

Thematic Article

Teaching English for Students with Special Educational Needs During the Pandemic

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Abstract

This research aimed to examine the impact of distance learning on SEN students' English language education, parental involvement in the education of these children, as well as the ICT tools used for their development. There is little information about the difficulties and trials these students and their teachers had to face during the COVID-19 epidemic. Moreover, parental involvement plays a significant role in school performance, but there is little information about how this was realized during distance learning. We assumed that the biggest problem was the transition from face-to-face education to the online sphere. To examine this, we conducted semi-structured personal interviews with elementary school English teachers from north-eastern Hungary. The most important result of our research is that during this period only a few SEN students could receive special, individual lessons, and differentiated education was implemented to a somewhat limited extent. To conclude, more programs should be created that meet the different needs of SEN to properly educate these children, and that as many development specialists as possible, who could provide group or individual lessons, should be recruited.

Keywords: special educational needs, teaching methods, distance learning, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

In our research, the presence of tools and methods for the English language education and development of students with special educational needs (SEN) during the pandemic, as well as the parental involvement are examined. This research focuses on students who are currently learning in an integrated way with mainstream students.

As a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, which has been going on for 4 years now, the repeatedly introduced precautions and restrictions, as well as the accompanying online education, the “home office”, have changed people's everyday lives, defined work relationships, and altered education as well (Thékes, 2020).

The sudden outbreak of the pandemic caught teachers, children, and parents unprepared. In a few days, education had to switch to a system that was still unknown to everyone, as it was not the usual form of teaching. Completely new systems that could be used effectively in education had to be created, everyone had to learn how to use computers, and special time had to be devoted to how each lesson could be held effectively online, so that all children were involved. This period was particularly difficult for those families who raise and teach children with special educational needs (Gulkaya & Sorakin, 2021), as well as for their teachers, since these children were repeatedly disadvantaged due to their special needs.

In Hungary, Totyik (2020) and Thékes (2020) also dealt with the various effects of the Covid-19 epidemic. The former published a study on disadvantaged students, in which he writes about the ‘Máté effect’, i.e. inequality of opportunity, methodological renewal, and starting over after the virus (Totyik, 2020). Thékes (2020) writes in his study about educational technology, the realization of digital pedagogy, and the transition

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to it (Thékes, 2020). Totyik (2020) drew attention to the need for more modern techniques and programs suitable for the 21st century, with the help of which a joint, well-functioning, and efficient learning process could be carried out from the point of view of both the teacher and the student (Totyik, 2020). The results of Thékes (2020) show that the majority of teachers experienced the transition to online education positively and that there was no lack of preparation (Thékes, 2020). Taking our research into consideration, both results are relevant, since our questions include how the teachers experienced the sudden change, as well as how the use of ICT tools and online education were implemented during the pandemic.

In this study, we are looking for the answer to what kind of trials the SEN students and their teachers had to endure during the pandemic, and also what effect the previously mentioned digital technologies had on the children's performance and development, as well as how well they were able to identify with these devices.

Interpretation and Current Definition of Special Educational Needs

To begin with, "Special Educational Needs" is 'a term used in some countries to refer to children with impairments that are seen as requiring additional support.' (UNESCO, 2017, p. 7). The term SEN differs in each country, but in most cases, it includes students with intellectual or physical disabilities, or children with cognitive or educational disabilities (OECD 2004). In Hungary, the term "disability" was used to describe children and students with special educational needs, which was introduced by Act LXXIX of 1993 on Public Education. This Act has been amended several times since. Subsequently, Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education described SEN students as children with disabilities, according to which "disability" refers to an unfavorable change in a characteristic (Meggyesné Hosszu & Nagyné Hegedűs, 2013).

According to various international literature, the term SEN refers to a specific educational need, which is not equivalent to the term special educational needs used in Hungary (Hrabéczy et al., 2023; Vehmas, 2010; Robson, 2005). This term was coined to avoid the term "disability" and in order to create equal opportunities. It was intended to spread the meaning of disability in a broader context and different stereotypes, thus promoting the importance of development (Csépe, 2007; Mesterházi, 2007; Eröss & Kende, 2010). Based on the work of Mohai and Perlusz (2020), SEN (in line with the definition of the Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education) is a genetic condition of congenital origin, caused by a disease or injury. In addition, these children and students need special care or more focused, multifaceted educational work (Mohai & Perlusz, 2020).

