

Zora Krnjaić¹

University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Psychology, Serbia

Mojca Jurišević²

ISBN: 978-86-7372-317-4, 29 (2024), p. 120-125

Faculty of Education, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Original scientific paper

Jana Šimon³

Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia

UDK: 376.7

CONTEXT AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES IN GIFTED EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN CROATIA, SERBIA AND SLOVENIA⁴

Abstract: Although there were studies that investigated some aspects of remote education and educational experience of different stakeholders during the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a lack of data and studies that explored context and effects of organizational changes in education during the pandemic on gifted students. This paper is part of the wider qualitative study about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on schooling in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia that specifically included gifted students (both from primary and high schools). In the first part of the paper, some basic characteristics of access to the gifted, identification procedures and support for gifted students in three countries are discussed, while in the second part organizational changes in emergency circumstances during the pandemic are considered. It is shown that, besides similarities and differences in approach, gifted students could be considered a vulnerable group in all three countries of the region.

Key words: gifted students, Covid-19 pandemic, provisions for gifted students, comparative study.

Introduction

The World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. Since then, the number of countries closing schools has risen rapidly in just a few days (UNESCO 2020; 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic and the measures introduced to prevent the spread of the disease dramatically changed life conditions and educational process for all the actors (students, teachers and entire families). Protection measures were very restrictive at the beginning of the pandemic, educational institutions were closed and the majority of countries introduced *emergency remote education* (ERE) (Giannini, 2020). New practice in emergency situations changed students' educational experience and affected the role of the teacher and use of digital media and e learning.

Although there were studies that investigated some aspects of ERE and educational experience of different stakeholders during the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a lack of data and studies that explored context and effects of organizational changes in education during the pandemic on gifted students. This work is part of the wider qualitative study about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on schooling in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia⁵ that included primary and high school students from the general population and also students from vulnerable groups: students with learning disabilities, low SES students and gifted students, as well as

¹ zkrnjaic@f.bg.ac.rs

² Mojca.Jurisevic@pef.uni-lj.si

³ jana@idi.hr

⁴This study was supported by the Croatian Science Foundation (Grant No. IP-CORONA-2020-12-5131); UNICEF (Grant No. BG/PGM/DK/TR/2022-592) and the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia (Grant No. 451-03-47/2023-01/ 200163); the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia.

⁵The study is the result of international collaboration of the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (ISRZ), Faculty of Pedagogy-University of Ljubljana and Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy-University of Belgrade.

their parents and teachers.⁶ This paper is focused on high school gifted students aiming to consider the educational context for gifted high school students in three regional countries: Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia, during Covid-19 pandemic.

Legal framework concerning gifted students in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia

In this part, some basic characteristics of access to the gifted, identification procedures and support for gifted students in three regional countries are discussed.

Gifted education in Croatia. – Croatian legal framework postulates obligatory identification of gifted students at all educational levels, as well as provision of educational models and differentiated curriculum according to students' needs (Ordinance on Secondary School Education of Gifted Students, 1993). In practice, there are vast differences in the implementation of these procedures across Croatian schools. There are no systematic identification procedures, thus no national monitoring and evaluation system is put in place (Antulić Majcen et al., 2019; Ministry of Science and Education, Republic of Croatia, 2022). At the high school level enrichment for gifted students is implemented in the regular educational system. It mostly pertains to preparation for subject-related competitions, with additional classes or extracurricular activities in students' subjects of interest provided by school teachers or mentors, as well as occasional involvement in programs and projects.

Gifted education in Serbia. – The framework of state policy and legislations in Serbia refers to the right of all individuals with outstanding abilities to appropriate education and institutional support (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2021a). There is no systematic identification but there is an education system of specialized schools for gifted and talented high school students, extracurricular programs, state financial support for individual achievements as well as teacher training (Bogunović & Krnjaić, 2013; Krnjaić, 2022). Basic forms of the support within the educational approach to gifted students that are recognized in the legal regulations are referring to: promoting, accelerating, enriching and allocating in selected classes and specialized schools for gifted in different domains (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia, 2023) but there are vast differences in the implementation of these procedures in practice. So, even within the regular education system gifted students could be educated by individualized educational plan (adjusted – IEP3) (Altaras Dimitrijević & Tatić Janevski, 2016) it is not often implemented in schools, while additional classes or extracurricular activities are usually organized as preparation for subject-related competitions and depend on the personal engagement of teachers and mentors.

