

Classroom Management and the Vital Role of the Classroom Teacher: Insights from Distance Teaching Experiences

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ABSTRACT

A class is a group of pupils who need someone to lead them. The adult leader of such a group is called the class teacher. The class teacher's main responsibility is to manage the class effectively. This includes creating a positive and supportive learning environment in which pupils can develop both academically and socially. Classroom management involves setting clear expectations, establishing routines, and fostering a culture of respect and cooperation among pupils. In addition, classroom teachers are not only educators but also mentors who guide students towards personal growth and academic success. A qualified classroom teacher understands the individual needs of each student and adapts his or her teaching approach accordingly. The impact of a dedicated classroom teacher on students is remarkable. Through their consistency, responsibility, and commitment, they inspire students to become responsible and engaged learners themselves. This research was conducted at the Secondary Vocational and Technical School for Mechanical Engineering. A total of 23 classroom teachers took part in the survey. We found that during the distance learning all class teachers used the Zoom and MS Teams platforms, but they also used traditional approaches such as telephone calls. The biggest problem that arose in distance learning was the unresponsiveness of parents. In such cases, the school counsellor and relevant guidance centres can be consulted on the pupil's progress as they have more resources and information.

Keywords: classroom leadership, class meeting, class teacher, classroom tasks, distance learning

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1. Introduction

The role of the class teacher is multi-faceted and goes beyond simply managing the class. They play a key role in providing direction for the academic and personal growth of the students while keeping a close eye on their progress and behaviour. Acting as a bridge between pupils and other teachers, the class teacher fosters positive relationships within the classroom and creates a supportive learning environment. A crucial aspect of the class teacher's responsibility is their role in liaising with parents. Co-operation with parents is vital, as the attitudes and behaviours of pupils at home often have a direct impact on their performance and behaviour at school. By maintaining open and effective communication with parents, the class teacher can better understand the individual needs of pupils and provide tailored support to maximise their potential (Ažman, 2012).

In the classroom, the class teacher holds a unique position to influence students' development more effectively than other teachers. They serve as role models, encouraging students to excel academically and personally. Additionally, the class teacher is responsible for implementing discipline and fair consequences when students misbehave, ensuring a harmonious learning environment for all. Creating a positive classroom climate is a top priority for the class teacher.

By emphasizing values such as respect, tolerance, solidarity, and cooperation, they set the foundation for a supportive and inclusive learning space. Through their actions and teaching approach, the class teacher strives to foster a sense of belonging and engagement among students. To ensure successful classroom management, modern approaches have been adopted to adapt to the evolving needs of education. Techniques such as differentiated instruction, personalized learning plans, and collaborative learning strategies are employed to cater to individual student needs and create an inclusive learning environment. Amid the challenges posed by the pandemic and the shift to teleworking, class teachers played a crucial role in ensuring continuity in education. Adapting to online teaching and learning, they employed various digital tools and platforms to engage students and deliver lessons effectively. The results of the survey conducted with class teachers highlight their resilience and dedication in maintaining a sense of normalcy and support for their students during uncertain times (Kalin, 2001).

In distance learning, the field of pedagogical leadership is very different from the traditional classroom. It is therefore essential that teachers are given sufficient time to familiarise themselves not only with the technology but also with the pedagogical techniques that underpin effective virtual teaching. This double preparation effort is key to improving the classroom experience, to the benefit of both learners and teachers (Roth et al., 2020).

To truly understand the nature of distance learning, an effective Learning Management System (LMS) must be viewed as a replacement for the physical school building. In this context, each course takes on the role of a virtual classroom, mirroring the structured learning environment traditionally associated with physical institutions. This conceptualisation emphasises the importance of maintaining the same level of commitment and careful planning as in a physical classroom and highlights the need for a coherent and well-structured virtual learning experience (Martin et al., 2020).

Researchers highlight the advantages of distance learning, including the ability to study from anywhere at any time, significant cost savings and greater flexibility in choosing study times, which saves time. However, it is important to be aware that there are disadvantages to distance learning. These include a greater potential for distraction, the complexity of the technology used, limited opportunities for social interaction, and the challenge of maintaining regular contact with tutors (Sadeghi, 2019). However, during the pandemic, all of us, students, and teachers alike, were forced to work, teach, and learn remotely using ICT technology.