According to the Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education, Article 4, paragraph 25, a child or student with special educational needs (SEN) is "a child or student requiring special treatment who, according to the expert opinion of the expert committee, has a motor, sensory, intellectual or speech disability, or, in the case of a combination of several disabilities, a cumulative disability, autism spectrum disorder or other mental developmental disorder (severe learning, attention or behavioral disorder)." (Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education).

In our research, we interpret special educational needs students as defined in the Hungarian CXC of 2011 Public Education Act. These children differ from their non-SEN associates, and as a consequence, they require more attention and explanation of material and concepts than others. Their instruction may be provided by special education, conductive education or integrated education with other students, subject to the opinion of expert committees.⁴

Online Education for Students with Special Educational Needs

Distance learning in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic has been a major concern and challenge for families and professionals alike to organize effective distance learning for children with special educational needs. Digital tools, which have come to the forefront during the era of online education, have been playing a vital role in the education of these students for some time, with a primary focus on developmental, compensatory and remedial factors (DPMK, 2020). Digital education for SEN learners can only be truly effective if the tools are available, if they are properly supported, and if as many of the pedagogical methods used previously are retained throughout their development (DPMK, 2020; Liu et al., 2020). The desire to experience success and to avoid situations of failure and frustration are important, as neither the student nor the teacher can be expected to perform to the same standard or to apply the methods of development in such situations.

⁴ Act LXI of 2003 amending Act LXXIX of 1993 on Public Education <http://mkogy.jogtar.hu/?page=show&docid=a0300061.TV>

Institutions and the opportunities they provide play an important role in the online education of students with special educational needs. In order to make education effective for these learners, a system needs to be put in place based on the assessed and known home and family situations of each learner (DPMK, 2020; Jumareng et al., 2022). Their distance learning and practices require continuous review, which requires changes in the event problems arise (DPMK, 2020). To organize the teaching materials, tools and methods for teaching SEN students at home, the followings should be taken into account:

- In order to maintain relative security and stability, great emphasis should be placed on ongoing contact and communication with families and students.
- As digital education has fundamentally changed the framework for learning and teaching, it is important that the organization is clear and comprehensible to all in order to maintain the dynamism and valuable details that were previously used.
- Previously set developmental and individual targets should be reviewed and those that can be met and achieved through online education should be chosen, taking into account that methods and tools can be used to reduce the barriers to teaching SEN students.
- The assessment of students with special educational needs has been severely limited by digital education, so efforts should be made to ensure that developmental and formative assessments are used to support them in a way that is appropriate to the pandemic.
- When using the opportunities given by digitalization and online education, particular care and caution should be taken in the choice of this digital content (DPMK, 2020).

When teaching children with special educational needs online, it is necessary to find and organize a teaching system and working methods that develop a realistic and mutually beneficial collaboration between the teacher and the student.

Using ICT Tools in the Education of SEN Students

In the course of online education, the opportunities provided by ICT tools, as well as the ability to use them, were rapidly won the appreciation of teachers, students and parents as well. Increasingly knowledge-intensive technological devices are a big part of our lives, being used in schools on a daily basis as well. The various programmes, tools, and apps develop children's creativity, have a positive impact on imagination and memory. Moreover, within a 45-minute lesson, in shorter blocks we can communicate more attention-grabbing, colorful, and interesting concepts to children, and also support the motivation and learning of students with special educational needs (Meggyesné Hosszu & Nagyné Hegedűs, 2013).

According to Klimova (2014), the interactive whiteboard is a great example to show the advantages of ICT tools in the classroom. First of all, it increases students' motivation to learn languages and helps them focus more on the task rather than on the teacher. Interactive whiteboards provide more personal learning, as well as including tasks requiring classmate cooperation, and independent work. The curricula can be adapted at any time to suit the individual needs of the learner, and the corresponding games can be replayed as well. Thanks to the multimedia, it provides a varied and dynamic learning and practice experience, excellent for the development of all foreign language skills. (Klimova & Poulova, 2014).