Gifted education in Slovenia. – In Slovenia, support for gifted students in high school is provided on different organizational levels, i.e. curricular and extra-curricular enrichment activities, acceleration, and special education programs for gifted students in arts, sports and academics; gifted students also have the opportunity to receive a national scholarship and participate in competitions in various subject areas (Jurišević, 2020). Despite the fact all these possibilities exist, they are implemented differently in schools, as work with gifted students is not systematically regulated in Slovenia. The procedure for identifying giftedness depends on the high schools. Some students, who enroll in high schools, are already identified as gifted in primary school; the others may be invited to the identification process by teachers or school counselors in high school. Many grammar schools do not use the identification procedure suggested by the Ministry of Education, but instead pay special attention to highly motivated and academically outstanding students. However, to be formally

⁶ Study results concerning the effects of education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Serbia on typical students and students with learning difficulties and students from low SES families see: Institute of psychology, 2022.

identified as a gifted student in the Slovenian education system, a student must reach the top 10 per cent on at least one of two or three measures: (1) intelligence test (Raven's Progressive Matrices or Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children), (2) creativity test (Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking or Test for Creativity Thinking - Drawing Production), or (3) teacher assessment by Teacher's Assessment Scale of Gifted Students; the latter is a criterion only for primary school (Jurišević, 2011).

Measures introduced to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic that affected gifted high school students in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia

High school education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Croatia. – During the Covid-19 pandemic, high schools in Croatia were fully closed only during the spring of the 2019/2020 school year, with the implementation of emergency remote teaching and learning at the time (i.e. video-conferences, lecture recordings, digital teaching platforms). Exceptions were made for students in the final grades of their high school education who took their final exams in person, as well as for vocational students who had practical lessons in schools (Ministry of Science and Education, Republic of Croatia, 2020a).

In the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 school years, all Croatian high schools could flexibly adapt to epidemiological circumstances, by adopting one of the three models: high school education fully in person, blended online and in-person teaching (two groups of students, one attending school online, the other in person, with groups switching educational model weekly or biweekly), or fully remote high school education (Ministry of Science and Education, Republic of Croatia, 2020c, 2021). Decision on the educational model was made by coordination of schools, county government and epidemiologists, with the possibility of changing the chosen educational model at any time during the school year. As such, Croatia was one of the European countries with the fewest days of fully remote teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2022). By the 2022/2023 school year all schools in Croatia, including high schools, implemented entirely in-person education.

High school education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Serbia. – High schools in Serbia closed on March 16 2019/2020 and online classes began on the 23rd of March for secondary schools. By the end of that school year, TV lessons for primary and secondary school students were broadcast on the public TV service. In April 2020, a national online platform was established which, in addition to recordings of TV lessons, also included interactive tests, as an addition to the TV lessons. In order to support students and the learning process, schools soon started using a learning management system (LMS) - usually Google Classroom (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2020a; 2020b)

In the school year 2020/21 hybrid teaching model was introduced (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2021b). One half of the students in high schools were attending classes in school, while another half was attending classes from home. Classes were shortened from 45 to 30 minutes and the number of classes was cut to up to five. From September 2021, the "traffic light model" was introduced in which the teaching modality (in school - hybrid - remote) was determined at the level of the municipality and school, depending on the local epidemiological situation. After longer or shorter periods of hybrid or distance teaching, in April 2022 all schools returned to direct teaching.

High school education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Slovenia. – During the first Covid-19 wave in the 2019/20 school year, Slovenian high schools closed on March 16 2019/2020 and commenced emergency remote education until the end of the school year. In the 2020/21 school year, high schools initially resumed face-to-face classes, but switched back to emergency remote education at the end of October 2020 2021, which lasted until February

2021/2022 (for final year students) and March (for other students). Onwards the hybrid model of education was recommended nationally.

Effects of organizational changes during Covid-19 pandemic on gifted high school students in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia

Legal framework and some basic characteristics of access to the gifted high school students' education in three regional countries in regular circumstances are discussed as well as the organizational changes in emergency circumstances introduced to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, different epidemiological waves occurred, with a diverse set of restrictions and measures put in place in schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2020a, 2021b; Ministry of Science and Education, Republic of Croatia, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). After the first wave and lockdown when all schools were closed, and the ERE was introduced, gradually, different hybrid forms of teaching and learning were also introduced. In all three countries, a decision on the educational model (in-person, hybrid model, the ERE) was made through the coordination of schools, county governments, and epidemiologists, with the possibility of changing the chosen educational model at any time during the school year (Ministry of Science and Education, Republic of Croatia 2021).