Teachers also need to be satisfied to work. Teacher job satisfaction and motivation are essential for the quality of teaching and high standards of student achievement and help staff develop positive feelings about the profession. Through job satisfaction and motivation, teachers achieve freedom and empowerment (Haas, 2010), foster positive and meaningful relationships with each other, contribute to the success of the whole organisation, and have positive attitudes towards all stakeholders, from colleagues to students to parents (Sahito and Vaisanen, 2020).

Professional development, often referred to as on-the-job training, is the continuous learning and training that teachers undertake once they have obtained their teaching qualifications and are actively working in the field. This continuous professional development has several benefits for teachers. It helps to fill any existing gaps in their knowledge, ensures that they stay abreast of evolving educational theories and legal requirements, and provides a valuable platform for teachers to engage in reflective practice and critically evaluate their teaching methods and educational philosophies (Stough & Montague, 2014).

All the above factors influence the work of the class teacher and the way he or she carries out his or her roles and responsibilities. The class teacher has an extremely important influence in

shaping the overall growth and development of the pupils. Their influence extends beyond academic learning as they seek to instil in pupils the essential values and skills that will prepare them for the challenges of personal and professional life. By continually developing and adopting modern approaches to classroom management, classroom teachers provide a positive and enriching educational experience for their students.

The purpose of this article is to review the tasks and roles of the classroom teacher and contemporary approaches to classroom management for students to be successful. The aim of this paper is to examine how the classroom teachers at our school responded to remote working during the pandemic and how they carried out their role at that time, to examine where the teachers gained experience in leading lessons, which I obtained from a short survey.

2. Class Teacher and Classroom Management

The class teacher is defined as a professional person with different competencies, sometimes making decisions, sometimes guiding, and discussing, sometimes caring, and collaborating. This depends on the role and tasks they perform (Pušnik, 2001).

The tasks of the class teacher in Slovenia are also roughly defined by law (ZOFVI), and these are: to lead the departmental teachers' meeting, to analyse the educational and learning results of the department, to solve educational and learning problems of individual pupils, to cooperate with parents, to cooperate with the school counselling service, to decide on educational measures (ZOFVI, 1996).

Another important document in Slovenia that defines the role, organisational forms of work, work plan, tasks and competencies of the class teacher is the document Programme Guidelines for the Work of the Departmental Teachers' Assembly and the Departmental Community. This document defines the role of the class teacher (Programme Guidelines, 2005):

- Linking: links with other systems within and outside the school, ensuring that the school as an institution is linked to pupils and parents.
- Educational: planning and organising situations in which students take responsibility for life in the departmental community and for their own actions and decisions.
- Encouraging: encourages, motivates, and activates students and teachers to exercise and develop their skills and ideas.
- Planning: planning and evaluating work with other staff.
- Mediating in problem situations: assisting all concerned in problem-solving situations, ensuring that the conflict resolution process is constructive.
- Informing: providing information to pupils, parents, and other members of staff.
- Administrative: managing documentation, ensuring the legality of procedures, minutes, records, issuing certificates, etc.

The multiple roles of a class teacher give rise to a variety of tasks and responsibilities that have been classified and discussed by various authors in the field of education. These tasks can be categorised into different areas, each of which contributes to the overall welfare and development of the pupils under the class teacher's care.

Some authors divide these roles into several: educational (dealing with students' personal issues), administrative (managing classroom documentation), liaison (mediating between parents, students, and the school as an institution), referee and advocate (defending students' rights), animator (encouraging students to participate actively), and assistant and counsellor (advising, helping students to learn) (Kalin, 2001).