Based on Molnár's (2009) research, one of its positive effects on the learning process is that it provides multiple opportunities for repetition and practice, as well as self-monitoring. While using it, the students can progress at their own pace, thus ensuring individual work without frustration and anxiety. Moreover, motivation does not need to be constantly recreated, as interactive tasks can maintain it for longer periods. It provides easy-to-follow instructions leading to small successes, and anxiety-free modes of correction. In addition, by continuously providing help, reinforcement, and feedback, it guides the learner to work thoroughly. Furthermore, multi-perspective visualization is provided aiding the problem-solving process, assisting students who previously failed in certain areas. (Molnár, 2009).

With the help of the tools mentioned above, individualized task sets can also be put together, so that everyone can excel, whether working in a group or individually. These can be challenging and time-consuming for teachers, but by using these tools, we can provide children with a wide range of opportunities, can immediately see their progress, and can greatly enhance their motivation (Meggyesné Hosszu & Nagyné Hegedűs, 2013).

Parents of SEN Children and Their Involvement in their children's Studies

Parental involvement plays a crucial role in school socialization, achievement and attainment. Though the latter specifically has been the subject of several studies, what they all have in common is that the most decisive factor in students' success at school is the parent, including dealing with the parent's own parenting style and involvement, and the way in which he or she represents and transmits the values associated with learning (Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012).

In this study, we consider the topic of parental involvement important because, with the advent of distance learning, parents have had to play an increasing role in supporting their children's home education and ensuring its smooth and effective implementation.

Epstein's (2001, 2010) work suggests that student achievement is most developed and reaches its highest levels when school and family work together towards a common goal and when there is overlap between home, i.e. family, and school activities.

Based on Epstein's 2001 model, parental involvement, which collectively shapes students' success in school, can be categorized into 6 levels of cooperation between schools and parents:

1. Helping parents to create the right home environment for their children
2. Creating effective, purposeful communication between parents and the institution
3. Getting the support and help of parents, planning their work for them
4. Methods for parents to support their child's learning at home
5. Involving parents in institutional planning, giving them a voice
6. Parental cooperation with communities and institutions (Epstein, 2001).

This model of parental involvement describes the boundaries between parents, school, and community, defining which interaction can take place at both institutional and individual levels.

One of the most important decision points for families with SEN children is choosing the right educational institution. They have the option of placing the child in either a special school or an integrated educational setting. However, often it is not the parent who chooses, as there are cases where the parent is involved, or there are dissuasive, conscientious factors such as conscience, guilt, and fear of being blamed later if they have not chosen the right school (Marton, 2015). Parents, thus, need the appropriate help and support to create the right environment (Marton, 2015). There should be a strong focus on getting to know the family, identifying needs, and detailing and providing opportunities (Marton, 2015).

Based on research, parents have a massive impact on their children's academic and extracurricular results, this is why the assistance that teachers and schools can provide teachers is so crucial. (Mitsopoulou & Pavlatou, 2021). Teachers can most effectively establish cooperation between schools and families and can also support parental involvement in children's home studies (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). It is no different for students with special educational needs, since in their situation there is a greater need for the presence of partnership and support from both parents (Hrabéczy et al., 2023). The quintessential nature of parental involvement grew even more during distance learning. The scores of challenges and adversities accompanying it required persistence, compromise, and cooperation for parents, children, and schools alike, this being especially true for children with special educational needs (Kovács et al., 2022). Furthermore, distance learning showed that teachers need parental support (just as parents need the support of teachers) and that teaching children at home plays a major role in facilitating special education (Ayda et al., 2020).

According to a survey conducted by the "Step by Step" Association (Lépjünk, hogy Léphessenek Közhasznú Alapítvány), only 59% of children with special educational needs in Hungary received daily development, 8.2% received no development at all, and 15.1% received distance learning once a week (Baski, 2020). The respondents rated contact as having been moderate, along with the implementation of physical education, the adaptation of education to the special needs of the children, and distance learning overall. Meanwhile, they rated highly the inability of teachers and schools to create plans to meet children's special needs as a result of the sudden onset of the pandemic (Baski, 2020).

In the course of online education, parents were very often only told which pages to prepare and what to teach their children. This led to an excess of material to review in schools, it being more than what was given to meet children's specific needs (Baski, 2020).

Another serious problem was that not everyone was able to provide children with the distance learning and special, individualized equipment they needed. In addition, it was a challenge for parents to manage their

children's time to support their children's studies at home and to ensure that the home was still a place of rest, relaxation and play. It proved difficult for the mother and father to be both teachers and parents while keeping their parental roles in a situation where the home became the learning environment (Baski, 2020).

