationships, to provide support for students, and to create conditions for their personal and social development. This is important both for the quality of communication but also for maintaining his professional and ethical attitude in his work. The most important key principles for intervention through social communication are:

The principle of relevance and transparency. Effective communication should be tailored to the target audience, taking into account their needs, cultural values, and language. Understanding them is the basis for a successful intervention, and relevant messages increase the level of acceptance and understanding. On the other hand, openness and honesty are essential for building trust. Transparency allows for the creation of a stable relationship between the sender and the receiver of messages. When the audience feels that the communication is sincere and relevant, it is ready for active involvement. The principles of relevance and transparency are key to effective social communication. They create the basis for a reliable and influential exchange of information, which is especially important in the context of interventions, education, and promotion of positive social changes. Through their application, communication becomes a means of fostering awareness, understanding, and active inclusion (Baraibar-Diez & Odriozola, 2015).

The principle of inclusiveness in social communication is a key principle that ensures equal participation and representation of all individuals and groups in the communication process. This principle implies the recognition of diversity and the active engagement of all members, regardless of their social, cultural, economic, or physical status. Social communication should provide information that is accessible to all, including marginalized groups, people with disabilities, and those living in remote communities. Inclusivity refers to respecting cultural, linguistic, gender, and other types of diversity, which leads to the conclusion that the inclusion of all stakeholders and target groups ensures that communication will be balanced and targeted at the unique needs and perspectives of different groups (Rozaki, Kovačić, Charalampous, González, & Gabriels, 2020).

The principle of empathy is an essential principle in social communication, which enables a better understanding of the feelings, needs, and experiences of other people. It represents the ability to put oneself in someone else's perspective and to establish an emotional connection, which is crucial for effective and meaningful communication. Empathy is expressed through the skill of active listening, which involves giving the interlocutor full attention, showing understanding, and responding to their words and feelings. With an empathetic approach, messages are adapted to reflect the emotions and needs of the audience, enabling better understanding and acceptance. In social communication, empathy is applied through: listening and recognizing the needs of the interlocutor; using emotionally relevant messages; avoiding direct and imposed advice and solutions; showing sincere interest in the interlocutor's problem. The principle of empathy enables connecting with people on a deeper emotional level, fostering trust and creating a basis for achieving positive changes (Abrahams, 2024).

The principle of interactivity in social communication refers to the two-way exchange of information and influence between individuals or groups, which is the basis for creating deep and effective communication processes. This principle implies the active participation of all communicators in the exchange process, where each participant not only receives but also gives information, expresses

opinions, and influences others. Key aspects of interactive social communication can be listed as: two-way communication; reciprocity or a two-way exchange process; choice of channels and format of communication; and active involvement in listening (Burgoon et al., 2002).

The principle of cultural sensitivity in social communication refers to the awareness and respect for differences between cultures, as well as the ability to communicate in a manner that is respectful and seeks to avoid cultural discomfort and conflict. This principle plays a key role in a globalized world, where people from different cultural backgrounds often meet and communicate in different contexts. To be culturally sensitive, it is important to understand the different values, beliefs, languages, customs, and norms of other cultures. This is very important because different cultures have different communication styles, including verbal and non-verbal communication. This principle also requires the avoidance of stereotypes and prejudices that can affect the way in which interlocutors communicate. The application of cultural sensitivity in social communication not only helps to avoid conflicts but also contributes to better understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between different cultures (Smith, 2023).

The principle of sustainability in social communication refers to the creation and maintenance of communication processes that are long-term, effective, and ethical, to achieve stability and positive results in mutual relationships. This principle aims to ensure that communication is not only productive and constructive in the moment, but also that it will continue to have a positive effect in the future, without harming the participants, society, or the environment. Sustainability in communication is achieved through constant and open communication, respect for diversity, empathy, and honesty in contacts. It not only refers to continuous communication, but also to achieving positive results that can be in the form of joint solutions to problems, improving social conditions, or developing new ideas and innovations that benefit all parties. This principle also includes the ability to adapt communication strategies to new circumstances and needs, which is especially important in globalized and rapidly changing societies (Weder, 2023).

The principles of social communication intervention are the foundation for creating effective, healthy, and productive interpersonal relationships in a variety of contexts. Communication-based on these principles creates strong and sustainable connections, encourages collaboration, and ensures the development of positive social change.

Conclusion

Social communication forms the foundation for the development of social competence and interpersonal relationships. Its significance lies not only in facilitating the exchange of ideas, feelings, and information but also in fostering trust and understanding among diverse groups. The role of the social pedagogue is crucial in promoting and refining these skills through individual support, group activities, and the application of inclusive methods. Developed communication abilities, such as empathy, assertiveness, active listening, and nonverbal communication, enable better collaboration and effective conflict resolution. Social communication also serves as a tool for intervention, encouraging positive change and active participation within the community. Overall, the study emphasizes that cultivating and enhancing communication skills through the work of the social pedagogue significantly contributes to creating a more inclusive, harmonious, and socially responsible environment.

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DIFFICULT LEARNING OF THE GERMAN LANGUAGE DUE TO MASTERING THE DIFFERENCES IN THE GRAMMAR OF THE MACEDONIAN AND GERMAN LANGUAGES

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Abstract

In order to be able to say that we successfully speak and write German, like any other foreign language, it is essential to master its grammar. If we are honest with ourselves, then we will admit that in elementary school, in our mother tongue classes, the part when we had to learn the grammar of the Macedonian language was the most difficult to master, at least for most of us. Mastering the grammar of the German language is not easy for our students, because they cannot make this process easier if they make a comparison with Macedonian grammar.

In this paper, we will examine the difficulties in learning the German language due to mastering the grammar, which is very different compared to ours. Whether students, when faced with this problem, are demotivated in their desire to learn the German language, is the subject of research in this paper. Based on the results that we will obtain from the conducted research, we will draw the conclusion of the paper. Learning German poses a significant challenge for Macedonian students due to the substantial grammatical differences between the two languages.

The research aims to identify and analyze the main obstacles that arise in mastering German grammar, especially in the areas of cases, genders, word order, and verb tenses. Through a comparative analysis of grammatical structures in the Macedonian and German languages, the paper examines typical mistakes made by learners and the reasons behind them. Special emphasis is placed on the influence of the mother tongue on the acquisition of a foreign language, as well as the need for adapted teaching methods and didactic approaches that take these linguistic differences into account.

Keywords: learning German, mastering grammar, difficulties, grammatical systems, contrastive analysis

INTRODUCTION

Macedonian people have a rich history in all areas of life. We can boast of numerous successful people who build their careers all over the world. But along with the praise, we as a people have one common negative trait, and that is that "if we fail in our goal or intention, we always look for the blame in others". Here we would like to clarify a situation among parents whose children are learning German. Namely, their child is having a hard time learning German, because of a teacher who does not know how to teach it. If these parents did just a little research into the German language, not only about the course of instruction, but also the content that the teachers teach and how dedicated they are to additional training and seminars, then they would certainly change their opinion. It is this problem that teachers face that was the reason for the topic of this paper, where we will try to clarify in more detail the grammar of the German language, that is, the segments that are different from the grammar of our native language.

A brief overview of the grammar of the German language

In this section we would like to give a brief overview of the complexity of German grammar. As previously mentioned, no foreign language, and in our case German, can be said to be able to speak or write, if its grammar has not been mastered. In learning German grammar, students cannot help

themselves much if they make a comparison with ours, Macedonian, because there are differences that can confuse them.

Students learning German are often advised to learn German nouns together with their definite article, because the definite article of a noun corresponds to the gender of the noun. However, the gender of 80% of nouns can be recognized by the meaning or form, especially the last few letters of the noun. Nouns in German have three specific genders (masculine, feminine and neuter) and are declined according to cases and grammatical numbers. All nouns are written with a capital letter.

In the German language, there are four grammatical cases according to which nouns, adjectives, and pronouns change. The cases are:

- nominative (Nominativ/Werfall),
- genitive (Genitiv/Wesfall),
- dative (Dativ/Wemfall) and
- accusative (Akkusativ/Wenfall).

The case of a particular noun depends on the grammatical function of the noun in the sentence.

Nominative (Wer oder was?): the subject of the sentence, the doer of the action.

Genitive (Wessen?): the possessor of something, or the object of certain prepositions.

Dative (Wem?): the indirect object, as in the case when the object is given to someone or the object of a certain preposition.

Accusative (Wen oder was?): the direct object, the thing that directly receives the action, or the object of a certain preposition.

Today, the use of the genitive case is still rare in the spoken language of the people who speak the language, often replacing it with the dative case, similar to the Faroese cognate German. But the genitive case remains almost mandatory in written communication, public speeches and in everything that is not explicitly colloquial in German, and is still an important part of the German Bildungssprache (educational language). In television programs and films, you can often encounter a mixture of the two cases, the dative as a substitute and the regular genitive, depending on how formal or "artistic" the program is supposed to be. The use of the dative as a substitute is more common in the southern German dialects, while Germans from the northern regions (where at that time Luther's Bible in German was taught as a foreign language) use the genitive much more often. Although it became quite common not to use the genitive when formally required, a large number of Germans knew how to use it and generally did.

The dative governs the indirect object and location in a sentence.

The sentence “Ich gebe meinem Sohn einen Hund” (in Macedonian „Му давам куче на синот“)) contains the subject “ich”; the verb “gebe”; the indirect object “meinem Sohn”; and the direct object “einen Hund”.

Why is “einen Hund” a direct object and not an indirect object? Because “einen Hund” is what corresponds to the action of the subject and “meinem Sohn” is what is acted upon or the specific location of the subject.

The case of the noun after a preposition is determined by the preposition. In German, prepositions are powerful enough to change what follows to be the subordination of the type of preposition and can be difficult to master. The reason for this is that prepositions are designed to give direction, location, intensity, etc. to a sentence. The way a Macedonian speaker would point can be quite different from the way a German speaker would point. Perhaps these few examples will clarify this:

MACEDONIAN: Книгата е на масата. Постерот е на ѕидот.

"На" is a preposition. In this context, in Macedonian we understand "on" in the sense of contact between two surfaces.

GERMAN: Das Buch liegt auf dem Tisch. Das Poster hängt an der Wand.