In all three regional countries, besides regular classes, the majority of extracurricular and extra school activities, programs/seminars and competitions preparations, competitions etc. were canceled or postponed or moved to digital format. These organizational changes have directly affected the educational opportunities and educational experiences of gifted students. Yet, the gifted were not recognized as a vulnerable group.

Various forms of support, proposals and recommendations in the guidelines of the respective institutions (ministries and/or international organization) were in general related to the population of typical students, while specific recommendations and instructions were related to students from marginalized groups and students with learning difficulties who needed additional educational support. There were no specific instructions for working with the gifted in the official institutional announcements in emergency circumstances. Provisions for gifted students, individualized approach, extra guidance such as monitoring their learning process and preparing additional assignments were more a matter of effort and commitment of individual teachers.

References:

- Altaras Dimitrijević, A., Janevski Tatić, S. (2016). *Obrazovanje učenika izuzetnih sposobnosti: naučne osnove i smernice za školsku praksu*. Beograd: Zavod za unapređivanje obrazovanja i vaspitanja.
- Antulić Majcen, S., Čurković, N., & Bukvić, S. (2019, April). *Do we really use all the resources in working with gifted students? - Research results obtained in Croatian primary schools* [Paper presentation]. Challenges in working with gifted children and young people in 2019, Split, <https://www.bib.irb.hr/1115586>.
- Bogunović, B., & Krnjaić, Z. (2013). Supporting development of gifted children in Serbia. *ECHA NEWS*, 27(2), 18-20.
- Giannini, S. (2020). *Distance Learning Denied. Over 500 million of the world's children and youth are not accessing distance learning alternatives*. Retrieved on 10 February, 2021, from <https://gemreport.unesco.wordpress.com/2020/05/15/distance-learning-denied/>.

- Institute of Psychology (2022). *Obrazovanje tokom pandemije Kovid-19 u Srbiji: kvalitativna studija* [Education during COVID-19 pandemic in Serbia: a qualitative study], https://hdl.handle.net/21.15107/rcub_reff_4546.
- Jurišević, M. (2011). Gifted education. In J. Krek & M. Metljak (Eds.), *White paper on education in the Republic of Slovenia 2011* (pp. 329-367). Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo.
- Jurišević, M. (2020). Izobraževanje nadarjenih: Analiza nacionalnega konteksta za popotnico v naslednje desetletje [Gifted and talented education: Analysis of the national context as a guide for the next decade]. *Vzgoja in izobraževanje*, 51(1/2), 6-11.
- Krnjaić, Z. (2022). National Report - Serbia. The Petnica Science Centre (PSC) – 40th anniversary. *ECHA News*, 36(1), 17-18.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. (2020a, 16 March). *Ostvarivanje obrazovno-vaspitanog rada učenjem na daljinu za učenike osnovnih i srednjih škola* [Distance learning during the state of emergency], <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Nastava-na-daljinu-u-vanrednom-stanju.pdf>.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (2020b, May). *Instrukcija o organizaciji rada srednjih škola za završetak drugog polugodišta školske godine 2019/2020*. [Instruction on the Organization of High School Work for the End of the Second Semester of the 2019/2020 School Year], <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Smernice+za+organizaciju+rada+rada+u+srednjim+C5%AIkolama+u+2020%2F21>.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. (2021a, June 3). *Strategija razvoja obrazovanja i vaspitanja u Republici Srbiji do 2030. godine* [Strategy of development of education in the Republic of Serbia - until 2030], https://prosveta.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/1-SROVRS-2030_MASTER_0402_V1.pdf.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. (2021b, August). *Stručno uputstvo za organizovanje i ostvarivanje vaspitno-obrazovnog rada u srednjoj školi u 2021/2022 školskoj godini* [Professional instructions for organizing and implementing educational work in high school in the 2021/2022 school year], <https://prosveta.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Strucno-uputstvo-za-organizaciju-rada-srednjih-skola-2021-2022.pdf>.
- Ministry of Education. (2023, October). *Stručno uputstvo za prepoznavanje, podršku i praćenje obrazovanja i vaspitanja učenika i učenica sa izuzetnim/posebnim sposobnostima* [Professional instructions for identifying, support and monitoring the education and upbringing of students with exceptional/special abilities], <https://zuov.gov.rs/strucno-uputstvo-za-prepoznavanje-podrsku-i-pracenje-obrazovanja-i-vaspitanja-ucenika-i-ucenica-sa-izuzetnim-posebnim-sposobnostima/>.
- Ministry of Science and Education, Republic of Croatia. (2022, October 28). *Smjernice za rad s darovitim djecom i učenicima* [Guidelines for working with gifted children and students], <https://mzo.gov.hr/vijesti/smjernice-za-rad-s-darovitom-djecom-i-ucenicima/5101>.
- Ministry of Science and Education, Republic of Croatia. (2020a, June 25). *Školska godina 2019./2020. – Odgoj i obrazovanje* [2019/2020 school year – upbringing and education], <https://mzo.gov.hr/vijesti/skolska-godina-2019-2020-odgoj-i-obrazovanje/3920>.
- Ministry of Science and Education, Republic of Croatia. (2020b, July 8). *Akcijski plan za provedbu nastave na daljinu* [Action Plan for the Implementation of the Distance Education], <https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/NastavaNaDaljinu//Akcijski%20plan%20za%20provedbu%20nastave%20na%20daljinu%20-%20Model%20nastave%20na%20daljinu.pdf>.
- Ministry of Science and Education, Republic of Croatia. (2020c, October 8). *Models and recommendations for work in conditions related to COVID-19 disease in pedagogical/school year 2020/2021*, <https://mzo.gov.hr/news/models-and-recommendations-for-work-in-conditions-related-to-covid-19-disease-in-pedagogical-school-year-2020-2021/3977>.
- Ministry of Science and Education, Republic of Croatia. (2021, September). *Modeli i preporuke za rad u uvjetima povezanima s bolesti COVID-19* [Models and recommendations for work in conditions related to COVID-19 disease in pedagogical/school year 2021/2022], [https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Modeli%20i%20preporuke%20za%20provedbu%20nastave%20u%202021-2022%20\(1\)_31%208.pdf](https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Modeli%20i%20preporuke%20za%20provedbu%20nastave%20u%202021-2022%20(1)_31%208.pdf).