Methodology

The purpose and questions of the research

The purpose of the research was therefore to find out how the English language education of students with special educational needs was realized during the pandemic. In addition, we wanted to know what difficulties these children, their parents, and their teachers had to face during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this situation affected the cooperation of parents with teachers, and parental involvement in the schooling of their children. In this research, we examined the impact of distance education on SEN students' English language education, their progression during this time, as well as the ICT tools used for their development. Another important purpose is to raise awareness and make known the possibility of supporting and providing the most successful and effective education for students with special educational needs. Furthermore, it is necessary to train and develop as many professionals as possible and the tools and programs suitable for them, so that the education of these children can continue smoothly and effectively even in such unexpected situations as the outbreak of the COVID-19 Virus. To examine these aspects, we formed the following research questions:

1. What kind of difficulties did the SEN students and their teachers have to face during the pandemic?
2. How was digital education implemented?
3. How did digital education affect SEN students' results in English?
4. How was school and parent cooperation realized during the pandemic?

Research methods

A semi-structured personal interview was used as a measuring tool, which consisted of 29 questions for English teachers. The questions were descriptive. In order to support our research, we contacted teachers who instruct children with special educational needs in primary schools. A total of 48 schools and 124 English language teachers were contacted of which 7 primary school teachers agreed to participate in the interview. Despite the large number of inquiries, the low number of interviews can be explained by the sensitivity of the topic, which makes teachers feel less comfortable when answering questions related to the topic. However, since the interviewed teachers mostly work in similar environments and with similar types of students with special needs, our sample is quite homogenous. With homogenous samples and a lower number of interviews a higher saturation of data can be reached more easily. In this case, seven interviews proved to be enough to reach the saturation of data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

In this current study we decided to analyze only the perception of teachers. This was because the first thing we wanted to do was dig into the depth of how professionals directly involved in educational tasks experienced the change during distance learning, and how they were able to face the emerging challenges with the help of their methodological repertoire. However, in the next phase of the research, we consider it worthwhile and important to compare the perceptions of teachers and parents in order to get a more accurate picture of the cooperation of teachers and parents during the pandemic in the case of children with special educational needs. The data collection took place in October 2022, at which time the interviewed teachers were already beyond the period of the COVID-19 virus. They did, however, express their experiences of their time in the pandemic. In contrast to questionnaire research, the semi-structured interview provides an excellent opportunity for the interview process to adapt to the interviewees and the interviewees' thoughts and additions (Ceglédi, 2015).

During the analysis of the completed interviews, type analysis was applied based on the methodological principles of Kuckartz (2012). This is a possible methodology for the systematic examination of qualitative data, and which method provides the opportunity to examine the latent contents of text corpora in addition to the manifest contents (Sántha, 2021). This analysis method enables an interpretative, comprehensive analysis of the entire text corpus using a case-oriented approach, which enables the exploration of the relationship between the research questions and the relevant text passages. Regardless of the fact that type analysis is a much slower method than machine coding, it provides more validity for research (Molnár, 2016). A total of 7 interviewees were available to us, consisting of 7 primary school teachers.