The meaning is the same – “на”. But still, these are two different prepositions “auf” and “an”. But why are there two prepositions? Because “auf” is used when it comes to horizontal contact, and “an” is used when it comes to vertical contact (Helbig & Buscha, 2001).

The declension of adjectives depends not only on the gender, number, and case of the noun it modifies, but also on whether it has no article or whether it has an indefinite or definite article.

In German, there are twelve different ways of forming the plural. Those who learn German as a foreign language learn the plural of a noun together with the noun. Although many feminine nouns form the plural correctly, many masculine and neuter nouns do not have a correct plural. For example, some plurals are formed with an "n" and some with an "en", some with an umlaut and an "e" or an umlaut and an "en", other plurals are the same as the singular, some with an "er" or an umlaut and an "er". Many pronouns taken from other languages are pluralized with an "s" (for example: Restaurant = Restaurants).

Nominal phrases in German generally consist of the following components in the following order: article, number (basic or ordinal number), adjective(s), noun, genitive attribute, position(s), relative clause, reflexive pronoun.

"Die dritte umwerfende Vorstellung des Schillerdramas in dieser Woche in Hamburg"

(Третиот зачудувачки перформанс на Шилеровата драма оваа недела во Хамбург)

The nominal phrase is often found in a relative clause. Apart from their highly modelled forms, relative pronouns in German are less complicated. There are two variants. The first, more common usage is based on the definite articles der, die, das, but with special forms in the genitive (dessen, deren) and the plural in the dative (denen). And the second, more literary and used for emphasis, is the relative usage of welcher, welche, welches. Both usages model according to gender, case and number. They take their gender and number from the noun they model, but their case is taken from their function in the sentence.

Das Haus, in dem ich wohne, ist sehr alt.

(Куќата во која живеам е многу стара.)

The modified forms depend on the number, case, and gender of the corresponding noun. The articles have the same plural forms in all three genders.

In relation to nouns, cardinal numbers are placed before adjectives, if any. If the number is relatively low, it is usually not combined with the indefinite article in the plural (for example einige or mehrere). Personal pronouns in the first or second person are placed before numerals. Personal pronouns in the third person can be used with numerals.

Adjectives in German usually come before the noun they modify. Adjectives in German have endings that depend on the case, number, and (in the singular) gender of the noun phrase, but there are actually two groups of endings, called strong and weak endings. Each group depends on the type of word that follows the adjective, and sometimes also on gender and case. Like articles, adjectives take the same plural endings in all three genders.

Third-person pronouns can be used as a replacement for nominal phrases. They have the same gender, number, and case as the original nominal phrases. This also applies to other pronouns.

Verbs in German can be divided into weak, with a dental consonant change, or strong, representing a vowel gradation (ablaut). Most verbs of both types are regular, although a large number of subgroups and anomalies occur. The only totally irregular verb in the language is "sein" (to be). However, in German as a foreign language textbooks, strong verbs are often classified as irregular. There are fewer than 200 strong and irregular verbs, and there is a tendency for strong verbs to gradually become weak.

In German, many verbs have a separable prefix that can be disconnected from their root. Examples include aussehen, to appear or look, and vorstellen, to imagine or imagine.

Peter sieht spitze in seinem Anzug aus.

(Петер изгледа згодно во неговата облека.)

Lori, kennst du meine Frau? Ja? Wer stellte euch vor?

Лори, ја познаваш ли жена ми? Да? Кој ти ја претстави?(Кој ве запозна?)

Modal particles (Abtönungspartikel) are parts of speech that are often used in spoken German. These words affect the style of the sentence, rather than conveying a specific literal meaning. Typical examples of this type of word in German are doch, mal, halt, eben, nun, schon, eh or ja. Many of these words also have more basic, specific meanings (for example: "ja" yes, "schon" already), but in their modal use this meaning is not directly expressed.

The sentence structure in German is somewhat more complex than in other languages, with phrases properly placed for both interrogative and dependent structures.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The subject of this paper's research is whether students become less motivated in learning the German language due to difficulties in mastering grammar.

As a problem of this research, I single out the opinion and attitude of some parents regarding the difficulties in learning the German language among their children, the blame lies with the teachers who teach it.

The aim of the research is to see how mastering the grammar of the German language could be facilitated in order to facilitate its learning.

Based on the subject of research, the methodology used during the research is determined, and the methods will be combined depending on the content, i.e. the element being researched.

The research is developmental in nature, with the aim of determining whether children from our city and the wider region face learning difficulties in mastering the grammar of the German language.

According to the content, this research is social, as it treats a phenomenon that is occurring at the same time in the Southwestern region of the Republic of North Macedonia.

According to the time duration of monitoring the research phenomenon, this research is transferable, as it will be realized in a short period of time, in different places, under different conditions.

Primary and secondary research is used to prepare the paper. Secondary sources refer to professional literature, scientific papers in the field of foreign language curricula, in theory and practice.

The general scientific methods used in data processing are:

Analytical-synthetic method - analysis of certain phenomena, breaking them down to their basic parts, grouping them according to common characteristics and, based on that, drawing and presenting new specific conclusions.

Inductive-deductive method - establishing general conclusions through individual specific views and observations, and vice versa, arriving at new specific conclusions through general views.

Descriptive method - as a procedure for describing or presenting the subject of scientific research with scientific interpretation and explanation is one of the goals of science (along with prediction and explanation). The descriptive method, as the name suggests, describes objects and phenomena. Descriptive methods can be observational methods, surveys and case studies. Descriptive research can be explained as a description of the state of things at the moment when the researcher observes them without changing any of the variable elements. In doing so, various aspects of a phenomenon or object, their characteristics and/or behavior are described. A large number of scientific and professional literature and specific research by prominent experts from the country and abroad are used in the description.

Statistical method - the collected data were statistically processed, interpreted and then analyzed, based on which appropriate conclusions will be drawn about the researched phenomenon. The statistical method and its application will enable sorting and organizing the previously collected data according

to various criteria, all of which will be supported by statistical tables and graphical displays in order to more easily and clearly determine the relations of conditionality of this phenomenon.

For the purposes of this paper, analysis was used as a procedure, which, with the help of a survey questionnaire, allowed for the collection of data for the research of teachers and parents in the Southwestern region of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The obtained data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

- Methods of scientific knowledge

The interpretation of the obtained data is based on several methods of scientific inference, namely:

a. basic procedures of scientific inference

- analysis;

б. auxiliary procedures of scientific inference:

- comparative analysis.

Staffing plan: Teachers and parents were surveyed at random.

Timeline: The research was conducted from April 2025 to June 2025 according to the following schedule:

1. Technical preparation of the survey questionnaires;
2. The survey questionnaires were delivered and answered by randomly selected respondents.
3. Collection and classification of the survey questionnaires.

The results of the research will be beneficial for parents, teachers who teach foreign languages, but also for the entire social community.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The research included 200 randomly selected respondents, some foreign language teachers, some parents of students and some students. They were sent questionnaires electronically, consisting of three parts: demographic data, suggested answers and assessment. The completed questionnaires were sent again by e-mail. After they were processed, conclusions were drawn.

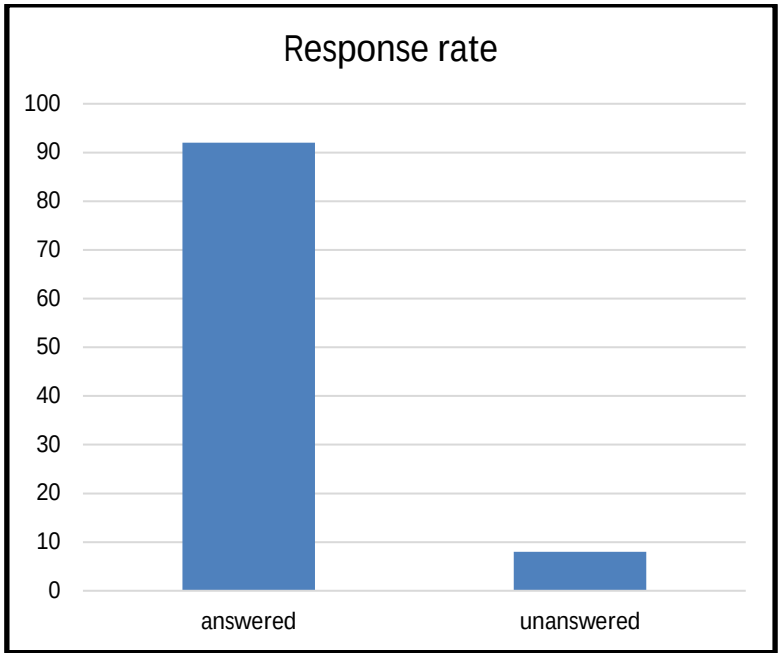


Chart No. 1. Structure of respondents according to the response rate to the survey questionnaire

From the survey questionnaires sent to the respondents, foreign language teachers, parents of students, and students, we received a response rate of 92%, a percentage with which we can be satisfied because this topic has aroused great interest among them.

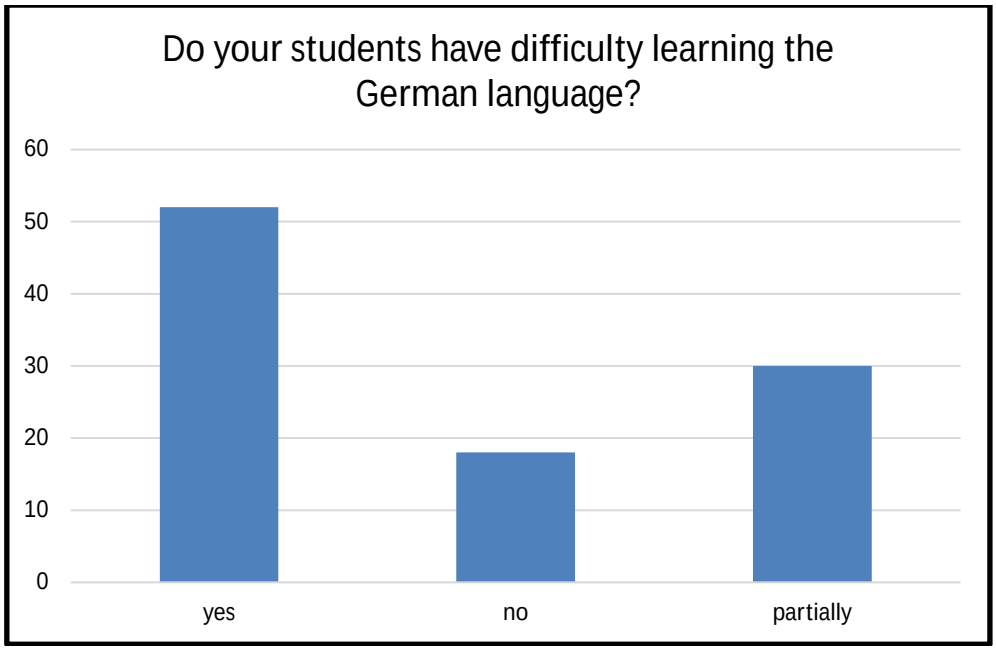


Chart No. 2. Do your students have difficulties learning the German language?