Tasks of the class teacher can be divided into three areas: leadership, building the classroom community and student achievement. A fundamental part of the classroom teacher's role is leadership. As a leader in the classroom, the teacher is responsible for guiding and inspiring students towards their academic goals and personal development. This involves creating a positive and conducive learning environment where students feel motivated to actively engage in their studies and pursue their interests. In addition, the classroom teacher sets clear expectations for behaviour and performance and promotes a sense of discipline and responsibility among students. The second important role is building and maintaining a strong classroom community. By fostering a supportive and inclusive atmosphere, the teacher encourages collaboration and cooperation between pupils, enabling them to develop essential social skills and empathy. Establishing a sense of belonging within the class promotes mutual respect and helps to create a safe space for open communication and the sharing of ideas. Student achievement is, of course, at the heart of the class teacher's responsibilities. The teacher continually monitors pupil progress and provides intervention or additional support as required to ensure that every pupil can succeed (Ažman, 2012).

In addition to these core tasks, there are a few administrative aspects to manage. These include keeping track of attendance, accepting excuses, and recording absences. The Class Teacher plays a key role in recognising and praising students for their achievements and in maintaining a positive and encouraging atmosphere in the classroom. They also communicate with parents or guardians, providing updates on attendance, behaviour, and academic performance, thus fostering a strong partnership between home and school. Keeping accurate and comprehensive records is an important aspect of the class teacher's role. This includes documenting various activities such as keeping attendance records, writing opinions, notices, and reports, and organising information related to student progress and assessments. These records serve as valuable resources for monitoring and evaluating pupil progress, guiding teaching decisions and collaborating with other educational professionals (Pušnik, 2001).

In conclusion, the tasks of a class teacher are diverse and interconnected, reflecting the multifaceted nature of their role. By embracing these responsibilities, class teachers play a significant role in shaping the educational journey of their students, fostering an environment where each student can grow academically, socially, and emotionally. Through their leadership, support, and dedication, class teachers create an impactful and positive learning experience that lays the foundation for students' future success.

3. Methodology

Our research approach was triangulated and represented an evolutionary process rather than an originally established methodological position. During the research, particular emphasis was placed on experimenting with the triangulation method, especially in the context of comparing findings.

In this article, triangulation is used as a means of using textual analysis to address the research question, primarily with the aim of increasing the credibility of the data obtained. This method combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to extend the body of evidence, increase the credibility of the findings and confirm the results of the textual analysis by comparing them with the results of the survey (Almalki, 2016, Kuckartz, 2014).

3.1. Purpose of the Research

At the Secondary School of Mechanical Engineering in Škofja Loka, where I teach mathematics, I took over classroom management for the first time 4 years ago. When I first

took the role of class teacher, I had no experience. I didn't know what my responsibilities and roles were and what exactly was expected of me. As a new teacher, you have no experience of classroom teaching. You don't get any experience while you're studying either. Sometimes there are seminars on this topic and some literature on the Internet. So, the teacher must find his own way, especially at the beginning.

Then came the pandemic, and teaching was done remotely, and classrooms were managed remotely. In my work, I seek advice from senior colleagues who are happy to share their experiences and advise me on any dilemmas.

The purpose of this research was to investigate teachers' experiences of remote classroom management at the Secondary Vocational and Technical School for Mechanical Engineering.

The aim of this research was to find out what barriers teachers had in terms of classroom management during the pandemic when classes were held remotely.

3.2. Research Questions

1. How did class teachers manage classroom management when distance learning was implemented?
2. What problems did class teachers encounter in managing classrooms when distance learning was implemented?

3.3. Research Design

Our research methodology was comprehensive. It combined textual analysis with a focused survey of closed-ended questions. This strategic choice was made to ensure a thorough evaluation of the tools used by teachers during the pandemic and to help understand the challenges they faced.

Triangulation involves the systematic review and evaluation of the content collected. In our research, we chose a comprehensive methodology combining textual analysis with a focused survey of closed-ended questions. This approach was strategically chosen to provide a comprehensive assessment of where classroom teachers gained their experience, how they managed their classrooms when distance learning was introduced, and what problems they encountered.

The articles were obtained from the relevant literature, which was searched in Google Scholar for key hits on class management, distance class management, and class teacher satisfaction.