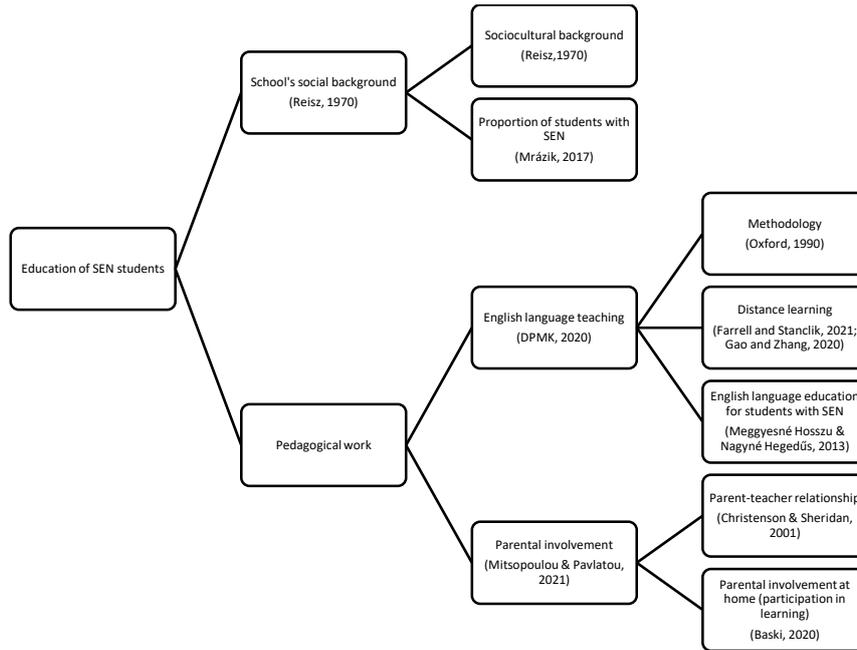


Figure 1. Main content nodes used to analyze the interview outline. Source: Own editing

Characteristics of Teachers

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample (N=7)

Specialization	Teaching experience	Number of teachers in their school	Number of children in their school
English, Developmental teacher	for 32 years	43+2 assistant teachers	442 students
English language and culture	for 30 years	40	500 students
English	for 8 years	36	500 students
English and Chemistry	for 5 years	39+10 assistant teachers	600 students
English and Ethics	for 10 years	42	450 students
English	for 10 years	50	560 students
English and Mathematics	for 30 years	40	460 students

Most of the interviewees are English teachers who have been teaching children for 5-32 years in primary schools with 442-600 students. Their schools have a teaching staff of 40-50 teachers, with two schools also employing 2-10 part-time teachers.

In order to answer these questions, it was necessary to compile an interview guide from which we could obtain information about the professional background of the interviewed teachers, their working environment, the social situation of students, the parent-teacher relationship, the English language education and online education of SEN students, as well as the results achieved in this way.

Results

Students’ social situation, parent-teacher relationship, education of students with special educational needs

According to the interviews of the teachers, the social situation of the children attending their schools was described as mixed.

„The social background of the children is mixed, but we are talking mainly about rural students with average or below average abilities.” (Teacher 2)

„Unfortunately, parents who have problems with their child do not come to us, they try to shift the blame entirely on us. We are in constant contact with the others, one of the parents is always present at the parents' meeting.” (Teacher 4)

Of the 7 teachers interviewed, 5 said that some of the children live in a full family, but many live in a single-parent family. All the interviewees teach children with special educational needs, in two cases more than one, visually impaired, autistic, dyslexic, dysgraphic and students with learning disabilities. They say that these children are hard-working, motivated, good learners and generally come from diverse family backgrounds.

„Yes, I teach several children with special educational needs. They come from different backgrounds, from visually impaired children to autistic students.” (Teacher 2)

„Yes, more than one, I teach children with dysgraphia and dyslexia. They are currently 9 or 10 years old, otherwise hard-working, good learners with a varied family background.” (Teacher 5)

The teachers interviewed said that English is taught using communicative, listening and modern language teaching methods. All teachers, except one, teach children with SEN differently, taking into account which method supports their learning process most, sometimes providing them with more individual support, and they are also orally assessed.

„I take into account who learns better with what technique, what is effective for them in the long term.”

The respondents classify the language skills of the children they teach as A1-B1, the gap between special educational needs students is not considered significant in 6 cases, only one interview shows a different answer, where the English teacher sees a big dissimilarity between SEN and non-SEN students.

„Special educational needs children are a bit behind, but some of them, for example, are so hard-working that they have caught up with their associates.” (Teacher 3)

„There is a big difference. Because of their special educational needs, they have problems with concentration, short and long-term memory, and retention. Consequently, they can work independently with much more preparation, and with constant attention, for a shorter time. They find it difficult to follow the material in class.” (Teacher 1)

English language education for students with special educational needs

Our interviews show that 5 out of 7 teachers use differentiation for students with special educational needs. When working in teams, SEN children are grouped together and given communicative tasks, as they are mostly auditory learners, most of them have a written exemption, so their oral skills are developed the most. Two of the respondents said that they do not use differentiation for students with special educational needs because they work with them once a week in a special lesson with a development teacher.

„This child with special educational needs receives special lessons once a week, we work with a development teacher.” (Teacher 5)

In 2 cases out of 7, the schools and families all responded well to the sudden changeover to online education. In another 2 cases, the respondent found it difficult, as it was sudden. In the other 3 cases, the reactions show that students liked it as it was more convenient for them, but parents found it stressful as they had to take on several roles at the same time. In the case of teachers, the main difficulty was experienced by older teachers who had problems with technology, which younger colleagues were happy to help with.