The survey question posed to the respondents – teachers, which reads: Do your students have difficulties in learning the German language? The results we obtained are graphically presented in Chart No. 2. As can be seen, the majority of the total number of respondents, i.e. 52%, gave an affirmative answer, 30% declared a partial answer, and the smallest part, or 18%, gave a negative answer.

We can conclude that more than half of the teachers who were the subject of our research stated that their students have difficulties learning the German language.

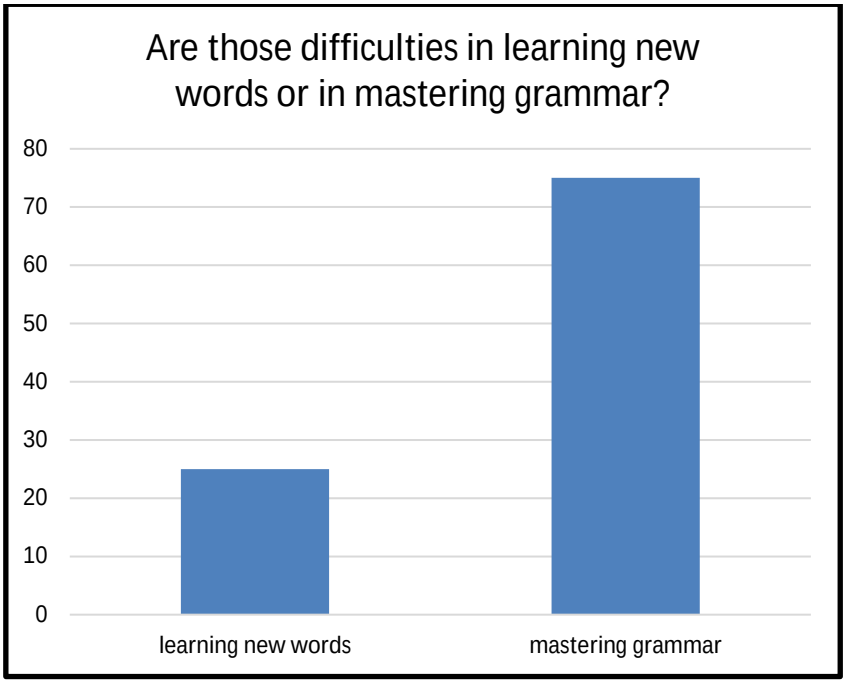


Chart No. 3. Are these difficulties in learning new words or in mastering grammar?

The next survey question that was sent to teachers complements the previous one and refers to the clarification of the difficulties in learning the German language. Is it more difficult to learn new words or to master grammar? Three quarters of the total number of respondents - teachers, or 75%, stated that their students have difficulties in mastering German grammar. One quarter or 25% stated that their students have difficulties in learning new words.

These results are graphically presented in Chart No. 3.

It can be concluded that teachers have realized that most of their students have difficulty mastering the grammar of the German language, and this makes learning the language more difficult.

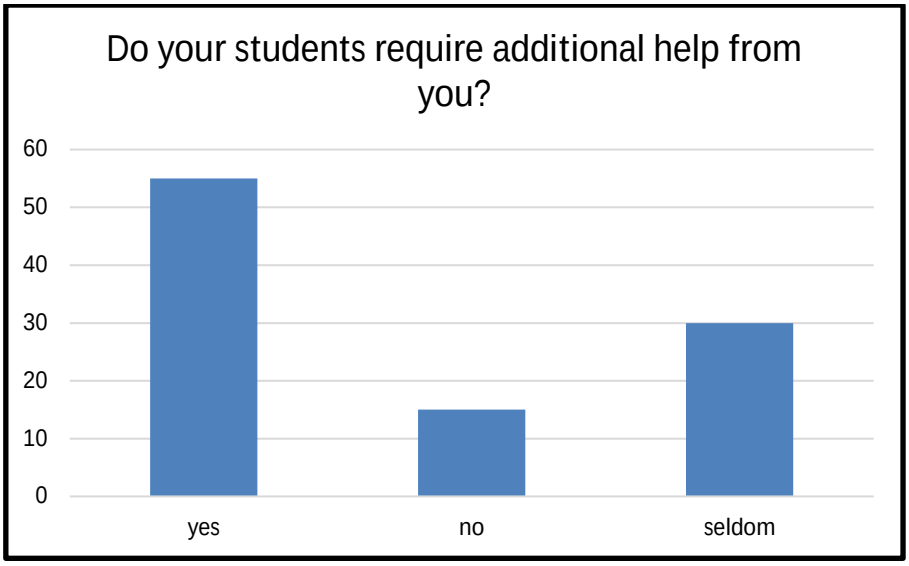


Chart No. 4. Do your students require additional help from you?

Do your students seek additional help from teachers to cope with difficulties in learning the German language was the next survey question submitted to teachers, and it complements the previous two. As we can see from graph no. 4. which presents the results of the teachers' responses, 55% of them stated that students seek additional help from them. 30% stated that this help is rarely requested, and the smallest part or 15% stated that the help is not requested.

We can conclude that half of the teachers stated that their students require additional help from them in learning the German language.

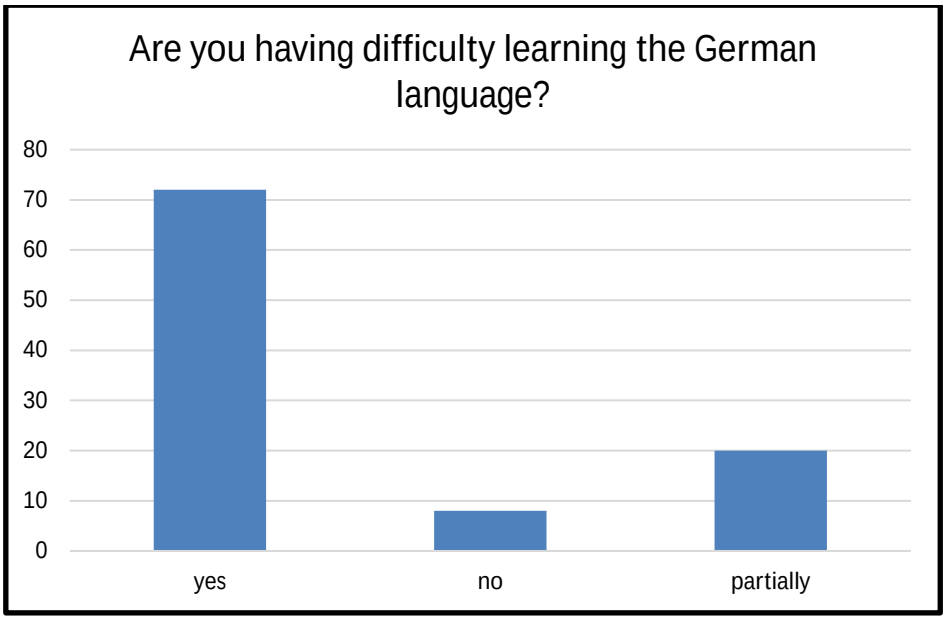


Chart No. 5. Do you have difficulties learning the German language?

The next survey question that was submitted to the respondents – students who are learning the German language, concerns the difficulties in learning the language. As we can see, a very high percentage, 72% of the total number, stated that they have difficulties in learning the language. 20% of them stated that they have some difficulties, and only 8% stated that they learn the German language easily.

These results are graphically presented in Chart No. 5.

We can conclude that two-thirds of the students reported having difficulty learning the German language.

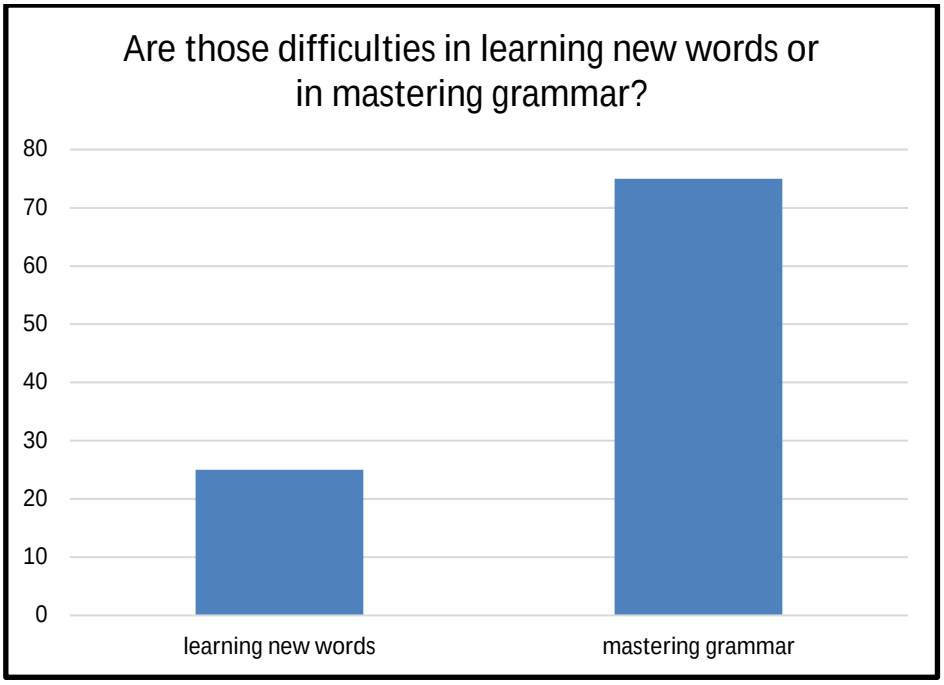


Chart No. 6. Are these difficulties in learning new words or in mastering grammar?