In addition, we included a survey component in our research design to gain a holistic perspective. Specifically, we used open-ended questions, which allowed respondents to give a wide range of answers. From an open-ended question, the researcher can obtain additional information that could not be obtained from closed-ended questions, but this information still needs to be classified in some way. This is where text analysis comes in (Popping, 2015). By analysing the text, we obtained the results of other researchers who had discovered what was happening in the field of teaching. We compared our results with theirs.

The purpose of the survey is not only to find out how classroom teachers have experienced working remotely but also whether they have gained any knowledge about classroom management. By summarising these experiences, we can help make it easier for new classroom teachers to do their jobs.

3.4. Research

This research aimed to investigate how classroom management was carried out at the Secondary Vocational and Technical School for Mechanical Engineering during the pandemic. It also aimed to discover classroom teachers' problems when working remotely.

The method we used to collect data was an anonymous survey consisting of a combination of open and closed questions. We sent the survey to 36 classroom teachers and 23 responded. Women predominate among all colleagues, which is also reflected in the survey, with 39 % of men and 61 % of women participating. In the survey, we focused on the following topics: how classroom teachers perceived their job, training for classroom management, how they managed the classroom when working remotely, and what difficulties they encountered.

The survey was anonymously on the Slovenian online survey portal 1ka. Twenty-three male and female teachers with different years of teaching experience participated. Most teachers (43 %) have been in a classroom role for more than 15 years, followed by teachers with less than 5 years of experience (30 %), 17 % of teachers have been in a classroom role for 10-15 years and 9 % of teachers have been in a classroom role for 5-10 years.

The vision of the class teacher is important for successful work in classroom management. The concept of professional vision originated with Goodwin (1994) and was adopted by Sherin (Goodwin, 1994, Sherin, 2001). Some scholars divide the process of professional vision into two main components: observation and cognition (Seidel & Stürmer, 2014). Observation involves the ability to focus attention on relevant teaching and learning situations. On the other hand, knowledge-based reasoning involves the ability to apply knowledge related to teaching and learning and to make sound deductions. This process serves as an indicator of the quality of the application of knowledge in the classroom. It's worth noting that observation and knowledge-based reasoning are interrelated aspects of professional vision (Grub et al., 2020).

The classroom teacher must be aware of the expectations of pupils, parents, and colleagues. By making his own decisions about the most important aspects of his work, the classroom teacher must form a basic vision of his work which he will always be ready to present to others he meets in the performance of his duties. It is very important to constantly clarify expectations and views about the role of the class teacher, especially among pupils, parents, colleagues, and the class teacher (Programme Guidelines, 2005).

As shown in Figure 1, 52 % of the teachers develop a vision for the work of the departmental community with the class, 39 % develop it independently and some (4 %) adopt the principal's vision.

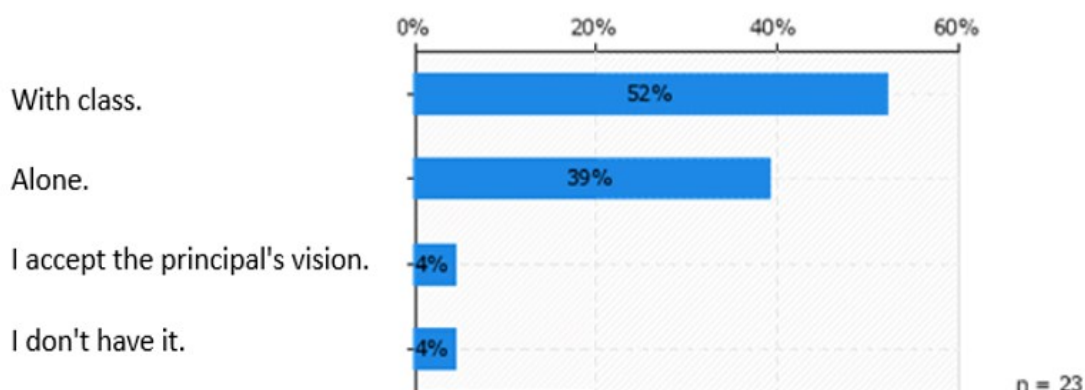


Figure 1. How do you create a vision for working with the departmental community?