„Some people had a problem with it, because we have several older teachers, and they had to get used to the technique.” (Teacher 4)

„They have made it more colorful, with more space for the right delivery of the learning content.” (Teacher 4)

Preparation for distance education

Of the teachers interviewed, one teacher said that he felt prepared to teach and accommodate children with special educational needs, but it should be noted that he is a trained professional, 5 of the remaining 6 respondents also answered “yes”, and 1 thought “we can never be too sure”. In the existing 6 cases, they have acquired their knowledge from literature, professionals, and special needs parents, and they rely on their experience and practice over the years and tried to keep themselves trained.

*„From my experiences over the years, from university classes, from my mother, a special needs teacher.”
(Teacher 4)*

All the interviewees had already studied literature on what to know about special educational needs students. All the interviewees had already studied literature on what to know about special educational needs students. All 7 interviewees received professional support from the school management, but only 2 teachers were assisted by a special needs teacher. Regarding distance learning for children with special educational needs, in 3 cases they said that they did not receive any help, while in another 3 cases they did, and in 1 case the special needs teacher tried to help the special needs teacher.

„Unfortunately, not, only our special needs teacher tried to help.” (Teacher 7)

There was a unanimous opinion that SEN pupils did not need more time and attention, with only one teacher saying that more time and attention were needed.

*„They did not need a special tool. They needed more time, more attention. I gave them extra lessons several times, when I explained the new knowledge again, practicing the current learning material.”
(Teacher 1)*

In all cases, information on the needs and requirements of the children was provided by the teacher, parent or even the child. The necessary assessments were carried out in all 7 cases. The children’s goals were discussed in all cases, sometimes several times. Questionnaires on learning styles and strategies were completed by all but one of the teachers with the children they taught. During the online lessons, the principle of differentiated teaching was not applied at all by one teacher, two teachers distinguished only for homework, 4 teachers engaged them in separate groups, tried to give them tasks according to their abilities and their assessment was oral.

„Yes. First of all, most of the children with special educational needs were dyslexic and dysgraphic, so I always assessed their knowledge verbally. All of the children named above were auditory learners. On the other hand, as homework, they were given oral and grammar practice tasks that were color-coded, or they were given worksheets specially designed for them.” (Teacher 5)

„For the lesson, I tried to create tasks that were appropriate to their abilities. They mostly answered orally.” (Teacher 6)

Regarding the special individual or group sessions provided by the school for children with special educational needs, one teacher said that they were not provided, but for the other six teachers were provided, even in special classes for children with special educational needs. There were no problems with the use of ICT tools in online teaching.

Discussion

In the case of the families’ social status and the parent-teacher cooperation, the point of view of the responding teachers is in agreement with Marton’s results, which is that families should be known, their needs should be explored, and their options should be explained (Marton, 2015). The system of family relations for children attending school is considered by the teachers interviewed as good in 4 cases, mixed in 1 case and in 2 cases parents are said to pay less attention to their children’s studies, either because they are divorced or because they have problems with the child which they try to pass on to them. This result partially is in concordance with Epstein’s results, according to which parents and must work together for a child to develop as well as possible (Epstein, 2001). The teachers interviewed said that English is taught using communicative, listening and modern

language teaching methods. All teachers, except one, teach children with SEN differently, taking into account which method supports their learning process most, sometimes providing them with more individual support, and they are also orally assessed. This is in agreement with Meggyesné's opinion that a method and a learning environment should be created for them that has a positive effect on them and their studies (Meggyesné, 2013). In addition, our results are not in line with Baski's findings that due to the sudden outbreak of online education, teachers and schools could not create an effective plan for the education of these children (Baski, 2020).

The opinions of the teachers about teaching English to students with SEN are in concordance with the results of Meggyesné, according to which the various tools, programs, and applications have a positive, developmental effect on the children, and the 45-minute lesson can become more attention-grabbing, colorful, and interesting, which greatly helps the motivation and learning process of the SEN students (Meggyesné, 2013). The students' results during the online teaching deteriorated according to one opinion, improved according to one opinion, and maintained the level of the present instruction in 5 cases. In all cases, contact with parents was adequate, either by telephone or in various online formats. In one case, an online drop-in session was provided for parents.