The next survey question that was sent to the students complements the one that was asked to their teachers, and refers to the clarification of the difficulties in learning the German language. Is it more difficult to learn new words or to master the grammar? Three quarters of the total number of respondents – students, or 75%, stated that they have difficulties in mastering German grammar. One quarter or 25% stated that they have difficulties in learning new words. These results are graphically presented in Chart No. 6. If a comparison is made, we will see that the answers to the same question asked to teachers and students are identical.

It can be concluded that two-thirds of students have difficulty mastering the grammar of the German language, and this makes learning the language difficult.

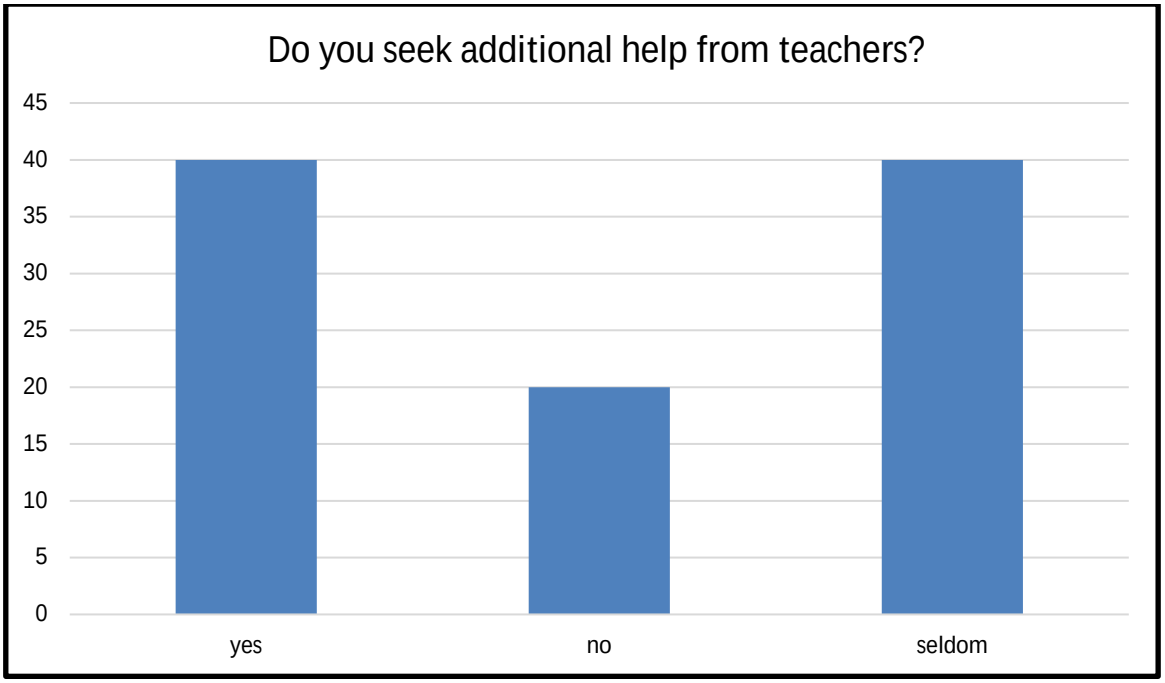


Chart No. 7. Do you ask for additional help from teachers?

To overcome difficulties in learning the German language, whether students seek additional help from their teachers was the next survey question, and the results of their responses are graphically presented in Chart No. 7.

As can be seen, an identical percentage of 40% of students stated that they require additional help, that is, they rarely request it, and 20% stated that they do not need that help.

We can conclude that although students stated that they need additional help in learning the German language, they seek that help from their teachers.

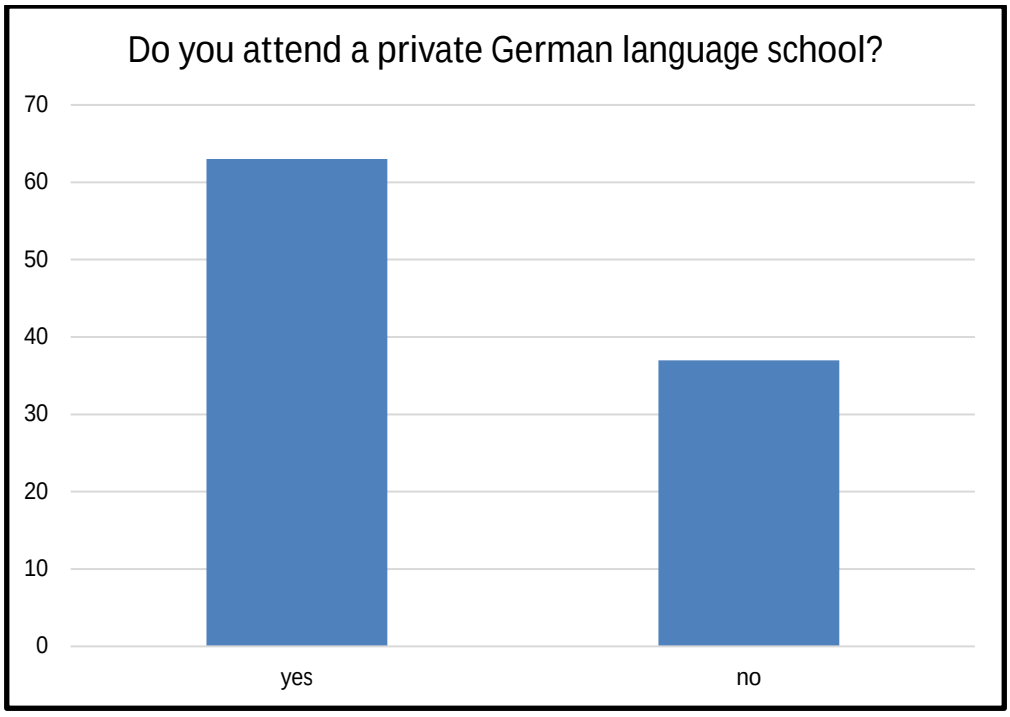


Chart No. 8. Do you attend a private German language school?

Whether students see visiting private foreign language schools as a help in overcoming difficulties in learning the German language was the survey question answered by the students who participated in our research.

More than half of the total number of respondents or 63% stated with a confirmed answer that they attend foreign language schools. One third or 37% stated that they do not attend these schools.

These results are graphically presented in Chart No. 8.

Based on this, we can conclude that more than half of the students stated that they attend private schools to overcome difficulties in learning the German language.

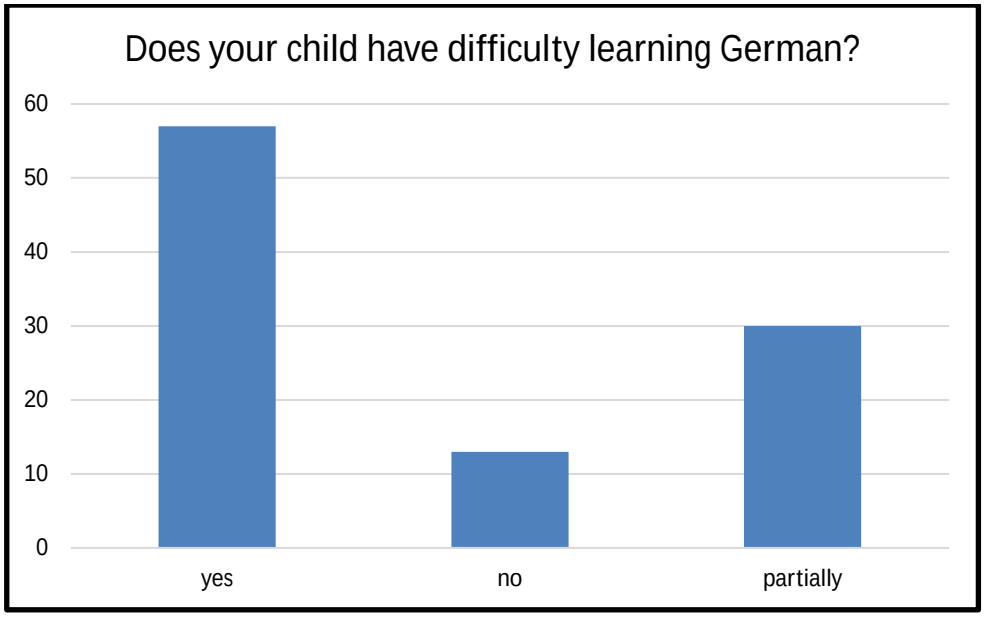


Chart No. 9. Does your child have difficulty learning the German language?

Chart No. 9. contains the results of the statements of the respondents – parents of students learning German, to the same survey question that was previously asked to their children and to teachers who teach German. As we can see, 58% of the total number responded with an affirmative answer, 30% decided with a partial answer, and the smallest percentage or 12% gave a negative answer, i.e. that their children do not have difficulties in learning the German language.

We can conclude that more than half of the parents stated that their children have difficulty learning the German language.

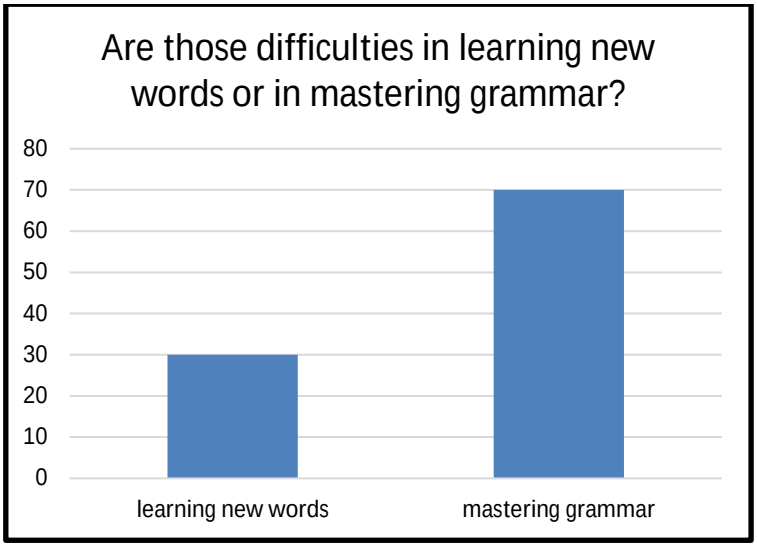


Chart No. 10. Are these difficulties in learning new words or in mastering grammar?