Grub's research highlights the central role of effective classroom management in the professional competence of teachers. In this context, a review of 12 studies focused on the assessment of professional vision in classroom management using eye-tracking technology. Collectively, these studies revealed consistent differences in eye movement patterns between experts and novices about various aspects of classroom management. However, questions remain regarding the specific indicators used in these studies and the potential factors influencing expert perception. These investigations point to areas where further research and investigation are warranted to deepen our understanding of the complexities surrounding classroom management and its visual interpretation (Grub et al., 2020).

Teachers have acquired the knowledge to become a classroom teacher in different ways: during their studies (4 %), in seminars (13 %), from literature (4 %) and some have done it by feeling from their own experience (22 %). Most of the experience, 57 %, was gained from senior colleagues. None of the teachers had acquired their teaching knowledge from web information. Some respondents added that they had gained experience over the years, while others were doing this work by feel, as can be seen in Figure 2.

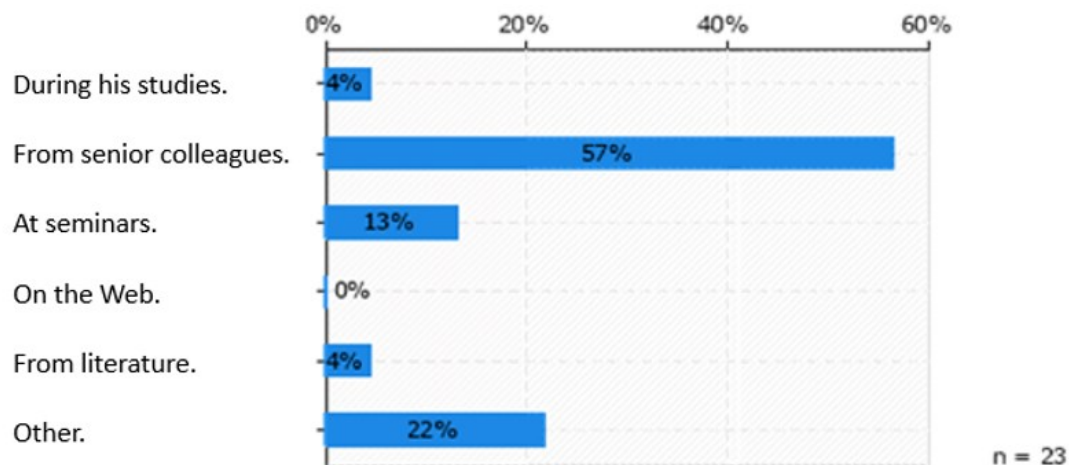


Figure 2. Where did you get your classroom skills?

The authors note that teachers want specific training in whole-class management strategies and in managing the behaviour of pupils with special needs. The findings suggest that teachers' classroom management training needs may persist throughout their careers, even after intensive pre-service training (Stough et al., 2015, Azman, 2012).

For classroom teachers' professional development training can be an important bridge from learning about evidence-based research practices to implementing them in the classroom (Kretlow et al., 2012). Peer mentoring is also a successful practice and numerous studies support the effectiveness of coaching novice teachers in developing classroom management skills (Edwards, 2011; Hough, 2011). Some authors report the effectiveness of the Teachers Supporting Teachers in Urban Schools (TST) model (Stough & Montague, 2014). Similarly, professional development programmes delivered by experts in the field in ways that are applicable, aligned with school goals, and practical in meeting current classroom needs are also effective (Hough, 2011).

As shown in Figure 3, many teachers (61 %) felt that there should be more seminars on classroom management. A few, 13 %, said that there should be more study groups on classroom management, and one said that it would be good to have more workshops.