In connection to preparing for distance education, according to 6 of the teachers interviewed, appropriate education was provided for students with special educational needs. 6 teachers worked with these children 3-4 times a week outside the classroom, while one teacher only worked with them 1-2 times a week. In five out of seven cases, individual needs were provided for, but for two of them, this was a difficulty. These results also do not support Baski's earlier findings that due to the sudden explosion of online education, teachers and schools were not really able to create an effective plan for educating these children (Baski, 2020). The opinions expressed by the teachers agree with Wember's results that students should not be paralyzed by fear of failure. Teachers must create a learning environment in which they can move through the new language in such a way that they feel like successful language learners (Wember, 2006). According to the teachers' suggestions, in order to ensure the effectiveness of online education for SEN students, special textbooks, school grouping, teaching assistants, programmes and textbooks for distance learning should be developed. This is in agreement with Meggyesné's research, according to which the use of such tools can show rapid and visible progress in their studies, and also motivates students to a great extent (Meggyesné Hosszu, 2013).

Limitations of the research include the small number of items due to the workload of the interview subjects. In addition, it should be mentioned that the results cannot be generalized due to the small sample size, however, this does not decrease the novelty of the research. Regardless, it can be the basis for larger research, with the help of which it becomes more precisely possible to discover how children with special educational needs can be taught most effectively, meeting all their needs.

Conclusion

The goal of our research is therefore to get answers to what kind of difficulties the SEN students and their teachers had to face during the pandemic, what impact the digital technologies had on their development and performance, and how well they were able to identify with these technologies.

Answering our first research question, respondents said that the sudden changeover to online education was certainly a challenge, especially for older teachers, who needed constant help with technical solutions. However, for the children, this did not cause any difficulties, as it meant a certain "easiness" for them.

The majority of the teachers of foreign languages, especially English, have been in the profession for more than 5 years and all of them work with children with special educational needs, sometimes more than one. The children come from absolutely mixed social backgrounds, with average or below-average abilities. In terms of their SEN type, they are visually impaired, autistic, dyslexic, dysgraphic and have learning difficulties.

As Marton wrote, teachers must get to know the family, find out their needs, and offer them opportunities, all so that their child can develop (Marton, 2015). The system of family relationships established during online education generally worked well, but in some cases, especially with divorced parents, there was less interest in and attention to the child's studies, which put an extra burden on teachers. Regardless, some of them were able to solve it and looked for the possibility of cooperation for the sake of their child's development and peace of mind.

Answering our second and third research question, foreign language teachers, as most of the SEN children have a writing exemption, have tried to teach using modern, mostly communicative techniques. As the appropriate ICT tools were available to all, they had no problems using them and were able to make good use

of online textbooks, LearningApps, Kahoot, or even YouTube videos to make the teaching process more colorful, playful, and perhaps even personal. Through all of this, they were able to maintain the children's attention and motivation, and they were also able to develop their abilities more effectively, which Meggyesné also stated in her study (Meggyesné, 2013).

In the case of children with special educational needs, they paid particular attention to grouping them together, for example, in teamwork, trying to give them tasks appropriate to their abilities, and also working with different development teachers in separate lessons with these children 1-4 times a week. Differentiated education was thus more or less achieved. Their individual needs were always taken into account, and parents and teachers were kept informed of this so that the assessments were also oral. There was no significant change in their results, thanks to these circumstances, the children's diligence, and the fact that the teachers were constantly training and preparing themselves for their teaching by reading various forums and literature, sometimes with the help of retired SEN teacher parents. The goals set by the children were mostly constantly discussed and monitored in an attempt to educate them. As everything was provided for both the children and the teachers during the distance learning, this was not a problem for them.

Answering our fourth question, as can be seen from the second and third questions, parents and teachers tried to cooperate. The communication between each other was continuous, and the teachers tried to provide the parents with information in all areas.

For future consideration, a number of proposals have been made for online education. It was suggested by teachers that much more time should be given to children with special educational needs and the teachers who teach them, even in the form of extra lessons. Teachers suggested that appropriate group splits should be allowed, and they would like to see many more distance learning programmes for English or any foreign language, online textbooks, and more support for the education of these children. Educators also suggested training teaching assistants and training and employing more development teachers who could make their work more effective and possibly help improve results.

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