The next survey question that was sent to parents complements the previous one and refers to the clarification of the difficulties in learning the German language. Is it more difficult to learn new words or to master grammar? More than two-thirds of the total number of respondents – parents, or 70%, stated that their children have difficulties in mastering German grammar. One-third or 30% stated that their children have difficulties in learning new words.

These results are graphically presented in Chart No. 10.

It can be concluded that parents have also realized that for the most part their children have difficulty mastering the grammar of the German language, and this makes learning the language more difficult.

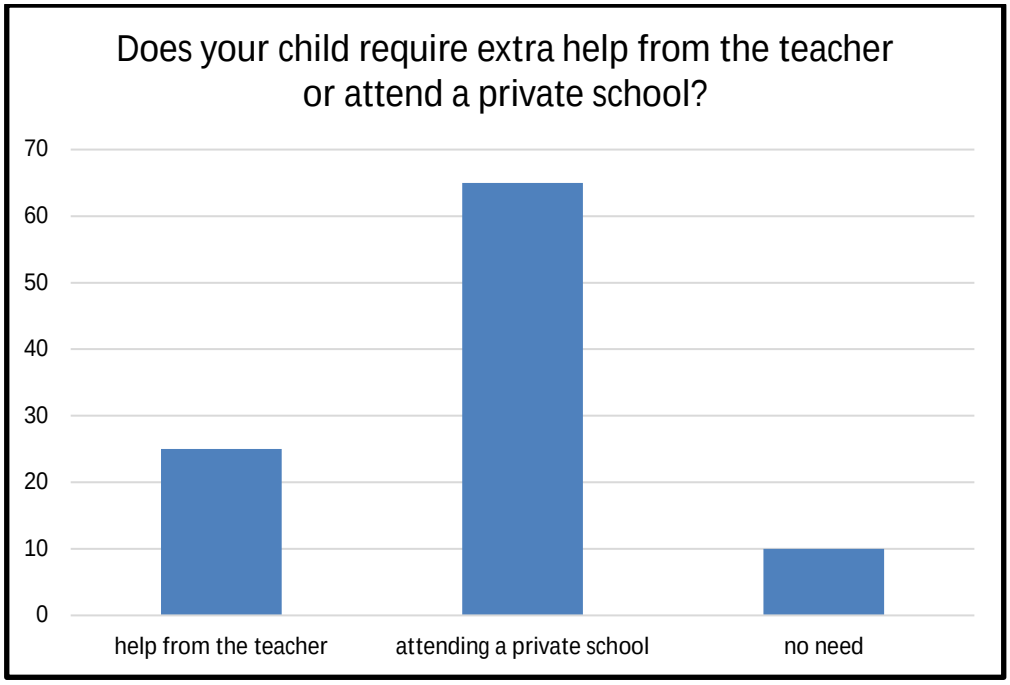


Chart No. 11. Does your child require additional help from the teacher or attend a private school?

The last survey question that was submitted to parents concerns their choice for solving the problem related to overcoming difficulties in learning the German language.

Chart No. 11 graphically presents the obtained results.

As we can see, the smallest percentage, or 10%, of the total number of parents who were the subject of the survey stated that their children do not seek additional help in learning the language. One third, or 35%, stated that their children seek help from their teachers, and the largest proportion, or 65%, stated that their children attend private schools.

We can conclude that more than half of the parents stated that their children attend private schools to facilitate learning the German language.

CONCLUSION

Learning a foreign language cannot be called an "easy process" because children are learning a language that is not their native language and is not a language they hear every day. Some authors agree that this process will be successful if quality teachers are involved. Some say that the process is conditioned by the students themselves, and some say that the family and living environment have an influence. In my personal opinion, this process cannot be successful without the simultaneous inclusion of all three previously mentioned factors.

In order to facilitate learning the German language, we conducted a survey involving German teachers, their students, and parents.

According to the results of the research conducted, we can draw several conclusions:

- From the survey questionnaires sent to students, foreign language teachers, and parents of students, we received a response rate of 92%, which in my opinion is a satisfactory percentage because the topic aroused great interest among them.
- More than half of the teachers who were the subject of our research stated that their students had difficulties learning the German language.
- Teachers have noticed that most of their students have difficulty mastering the grammar of the German language, which makes learning the language difficult.
- Half of the teachers reported that their students seek additional help from them in learning the German language.
- Two-thirds of students reported having difficulty learning the German language.
- Two-thirds of students have difficulty mastering German grammar, which makes learning the language difficult.
- Although students have stated that they need additional help in learning the German language, they rarely or only rarely seek this help from their teachers.
- More than half of the students reported attending private schools to overcome difficulties in learning the German language.
- More than half of the parents stated that their children have difficulties or have some difficulty in learning the German language.
- Most parents have noticed that their children have difficulty mastering the grammar of the German language, which makes learning the language more difficult.
- More than half of parents reported that their children attend private schools to facilitate learning the German language.

As my recommendation based on the research conducted and the results I obtained from it, I would like to state the following:

- To find a way, through the joint efforts of parents and teachers, to make it easier for students to learn the German language.

Only in this way will students be able to overcome the difficulties in learning the German language, be motivated, and successfully learn this foreign language.

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FROM SAINT CLEMENT TO THE DIGITAL AGE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARIES IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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Abstract
Libraries have always been fundamental to preserving and promoting cultural heritage, serving as key institutions for the transmission of knowledge across generations. In Macedonia, this role dates back to the 9th century with St. Clement of Ohrid, who established one of the first known Slavic scriptoria and laid the foundation for Slavic literacy and librarianship. Since that time, libraries in North Macedonia have developed from medieval manuscript collections into modern digital repositories, adapting to new technologies while preserving their essential role as guardians of national identity. Today, Macedonian libraries safeguard historical manuscripts, literature, and folklore, serving as cultural hubs that connect the country with the broader European intellectual landscape. Despite their significance, North Macedonian libraries face challenges such as limited funding, outdated infrastructure, and the need for enhanced professional development opportunities for librarians. Addressing these issues requires strategic investment in modernization, digital literacy, and governmental support to ensure that libraries remain vital institutions for cultural preservation and European integration.

Keywords: *Libraries, cultural identity, European context, European integration, cultural programs, Macedonia.*

Introduction

Throughout history, libraries have played a crucial role in cultural development and the transmission of knowledge, and this is particularly evident in the case of North Macedonia. The foundations of Macedonian librarianship can be traced back to the 9th century, when St. Clement of Ohrid established one of the first Slavic scriptoria, laying the groundwork for literacy and the preservation of Slavic heritage. From their medieval beginnings to the present day, libraries in North Macedonia have undergone continuous transformation, moving from manuscript collections to digital repositories while retaining their central role as custodians of national identity.

In the modern European context, Macedonian libraries act as active cultural hubs, participating in international collaborations, digitization projects, and cross-border research initiatives. Partnerships with European institutions—such as through the Europeana digital platform or Erasmus+ programs—allow them to share their collections globally, fostering intercultural dialogue and strengthening their role in European cultural networks. Furthermore, libraries contribute to cultural diplomacy by organizing book fairs, joint exhibitions, and scholarly conferences that showcase Macedonian literary and historical achievements.

Digitization initiatives, in particular, provide greater accessibility to rare manuscripts, ensuring their preservation and making them available to researchers worldwide. At the same time, challenges such as limited resources, outdated infrastructure, and insufficient opportunities for professional development continue to be pressing issues. Addressing these challenges is crucial for strengthening the role of libraries as cultural mediators within Europe. This study aims to examine the historical and contemporary role of libraries in North Macedonia, with a particular focus on their contribution to cultural heritage preservation, European integration, and cultural diplomacy. Specifically, the paper seeks to analyze how libraries balance their national identity-preserving function with their integration into the broader European cultural space. Accordingly, the central research question is: *In what ways do libraries in North Macedonia preserve national cultural identity while simultaneously contributing to European cultural integration and intercultural dialogue?*

Historical Development of Libraries in Macedonia

The origins of librarianship in Macedonia are closely tied to Saint Clement of Ohrid, one of the most notable disciples of Saints Cyril and Methodius and a successor of their groundbreaking work. Saints Cyril and Methodius created the first Slavic alphabet, consisting of 38 letters, which was understandable to the people and helped spread Christianity. They were brothers from Thessaloniki who preached the faith and baptized many. They translated numerous books, mainly theological texts, from Greek into Slavic. Interestingly, Saint Cyril served as a librarian in the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Glagolitic manuscripts from the Ohrid Literary Center include the Zograf Gospel, the Sinai Psalter, the Sinai Euchologion, and several Glagolitic manuscripts from the later-discovered Sinai collection (Crvenkovska, 2016). The Glagolitic script was widely used in the Principality of Moravia, which stretched across Central Europe, covering areas of several current countries, including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, parts of Poland, and regions reaching the Danube in the south.

Therefore, Saint Clement of Ohrid is regarded as the founder of librarianship in Macedonia, and many primary and secondary schools, faculties, and universities are named in his honor. Additionally, in North Macedonia, the most prestigious award in the field of librarianship is the Clement Charter for Lifetime Achievement, presented by the Library Association of Macedonia every two years. This award represents the highest recognition for contributions to Macedonian librarianship today.

The earliest libraries in Macedonia were monastic, preserving, copying, and translating numerous books and valuable manuscripts. Notable monasteries in Macedonia, recognized for their rich cultural and manuscript heritage, include:

• The Monastery of Saint Naum, founded in the 9th century;

• The Monastery of Saint John Bigorski (Debar region), founded in the 11th century, houses an extensive library with numerous religious books, manuscripts, and icons;

• The Lesnovo Monastery, an essential medieval literary center where books were copied and many old manuscripts were preserved;

• The Monastery of Saint Panteleimon – Nerezi (Skopje), dating back to the 12th century, is renowned for its manuscript books and liturgical texts;

• Marko’s Monastery (14th century), a spiritual and literary center where books were copied;

• The Treskavec Monastery (Prilep region), known for preserving Old Slavic manuscripts and books;

• The Monastery in Matejche (Kumanovo region), which preserved significant manuscripts from the medieval period.

Many other monasteries in Macedonia also represent true treasures of books, manuscripts, and significant libraries. Thus, monastic libraries were the first places where books were preserved, copied, and translated, playing an invaluable role in safeguarding Macedonia's cultural and literary heritage.