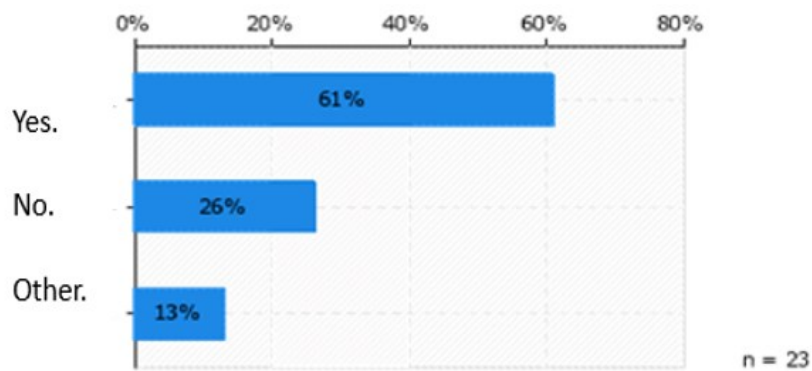


Figure 3. Do you think there should be more seminars on classroom management or distance classroom management?

In Stough's study, a group of 62 experienced special education teachers participated in a survey about their preparedness to manage classrooms effectively. Interestingly, despite having received extensive pre-service training, over 83 % of the participants indicated that they felt inadequately prepared for classroom management and dealing with behavioural problems. Notably, no statistically significant differences were observed based on the theoretical approaches used for classroom management training during their training. Furthermore, of those respondents (74,2 %) who had received classroom management training after completing their formal education, a significant majority (64 %) indicated a continued need for further training, particularly in dealing with student behaviour. Their preferences tended towards acquiring specific skills in whole class management strategies and meeting the needs of students with special needs. These findings strongly suggest that teachers' needs for classroom management training may persist even after their intensive pre-service training (Stough et al., 2015).

During the pandemic all teachers did remote class management activities once a week using video conferencing in MS Teams, some also using Zoom. Some also had parent-teacher meetings and tutorials in the afternoons on a scheduled basis with advance notice, remote parent-teacher conferences, using e-Assistant and telephone calls.

Foreign research has also confirmed that most teachers use WhatsApp messenger to control the learning process. The skills of the teachers are needed to additionally check the students' activities. They must convert the material into text, audio, and video. These materials are distributed using applications such as Google, YouTube, Zoom, etc. To successfully provide distance learning, teachers also used Google Meet, Google Classroom, etc. (Rabiman et al., 2020, Lathifah et al. 2020).

The biggest barrier identified by teachers was unresponsive parents (44%). These were parents of children who did not take part in virtual lessons. These pupils were already problematic in the regular classes. The class teachers solved the problem by calling the parents.

The second most common problem was poor equipment and problems with technology and internet connection (12%). Additional equipment was also provided by the school, but teachers are not responsible for internet problems. Teachers also mentioned a lack of direct contact with pupils and non-verbal communication as a problem (20%). 16% of teachers did not experience any problems.

In the field of distance learning, students and teachers face different challenges. For students involved in distance learning, the main issue is access to the internet and hardware. This means that they face problems related to the availability of a reliable internet connection and access to basic devices such as computers, tablets, or mobile phones. Another aspect is a perceived

lack of interaction with the teacher, which can hinder a sense of connection and engagement. In addition, issues such as instructor response time and the ability to socialise are also barriers to learning. In contrast, distance educators face their own set of enormous challenges. These cover the areas of legislation, infrastructure, human resources, content, and delivery. In the area of legislation, navigating the regulatory landscape and ensuring compliance can be a complex endeavour. Infrastructure challenges are related to the development of a robust technology ecosystem that supports effective teaching and learning. Human resources are critical, as they include the training and support that educators need to excel in the digital classroom. Content and its seamless integration into the virtual learning environment are also important, as is the practical application of pedagogical strategies in the digital domain (Barari et al., 2022).

All teachers in the survey pointed out that the work of the class teacher is undervalued. However, in times of Corona, this work was exhausting, as class teachers with more unresponsive parents had to work even harder than usual.

Some research confirms that teachers also need a stimulating environment for quality work. This includes praise and other simulations of quality work. It also includes the headteacher's evaluation, which research shows tends to be less positive in schools with large numbers of pupils. The results show that the principal's evaluation is associated with greater teacher satisfaction (Grissom, 2011).