- Pravilnik o srednjoškolskom obrazovanju darovitih učenika [Ordinance on Secondary School Education of Gifted Students], OG 90/93. (1993), <https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/eli/sluzbeni/1993/90/1755>.
- UNESCO (2020). *290 million students out of school due to COVID-19: UNESCO releases first global numbers and mobilizes response*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200312190142/https://en.unesco.org/news/290-million-students-out-school-due-covid-19-unesco-releases-first-global-numbers-and-mobilizes>.
- UNESCO. (2022, March). UNESCO map on school closures, <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>.

Zora Krnjaić

Univerzitet u Beogradu – Filozofski fakultet, Institut za psihologiju, Srbija

Moja Jurišević

Pedagoški fakultet, Univerzitet u Ljubljani, Slovenija

Jana Šimon

Institut za društvena istraživanja Zagreb, Hrvatska

KONTEKST I ORGANIZACIONE PROMENE U OBRAZOVANJU DAROVITIH TOKOM PANDEMIJE COVID-19 U HRVATSKOJ, SRBIJI I SLOVENIJI⁷

Rezime: Iako su postojale studije koje su istraživale neke aspekte obrazovanja na daljinu i obrazovno iskustvo različitih učesnika obrazovnog procesa tokom pandemije Covid19, nedostaju podaci i studije koje su istraživale kontekst i efekte organizacionih promena u obrazovanju tokom pandemije na darovite učenike. Ovaj rad je deo šire kvalitativne studije o efektima pandemije Covid-19 na obrazovanje u Hrvatskoj, Srbiji i Sloveniji koja je posebno obuhvatila i darovite učenike (osnovne i srednje škole). U prvom delu rada razmatraju se neke osnovne karakteristike pristupa darovitim učenicima, postupci identifikacije i podrška za darovite učenike u tri zemlje. U drugom delu rada razmatraju se organizacione promene u vanrednim okolnostima tokom pandemije. Pokazalo se da se, pored sličnosti i razlika u pristupu, u sve tri zemlje regiona daroviti učenici mogu smatrati ranjivom grupom.

Ključne reči: daroviti učenici, pandemija Covid-19, podrška darovitim učenicima, komparativna studija.

⁷ Ovaj rad je nastao uz podršku Hrvatske zaklade za nauku (Grant No. IP-CORONA-2020-12-5131); UNICEF-a (Grant No. BG/PGM/DK/TR/2022-592) i Ministarstva nauke, tehnološkog razvoja i inovacija Republike Srbije (Grant No. 451-03-47/2023-01/ 200163); Ministarstva prosvete, nauke i sporta Republike Slovenije.