With the development of society, new faculties, reading rooms, and libraries were opened. The first modern library was established at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje. Due to a shortage of library staff in Macedonia, the role of the librarian was often performed by prominent youth and students. Decisions were made to establish training programs for librarians to enhance their professional skills.

The National and University Library in Skopje was officially opened on November 23, 1944, by the decision of ASNOM (Anti-Fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia), while World War II had not yet ended (National and University Library "St. Clement of Ohrid"). Today, in Macedonia, there are libraries in all settlements. Libraries are divided according to their purpose: national, public, school, higher education, university, and specialized libraries. The main difference between national and other libraries (public, local, city, etc.) lies in their founders: national libraries are established by the state, while local and public libraries are under the authority of local self-government.

Libraries as Cultural Centers in the 21st Century

Libraries in North Macedonia today are repositories of a vast literary heritage. Their mission is not only to safeguard books and manuscripts but also to promote cultural heritage by organizing events such as book promotions, lectures, literary evenings, and collaborative projects with other libraries, institutions, associations, and international partners. Libraries support education, culture, and science, serving as meeting points for knowledge exchange and cultural dialogue.

Library staff play a vital role in this process. According to one definition of management, the staff constitute the organization itself. This principle applies to all institutions, including libraries. Following European and global trends, Macedonian libraries have also begun digitizing their collections. Digitization is a successful means of preserving a nation's literary and cultural heritage. According to the Manifesto for Digital Libraries, digitization is the process of converting information into a digital (computer-readable) format, while a digital library represents an online collection of verified digital objects accessible on the Internet.

European libraries are leaders in digitizing cultural, literary, and scientific heritage. The idea of digital libraries dates back to the post–World War II period. The oldest digital library is Project Gutenberg, established in 1971, which created digital versions of books to make them freely available online. Today, Project Gutenberg offers around 60,000 free electronic books available for download and reading.

Among the first digitization projects were:

- The DELOS project, focused on digital library research;
- The Mercury project (1991);
- The CORE project, which scanned over 400,000 pages from 20 chemistry journals;
- The American projects DLI-1 and DLI-2 (1994), funded by the National Science Foundation, NASA, and DARPA;
- The Europeana project, founded by the European Association of Libraries, Archives, and Museums, which has become the leading EU digital platform for cultural heritage, containing over 50 million digitized objects from more than 3,500 European institutions;
- The Million Book Project (2002), which later evolved into the Universal Digital Library;
- Google Books, implemented in collaboration with major global libraries.

Digitization became widely implemented during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as libraries sought innovative ways to remain relevant by providing online services. Programs developed during this period can now be accessed anytime and anywhere, targeting different user groups such as children, teenagers, students, adults, and seniors. European libraries have created many innovative online programs for children, including interactive stories, educational games, coding courses, and digital reading platforms. For example, the City Library in Prague offers workshops, storytelling events, and a famous "infinity tunnel of books," which fascinates young visitors. In Hungary, the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library in Budapest places great emphasis on children’s and youth programs, offering quizzes, storytelling workshops, puppet shows, art classes, and book clubs for teenagers.

In North Macedonia, libraries also organize projects for children and youth, often funded by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. For example, the National Institution – University Library "St. Clement of Ohrid" in Bitola organizes the "Teen Summer at the Library" program, which includes workshops such as "Books and Movies for Teenagers" and "Video Games," designed to attract youth during summer holidays. The "Goce Delchev" Library in Valandovo introduced "Social Games for Teenagers, Adolescents, and Adults," which were met with significant interest.

The importance of targeted programs for teenagers is highlighted by IFLA guidelines, which emphasize the need for librarians to address adolescents’ unique developmental stage, when voluntary reading is often neglected. Similarly, in North Macedonia, libraries recognize the importance of

tailoring services to youth, defined by national law as individuals aged 15 to 29 (Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies).

Digitization of Library Collections in North Macedonia

The National and University Library "St. Clement of Ohrid" in Skopje is the leading institution for digitizing library materials in North Macedonia. It is developing a digital collection of rare and valuable publications—including old books, manuscripts, newspapers, magazines, and other important documents—accessible through its online catalog. North Macedonia also maintains a Digital Library of the Republic of North Macedonia at the National Library "St. Clement of Ohrid," focusing on digitizing rare materials. Several universities, including the University "St. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, have institutional repositories where researchers and students can publish papers and dissertations. University libraries also provide access to international research databases such as EBSCO and Springer.

The City Library "Braka Miladinovci" in Skopje digitizes culturally and historically significant materials, including old books, postcards, photographs, and manuscripts. The Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (MANU) has developed a digital database of Macedonian dialects, preserving around 50,000 dialectal lexemes.

The Institute for Macedonian Literature has also created a Digital Library, offering access to out-of-print but still highly demanded publications, such as the collected works *The Life and Work of Grigor S. Prlichev* and *The Works of Aco Shopov* (Trajanova, 2022).

Conclusion

Libraries in North Macedonia have evolved from medieval monastic scriptoria to modern digital repositories, maintaining their central role as guardians of cultural identity while adapting to new technological and social challenges. Their historical roots, deeply connected to the work of St. Clement of Ohrid and the Glagolitic tradition, demonstrate the significance of libraries in shaping Slavic literacy and cultural continuity. In the 21st century, Macedonian libraries actively contribute to cultural diplomacy, European integration, and intercultural dialogue through digitization projects, international collaborations, and innovative programs for children, youth, and adults. However, challenges such as limited funding, outdated infrastructure, and insufficient professional development opportunities for librarians remain obstacles that need urgent attention. Addressing these issues requires a strategic vision that combines state support, European partnerships, and investment in digital transformation. By strengthening their role as cultural hubs and modernizing their services, Macedonian libraries will continue to serve not only as protectors of national identity but also as active participants in the broader European cultural landscape.

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THE CHARACTER KALESH ANGJA - SEMIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper applies parts of contemporary theoretical concepts that help in the analysis of characters, i.e. literary works. We focus on the character Kalesh Angja from the novel written by Stale Popov. More specifically, in this paper, the emphasis is placed on the signification of the character, as a segment in the attempt to determine the semiological status of the character in Macedonian realism. If we proceed according to the semiotic analysis of Filip Amon, the character of Kalesh Angja is included in the characters - referents / historical, allegorical. The analysis of the character Kalesh Angja (this paper as the first and the following as the second part) aims to offer a description of the character on a semiological level by applying the well-known techniques of the semiology of the character (Filip Amon) , through the stylistic - formational segments of the prose of Macedonian realism.

Key words: Kalesh Angja, semiology, character, the signification of the character, realism

INTRODUCTION

Determining the character Kalesh Angja in the category of characters - referents / historical, allegorical provides him with a broad communication with the reader, if we refer to the realization that the folk song about Kalesh Angja is actually the motive template of the text by Stale Popov. The motive is the resistance of the kidnapped young girl who does not want to be Turkified, does not want to change her Christian faith. Roland Bard also calls such phenomena a "real effect". The young and beautiful Angja is kidnapped and should be Turkified, but she bravely resists. Thus, the character Kalesh Angja is built along the axis: kidnapping, resistance, liberation (victory), without surprises, twists. The character Kalesh Angja is determined as a "historical or allegorical character": there is a historical contextualization of the story, the event happened, the time and space are the Ottoman rule in Macedonia (Mariovo). In Stale Popov's text, a historical moment indirectly related to the character Kalesh Angja is the delivery of the letter from Suljo-aga to the Padishah in Istanbul about the Mariovites and the Mariovite rebellion. We can simultaneously include the character Kalesh Angja in several of the three categories defined by Amon (characters - referents, characters - deictics, characters - anaphors), thanks to the functional polyvalence of each unit: The character Kalesh Angja in relation to Migar (Mithras) is positioned as a character - deictic (with the dialogue he leads with her, full of awareness, arguments, warnings, indications, conclusions, he literally takes the position of Socrates' interlocutors - through the dialogue led by Kalesh Angja and Migar, Migar comes to the truth). The deictic qualifications are further argued by the fact: the character Kalesh Angja is the communicator of a code, rules established in the collective cultural memory (Christianity, Islam) applied by the writer, and well known and adopted by the reader.

THE CHARACTER'S MEANING

According to Amon , "character, as a semiological concept, can first be defined as a double articulation of a morpheme, as a migratory morpheme, manipulated by a discontinuous signifier (a number of signs), which refers to a discontinuous signified (the meaning or value of the character), it will be defined by the network of relations of similarity, of opposition, of hierarchy and of subordination (its distribution) that contracts it on the plane of the signifier or signified, successively and/or

simultaneously with other characters and elements of the work in close contact (other characters from the same novel, from the same work) or in distant contact (in absentia / other characters of the same genus)." McDonald, Cohen, Greimas, Barthes, Todorov, Amon, 1996:243) Philip Amon continues, that ″as a discontinuous morpheme, the character is a unit of meaning, and yet we assume that this signified is sufficient for analysis and description. If we accept the initial hypothesis that the character in a novel is born only from units of meaning, that it is made of sentences that he or they utter about him, the character is therefore, the bearer of conversations and transformations of the narrative.″ (McDonald, Cohen, Greimas, Barthes, Todorov, Amon, 1996:244) Here, it seems important to underline that the "value" of a character (according to Saussure's terminology) is not formed only through repetition, accumulation or transformation from less definite to more definite, but the value of a character is also built through the perception of relations of opposition, through the relationship vis-à-vis other characters and expressions. First, we present the units of meaning that the omnipresent - omniscient narrator gives us about Kalesh Angja: the data we receive in this section provide Angja with a central position, which is impossible under normal conditions, according to the patriarchal nature of the community at that time. After the kidnapping of her brother, attention is turned to her, and these data participate in building the construction of the story and (through) the character Kalesh Angja. The references to family, relations with the environment, her beauty and hard work. But Angja is kidnapped by the Turks, just like her brother, before the eyes of their grandfather, and the data that follows relate to her indestructibility, the strength of her resistance, the methods and techniques that the kadi uses to Turkify Angja, because that is the only condition for her to become his anama. Old Aisha and her skill are completely useless, the Turkified Mitra ends her mission to win Angja with suicide - self-awareness (liberation). Angja's unbreakableness causes fear in the superstitious kadija, and in his helplessness he moves from caution to extreme cruelty, which again does not help him in his intention. At that moment, Angja is saved.