Researchers also confirm that bureaucracy has increased the burden on teachers and reduced the time available for activities they consider more valuable. Expectations for schools to become 'data-driven', however well-intentioned, have led many schools to unfocused attempts to collect data for accountability purposes (Cameron & Lovett, 2015, Sahito & Vaisanen, 2020, Lopes & Oliveira, 2020).

Some authors suggest the use of virtual simulations. These environments provide a unique opportunity for novice teachers to experience examples of classroom life in a controlled and structured environment (McGarr, 2021).

As noted in the previous studies, the survey results indicate that classroom teachers are also dissatisfied with distance learning. They share a common feeling that their efforts in traditional classroom teaching are not consistently recognised or appreciated, either by school management or by parents. The considerable time and dedication they put into their work is often undervalued.

Teaching is known to be highly demanding and exhausting work, often challenging teachers' self-efficacy and resilience, but cultures of collaboration and collective knowledge-building can mitigate these challenges and enhance teachers' capacity (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015). Therefore, it makes sense to increase respect for the teacher's work in the classroom and for classroom management. This will increase the motivation of teachers and encourage young people to choose this profession.

4. Conclusion

This study investigated how classroom teachers carried out classroom tasks during the pandemic and what problems they encountered. Text analysis was also used in this area. The results show that most teachers used MS Teams or Zoom virtual environments, but they also used traditional approaches such as calling parents on the phone. Classroom teachers had the most problems with pupils who did not attend virtual lessons and whose parents could not be contacted. The research also showed that teachers have gained experience in classroom management from senior colleagues, and some have also attended seminars on classroom management. For additional help in teaching, especially for beginning teachers, several

seminars are suggested, and research also suggests virtual simulations. Wherever and whenever the experience of senior teachers is useful.

We found that class teachers used MS Teams or Zoom for parent-teacher meetings in the afternoons on a scheduled basis with advance notice, remote parent-teacher conferences, using e-Assistant and telephone calls. This is the answer to the first question of the research.

The biggest problem in distance learning was the unresponsiveness of parents, followed by poor equipment problems with technology and lack of personal contact and non-verbal communication, which is the answer to the second research question. This is consistent with other researchers who found that teachers working remotely reported problems with internet access and lack of infrastructure. Classroom management and human resource constraints also emerged as significant barriers for teachers in this context. There were also problems with classroom management and human resources (Barari et al., 2022). Almost all teachers coped with the sudden shift from a face-to-face teaching model to online teaching during the pandemic. They struggled to adapt to the additional stress and workload. Accordingly, this led to changes in the professional role of teachers, a decrease in their satisfaction levels and many digital literacy challenges, as teachers had to balance their responsibilities, teaching, work life and development during the urgent need to move to online teaching. Teachers had more responsibilities, which often led to greater psychological pressure on teachers. In addition, pressure could result from a lack of technical support. There are still teachers with little or no digital literacy in online teaching, as they come from all ages and backgrounds (Li & Yu, 2022).

The respondents also pointed out that the work of the class teacher should be more respected, as a quality classroom community is one of the most important keys to a higher quality, modern and student-friendly school, and thus society. This is also confirmed by numerous research. Creating student-centred leadership requires school leaders to understand how students learn, how to help teachers create the conditions for learning, how to monitor progress, and how to foster collaboration and community within the school community. Conditions for learning, how to monitor progress, and how to foster collaboration and community within their school communities. For schools to meet the challenges they face, teachers need a sense of agency where they can become challengers, where they can take initiative, and where schools become teacher-friendly places where teachers feel supported by their leaders (Cameron & Lovett, 2015).

This is the only way to educate critical, self-confident, original, and tolerant future intellectuals. Articles have consistently highlighted the pivotal role of classroom management as a fundamental pedagogical skill that educators must master to optimize the learning experience in the classroom. Extensive research has demonstrated that skilled classroom management not only leads to improved student academic performance but also fosters greater enthusiasm for schoolwork (Stough & Montague, 2014, Stronge et al., 2011, Omoteso & Semudara, 2011). It is necessary for teachers to acquire the ability to supervise in a skilful way the implementation of the lessons and the behaviour of the pupils, as this contributes to the greater efficiency of both the pupils and the other staff of the school.

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