INFORMATION GIVEN TO US ABOUT KALESH ANJA THE OMNIPRESENT - OMNISCIENT STORYTELLER ↓
▪ cores
▪ work
▪ compassionate
▪ in love (has first love) / emotional maturity
▪ a free and peaceful childhood
▪ durable (silently endures all the abuse)
▪ beautiful
▪ smart
▪ sensitive
▪ shows knowledge and respect for tradition (the gunchet is upside down)
▪ possesses character and will
▪ brave
▪ protests (slams the kettle and basket off the ground)

If the realism of a character is measured by its signifier (semiological) resolution, then according to all traditional and critical reflections, but also normative theories, whose focus is the character, Angja is a "full-blooded" character. This is confirmed by the rich semiological label of the character, its portrayal. She is a smart, beautiful, hardworking, young girl, compassionate, sensitive, shows knowledge of tradition and its respect, brave, resilient, which in turn confirms the constancy of her character and will. In addition to the physical descriptions of the character Kalesh Angja, other characteristics are available that profile the character, the personality at the portrait level. The love feelings towards Stojan are proof of the emotional maturity of the character Kalesh Angja.

Information provided by other characters about Kalesh Angja :

And the data that we get about the character Kalesh Angja from the other characters refer to the enrichment of the character's etiquette. Determination, courage, constancy of character and the will to persevere are confirmed right at the beginning before the onslaught of all the bribery and luxury that the kadi offers. The confirmation of the character's attributes continues even when the methods change, when the luxury, silk and beautiful words are replaced by force and harassment, with their gradation provoking even stronger resistance, which will later culminate. Then, the character develops and builds the story, the resistance of the individual is the reason for the collective's attack, revenge on him. The conflict is identified on two levels, the first Angja: the kadi, and the second kadi: the Mariovtsi. In both cases, it is about the defense of freedom - being. If, however, the conflict is further generalized, both can be placed in the space of the conflict between Islam and Christianity. (Popov.S, 2017: 28, 29, 32,33, 66, 67, 70 - 76, 81, 82, 84, 89 - 91)

INFORMATION THAT OTHER CHARACTERS GIVE US ABOUT KALEŠ ANĐA ↓
▪ the judge is very polite (flower, strawberry, cherry - but very heavy)
▪ mute, not saying anything – silent
▪ proud (gnashes her teeth when insulted by the Anami)
▪ sorceress, witch
▪ everything listens and works
▪ crying

And these qualifiers that the other characters give us for the character Kalesh Angja can mainly be divided into two groups: they give the eyes with which the character is qualified: flower, strawberry, cherry - but very heavy; sorceress, witch and data that tell us about what the character does: mute, does not say anything - is silent, listens to everything and works, grinds her teeth when insulted by the anams (proud), cries. And the data that we get about the character's physical appearance are functional in two directions: beauty (beauty in itself is tragic in literature), youth, a well-developed and well-built body, are the direct cause of the abduction, that is, the reason for the efforts of the kadi to Turkify her caused by his irrepressible desire to make her his anam. And the data that refer to what the character does, are in the function of expressing and confirming the resistance. As we have already said, the second direction moves in the area of resistance, the profiling of the main struggle of the character (Christian: Muslim) also leaves physical, realistic, visible traces. The portrayal of the character is also enriched with detail. (Popov.S, 2017: 28,50)

HER PHYSICAL APPEARANCE ↓
▪ beautiful
▪ carriage
▪ neatly
▪ a sad person (dulled by fate)
▪ young girl (like dew)
▪ well-developed body
▪ darkened black eyes (apparently from a long cry)

(Popov.S, 2017: 69, 70-77, 78-82, 87-90)

The data that testify to the moral strength of the character Kalesh Angja actually refer to the built and fully confirmed mental structure. At first, the reactions are awakened by the senses: the visualization of the wire, the velvet, the golden buckles and buttons complemented by the smell of tos are the first signals that even more strongly strengthen the decision (not to become Turkic); there is an opposition between the foreign (unknown, Muslim) and the own (known, Christian) first through sensory reactions. This then immediately receives psychological confirmation, and this actually means confirmation of the decision not to become Turkic, not to accept the Muslim faith. (Popov.S, 2017:87-90, 158,159)

HER MORAL STRENGTH ↓
▪ disgust towards the luxury offered
▪ He gives his head, but he doesn't change his faith
▪ rebukes Migar=Mithra / silk is gold, velvet = trash: faith and freedom
▪ attitudes about women's dignity and love
▪ hard millet / resistance lasts a year and a half
▪ spits in the face of the judge
▪ determined to die, and not push herself
▪ I was born a cowgirl - I will die a cowgirl
▪ for the soul
▪ is not ignorant of religious matters
▪ consistency (repeats the answer)

What the character Kalesh Angja continually repeats, and confirmed as resistance, as a defense of Christianity: she gives her head, she does not change her faith; I was born a cowgirl - I will die a cowgirl; determined to die, not to be Turkified; silk is gold, velvet = garbage in relation to faith and freedom even functions at the level of maxims, i.e. units of the code in relation to which the actions of the character Kalesh Angja gain credibility as reliable. It can even be said that these maxims in the Macedonian collective memory, due to the known historical circumstances (disputed national identity, long slavery) have been elevated to the level of apodictic statements, so we encounter them as wisdom or proverbs in wide literary application. Let us just mention that the path to this text by Stale Popov of maxims is precisely from folk art, the song about Kalesh Angja. Thus, the character Kalesh Angja is representative of the stoicism and defiance of the Macedonian woman (= Cveta - Macedonian Bloody Wedding by V. Chernodrinski and her line: "I died, but I did not become a Turk") in defense of her own faith and identity; in defense of dignity, honor, family, love = herself; in defense of her own existence; in defense of everything that she (the woman is) = faith, dignity, honor, family, love. Andonovski places the realism of Stale Popov in the second type of realism, which appears "as a model of narration in which the discourse itself builds a meta-linguistic structure that has the function of persuasive discourse, i.e. a discourse in relation to which actions are motivated." (Andonovski, 1997: 77). According to Andonovski, the characteristics of such realism would be "a high degree of artificial probability, that is, intratextual motivation ... where folk sayings (sentences) or customs play the role of a discourse in relation to which the actions of the characters are verified as credible or unreliable, as acceptable or as those that should be sanctioned." (Andonovski, 1997: 77). The character Kalesh Angja carries out his actions according to the clearly established rules of the community: to preserve the faith and defend personal honor.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper primarily offers a description of the character Kalesh Angja on a semiological level, using the well-known techniques of the semiology of the character. Semiology left significant traces in the creation of narratological analytical techniques and initiated the development of narratology (the theory

of prose), which has never been free from its fruitful influence. However, semiology has had the greatest influence on the development of narrative theories precisely on the level of the character, because the character as a narrative perspective of the text can most easily be identified with the traditional semiological concept of the sign. The next part, which will be published as the second part of this paper (its continuation), will attempt to round off the elaboration of the semiological status of the character Kalesh Angja, with an emphasis on the descriptive levels of narration and the signifier of the character.

This will mean an attempt to build a semiological status of the character in the Macedonian realist novel, to name the role of stylistic formation in building the character, as well as to confirm the applicability of the semiological concept, primarily of Philip Amon (Todorov, Bremon, Eco, Kristeva, as well as some Macedonian semiological approaches - Venko Andonovski, Atanas Vangelov).

A recommendation and challenge for new research is the direction towards the analysis of characters from different stylistic formations: in addition to realism, also in modernism and postmodernism in Macedonian prose, which should result in naming the differences in the semiological status of the characters, depending on which stylistic formation they belong to. The aim of the analysis is to confirm the specificity of a semiology of the character and to underline the differences that arise in relation to the historical and sociological (realism), psychological and psychoanalytic (modernism) and the quotational pseudo-historical and pseudo-sociological approach to the character (postmodernism).

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EMBODIED COGNITION IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL INTERACTION

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Abstract

The theory of embodied cognition holds that linguistic meaning is fundamentally grounded in sensory-motor experience. Yet contemporary communication increasingly unfolds in digital environments where physical co-presence, gesture, and shared perceptual context are limited or absent. This paper examines how such digitally mediated interaction challenges, extends, and reframes embodiment-based approaches in cognitive linguistics. I argue that rather than producing genuine disembodiment, digital communication gives rise to new forms of mediated or quasi-embodiment. Emojis, GIFs, typographic stylizations, and other symbolic cues function as schematic proxies for facial expression, gesture, and affect, enabling recipients to engage in embodied simulation during interpretation. Touchscreen interfaces further introduce action-based routines—such as swiping, tapping, and dragging, that draw upon familiar spatial and force schemas and contribute to users 'construal of communicative events. These practices, together with the spatial and temporal affordances of digital platforms, constitute emerging image schemas and multimodal patterns that shape meaning construction. By situating digital interaction within an expanded framework of embodied cognition, the paper highlights how bodily grounding persists through new channels and shows the need for cognitive linguistic theory to account for hybrid, technologically mediated forms of embodiment.

Keywords: Cognitive linguistics, Cognition, Emojis, Gestures.

1. Introduction

Embodied cognition has become a central framework in cognitive linguistics, grounding meaning in the sensory-motor structures that shape human experience. Early work in this tradition emphasized that linguistic concepts arise from recurring bodily patterns—image schemas, perceptual routines, and action-based metaphors—rather than from abstract, amodal symbols (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Later accounts elaborated this view by arguing that language comprehension recruits perceptual and motor systems through simulation processes (Barsalou, 1999). These theories, though diverse, share a core assumption: communication is fundamentally rooted in bodies interacting within shared physical environments.

Digital communication complicates this assumption. Most contemporary interaction—texting, messaging, social media, comment threads—occurs without co-present bodies. There is no gesture, gaze, or shared physical context. At first glance, such environments seem to strain the embodied view of meaning. They appear disembodied. Yet users still communicate efficiently. They express emotion, nuance, stance, and interpersonal alignment. Something else is happening beneath the surface.

This paper argues that digital communication does not eliminate embodiment. Instead, it restructures it. People rely on symbolic proxies—emojis, GIFs, reaction images, typographic cues—to simulate affective and gestural signals. They also engage with touchscreens through swiping, tapping, and dragging, embedding motor routines into communicative practices. These actions are small, but meaningful. They constitute a new layer of mediated embodiment.

Understanding this shift requires treating digital environments as cognitive ecologies. They are not neutral channels. They shape how users attend, interpret, and act. Work on distributed and extended cognition shows that cognitive processes often incorporate tools, artifacts, and environments as part of their functional systems (Clark & Chalmers, 1998). Digital platforms operate in similar ways. Their affordances channel embodied habits into new forms, creating hybrid modes of meaning-making that blend physical action with symbolic mediation.

This paper explores these emerging forms of quasi-embodiment. It examines how digital interaction challenges, extends, and reframes classic embodied approaches. It also argues that cognitive linguistics must broaden its theoretical tools to account for technologically mediated forms of bodily grounding. Our communication habits are changing. Our theories must change with them.

2. Theoretical notions

2.1. Embodiment in Cognitive Linguistics

Embodiment is a cornerstone of cognitive linguistics. It posits that linguistic meaning is grounded in patterns of perception, action, and bodily experience. These patterns form recurrent structures—known as image schemas—that organize how speakers conceptualize spatial relations, force dynamics, and event structure (Johnson, 1987). The idea is simple but powerful. Our bodies shape our concepts. Our concepts shape our language.

This perspective has been reinforced by research showing that language comprehension involves partial reenactment, or simulation, of sensory-motor states. When people read about actions or emotions, neural systems associated with those states become active. The body participates in understanding. It does so automatically and often below conscious awareness (Glenberg & Kaschak, 2002). These findings support the view that meaning is not stored in abstract symbols but arises from embodied cognitive processes.

Multimodality further strengthens this claim. Gesture, prosody, posture, and other bodily cues form an integrated system with speech. Together they create complex meaning packages that cannot be reduced to words alone. As Gibbs (2005) argues, language and bodily action are deeply intertwined, and each shapes the cognitive routines that underlie communication. Without the body, linguistic meaning would be impoverished. This is the classical position.

Digital environments complicate this tradition. They restrict access to full-bodied cues, yet communication still thrives. Understanding why requires expanding the framework of embodiment to incorporate mediated forms of interaction.

2.2 Digital Interaction as Cognitive Ecology

Digital communication does not occur in a vacuum. It takes place within structured environments, interfaces, platforms, screens, that offer specific possibilities for action. These possibilities, or affordances, shape how users attend to information, how they move through communicative space, and how they coordinate social meaning. The body adapts to these environments. It learns new routines. Sometimes these routines become habitual.

The idea that cognition is distributed across individuals, tools, and environments is not new. Research in distributed cognition has long demonstrated that cognitive processes extend beyond the skull and into the material and social world (Hutchins, 1995). Digital platforms function in a similar way. They guide users through specific spatial layouts, temporal rhythms, and interaction patterns. In doing so, they become part of the cognitive system.

From this perspective, digital communication is not disembodied. It is differently embodied. Users manipulate touchscreens, navigate interfaces, and interpret symbolic cues embedded in platform design. These actions are grounded in sensory-motor experience. They rely on familiar schemas, up/down, container, path, force, and reorganize them within digital space. The environment shapes the body, and the body, in turn, shapes meaning.

This ecological view provides a theoretical foundation for understanding quasi-embodiment in digital interaction. It allows us to recognize how technological mediation alters—but does not erase—the embodied basis of linguistic meaning.

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research design aimed at examining how digitally mediated communication challenges and extends traditional models of embodied cognition. Because the focus lies in conceptual analysis rather than hypothesis testing, the methodology integrates three complementary components: (1) a targeted theoretical literature review, (2) multimodal discourse sampling, and (3) analytic synthesis grounded in cognitive-linguistic principles. Together, these methods enable a systematic exploration of how symbolic, visual, and interactional cues function as forms of quasi-embodiment in digital contexts.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Quasi-Embodiment Through Visual and Symbolic Cues in Digital Text

4.1.1 Emojis as Affective and Embodied Proxies

Although digital communication lacks co-present bodies, users continually compensate through symbolic means. Emojis are a primary example. They represent schematic versions of facial expressions, gestures, and emotional states. Their simplicity is part of their power. A single curved mouth or tilted eyebrow can stand in for complex affective cues.

These symbols invite readers to perform embodied simulation during interpretation. When encountering a laughing emoji or a crying face, users mentally reenact the corresponding expression. They “feel” the smile. They “feel” the wince. Research shows that emoji processing activates affective and facial-motor systems similar to those involved in interpreting real emotional expressions (Kaye et al., 2016). Emojis are thus not mere decorations. They form a layer of quasi-embodied communication that supplements text.

They also conventionalize quickly. Some emojis retain iconic links to bodily states; others develop community-specific meanings or ironic uses. Regardless of their evolution, they continue to operate as compressed, easily deployable embodiments of feeling.

4.1.2 GIFs, Stickers, and Reaction Images

GIFs and reaction images extend this phenomenon. While emojis are schematic, GIFs often depict full-bodied movements, eye rolls, shrugs, applause, laughter. These images introduce dynamic cues that resemble gesture in face-to-face communication. They show bodies in motion. They show attitude.

Research in multimodal communication has shown that moving images can evoke strong embodied resonance, triggering motor and affective simulations in viewers (Mayer & Moreno, 2003). In digital contexts, GIFs function as performative stand-ins for gesture, prosody, or stance-taking. They allow users to project tone without using their own bodies.

They also create shared cultural repertoires. Much like conventional gestures, certain GIFs become recognizable shorthand for emotions, reactions, and social alignments. They form part of the embodied symbolic landscape through which digital communities communicate.

4.1.3 Typographic and Orthographic Embodiment

Not all quasi-embodied cues are visual. Some are built directly into the text itself. Users routinely manipulate typography, elongated letters, repeated vowels, capitalization, spacing, to convey rhythm,

intensity, or vocal expression. “Soooo goooood,” “NOPE,” or “uhhh…” invite readers to imagine prosodic contours. They encourage readers to hear the text.

These practices align with work showing that readers often simulate vocal and motor patterns during silent reading (Abramson & Goldinger, 1997). Text becomes performative. It points to breath, timing, emphasis, and bodily rhythm.

Typographic conventions thus form another domain of quasi-embodied expression. They remind us that embodiment need not rely on visible bodies. It can emerge from cues that prompt readers to mobilize their own bodily resources during meaning construction.

4.2. Embodiment in Touchscreen Interaction

4.2.1 Touch as Interface and Motor Schema

Touchscreen devices have introduced a new repertoire of everyday motor routines. Users swipe, tap, pinch, scroll, and long-press with remarkable fluency. These actions are not neutral. They draw upon deeply entrenched sensory-motor schemas that structure how humans interact with the physical world. A swipe echoes a pushing motion. A pinch mirrors a compressing or bringing-together action. Even a tap carries the logic of brief, targeted contact.

These gestures activate spatial and force schemas such as up/down, open/close, contact/no contact, and pressure, which cognitive linguistics has long viewed as foundational to conceptual organization (Talmy, 2000). Users therefore engage in bodily routines that underpin their understanding of digital space. The body learns these gestures as part of its communicative repertoire. They become automatic. They become meaningful.

Importantly, these actions also shape how information is accessed and navigated. A swipe does not just move content; it enacts a motion through conceptual space. The interface invites users to think through the body.

4.2 Interaction Design and Conceptual Metaphors

Touchscreen interfaces rely heavily on embodied metaphors. Commands such as “drag to trash,” “pull to refresh,” and “slide to unlock” present digital actions in terms of familiar physical ones. Users understand these metaphors immediately. They work because they map onto well-established patterns of bodily experience.

This design philosophy builds on the insight that conceptual metaphors structure cognition by projecting sensory-motor experience onto abstract domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Digital interfaces take this principle literally. They create environments where virtual objects behave according to physical expectations—folders look like containers; lists scroll like vertical paths; buttons react to pressure. These metaphors reduce cognitive load and encourage intuitive navigation (Norman, 2013). They also shape how users conceptualize digital communication as movement, contact, or manipulation within a spatial field.

In short, the interface is not merely a surface. It is a metaphorical landscape grounded in the body.

4.3 Gesture as Part of Linguistic Construal

Touch gestures become part of how users construe communicative sequences. Although these gestures are not visible to interlocutors, they contribute silently to the process of meaning-making. Scrolling through a conversation, tapping a message to open it, or pressing and holding to select text all involve micro-actions that structure how users perceive and interpret discourse. The body organizes the flow of language.

This aligns with research showing that gesture and motor activity influence how speakers conceptualize events and relations, even when the gestures are not communicative in the traditional sense (Hostetter & Alibali, 2008). Touch gestures operate similarly. They guide attention. They segment information. They shape interactional timing. Through these embodied routines, users develop a feel for conversation that blends physical action with symbolic interpretation.

Touch thus becomes an integral—if often invisible—component of digital linguistic practice. It grounds cognition in movement, even when the movement is small.

5. Conclusion

Digital communication does not sever the connection between language and the body. Instead, it reshapes it in ways that reveal the flexibility of embodied cognition. Even in environments where visible gestures, facial expressions, and shared physical context are absent, users draw on a wide array of quasi-embodied cues to construct and interpret meaning. Emojis, GIFs, reaction images, and typographic stylization operate as symbolic proxies for bodily states, inviting readers to simulate gestures, emotions, and prosodic rhythms. These cues demonstrate that embodiment persists through representational forms.

At the same time, touchscreen interfaces introduce a new layer of bodily grounding. The manual actions that structure digital interaction—swiping, tapping, pinching, long-pressing—are not merely functional motions. They rely on entrenched sensory-motor schemas and create patterned routines that shape how users navigate communicative space. Interface metaphors such as “drag to trash” or “pull to refresh” map familiar physical experiences onto digital actions, reinforcing the role of embodied cognition in interaction design. These gestures, though often invisible in the communicative exchange, contribute silently to users ’construal of messages and interactions. They anchor interpretation in movement.

Taken together, these forms of mediated and micro-embodiment call for an expanded theoretical framework. Cognitive linguistics must account for the hybrid systems in which meaning now emerges, systems that blend symbolic cues with physical action, and bodily routines with interface design. Digital communication is not a departure from embodied cognition but an evolution of it. As communicative practices become increasingly screen-based, understanding how meaning remains grounded in the body—both directly and through mediation—becomes essential for explaining how language continues to function in digitally saturated environments.

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