

STUDENTS CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR AND EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

*PETRONELA LADECKÁ, ^bIVETA MILEVSKA, ^cMARIJA DELETIKI ^dRAILI HIIESALU

^a Institute for working rehabilitation, Stredná odborná škola pre žiakov s TP, Mokrohájska 1, Bratislava, Slovakia

^b Rīgas Valda Avotiņa pamatskola, Salaspils iela 14, LV-1057, Latvia

^c "Dr. Zlatan Sremec" – Skopje, st. Emil Zola no. 5, municipality Kisela Voda 1000 Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia

^d Pärnu Pääkese School, Rõugu 8a, Pärnu 80031, Estonia

email: pladecka@gmail.com;
iveta.milevska@gmail.com;
m.deletic@yahoo.com
raili.hiiesalu@gmail.com;

This article was written during the Erasmus+ project "Coping with students challenging behaviour" (Project no. 2019-1-EE01-KA229-051598).

Abstract: In the spring 2020 the COVID-19 spread and lock time was new and mostly difficult for all of us, but mostly for pupils with SEN, their parents and also teachers. The aim of this research was to find out what kind of help did parents get from child's teachers/school according to teaching children and dealing with challenging behaviour during COVID-19 quarantine time in spring 2020. In the teachers questionnaire the main objectives were to find out useful online teaching methodology which helped to reduce/prevent challenging behaviour in children, in which way teachers supported parents and students.

Two questionnaires were conducted to answer the questions, one for parents and another for teachers. Four schools from different countries participated in this research. Results showed that teachers were stretched between pupils' education, their mental health, consultations with parents and administrative work. Teachers find it hard working in the quarantine period with the online classes and the reasons are mostly from technical nature. Teaching methodology and online tools for SEN children are rarely available, so we can conclude that teachers were left on their own creativity, knowledge, computer competencies, capabilities etc.

Parents on the other hand found that during lock time they had difficulties sharing their work time and helping the child to learn. About the help and support parents got from their child's teachers or school according to dealing with the child's challenging behaviour were prolonging the deadlines for homework's, learning materials, working lists, presentations, videos, regular contact via email and phone.

Keywords: COVID-19, special needs education, distance learning.

1 Introduction

Challenging behaviours (CB) are prevalent among people with intellectual disabilities (Emerson et al. 2001; Holden & Gitlesen 2006; Lowe et al. 2007). As CB is associated with negative outcomes for the persons with intellectual disabilities and their direct environment, which means in our case teachers or parents.

Educators have described challenging behaviours of students as a major concern in public schools for over 40 years (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004, cited in Kern, White, & Gresham, 2007). Teachers have reported feeling ill-equipped to assist students with the many challenges they present in the classroom (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, & Merrell, 2009; Justice & Espinoza, 2007, cited in Ducharme & Shecter, 2011), leading to high stress levels and Kate Browne burnout among teaching staff. Furthermore, teachers are facing pressure to maintain increasingly high academic standards, whilst supporting the various academic, behavioural and emotional needs of students within inclusive education settings.

The cause of challenging behaviour in young children and adolescents can be complex, and may stem from a number of genetic and environmental factors. This behaviour usually has a message, and may occur because the student lacks the skills to adopt more appropriate behaviours to achieve a goal or convey the message (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2007).

Conducted a survey among both parents and teachers we wanted to get an overview of the challenging behaviour of students during corona virus quarantine time at homes and examine teachers recommendations for parents to cope with students challenging behaviour and supporting ways during studying.

Challenging behaviour such as: aggression, low self-regulation, self injuring/or injuring others, tantrums, meltdowns (sensory overload), refusal to cooperate, verbal aggression- were taken into account.

The result will be presented and used in connection with the Erasmus+ project "Coping with students challenging behaviour" (Project no. 2019-1-EE01-KA229-051598). All results will be evaluated anonymously and will help teachers to help parents. Therefore, the questionnaire for parents was addressed to problematic behaviour in children.

The main objectives were to find out what kind of help did parents get from child's teachers/school according to teaching children and dealing with challenging behaviour during COVID-19 quarantine time in spring 2020. Did children challenging behaviour rise or not, what do parents still need at home according to children challenging behaviour.

In teachers questionnaire the main objectives were to find out useful online teaching methodology which helped to reduce/prevent challenging behaviour in children, in which way teachers supported parents and students so after this analysis all project partners can spread the information in their schools. Even before the crisis, teachers have expressed a strong need for training in the use of ICT for teaching (Schleicher, 2020).

When we started the project, we had taken into account mobilities, which unfortunately were canceled. To move towards the project objectives this survey provided input for this.

To fight the spread of coronavirus and maintain healthy social-distancing, schools across the country had to be temporarily closed and quickly transitioned from face-to-face learning to distance learning. For children aged to 18 it has been a new experience to study from home. Globally, over 1.2 billion children were out of the classroom. Therefore, the situation was new and it's not unusual for kids to behave differently in different settings, but all children had to study at home. Parents had to instruct and teach their children. Teachers were also in a new position; they had to adapt to new pedagogical concepts and modes of delivery of teaching, for which they may not have been trained.

The knowledge of how parents deal with their children's challenging behaviour at home was insufficient for us. Children with challenging behaviour often have difficulties engaging activities of daily living. Every school in this project has their ways of communicating and supporting parents. Some parents are open communicators, they talk about their child's problems and seek for school support. But there are parents who need help but do not ask for it and with this survey we hoped to learn more.

2 Research and research methods

Research group consists of parents questionnaire respondents: 49 responses all together, 29 of them were female and 18 male, 2 people didn't answer. Looking by country: 8 responses from Estonia, 12 from Latvia, 14 from Macedonia and 15 from Slovakia.

Teachers took part in this research and the number by gender is 66 females and 11 males. About the number of teachers that took part in this research, most participants are from North Macedonia (32), then Slovakia (20), Latvia (18) and Estonia (7).

The data was collected by Google Forms questionnaire. Google Forms compiles all the standard survey fields- such as text, multiple choice questions, dropdowns, linear scales, and grids text, multiple choice questions, dropdowns and grids- it all served our data collection needs.

All partners translated the English version questionnaires to their mother language. So all teachers and parents of four schools had the opportunity to reply to a questionnaire. Everyone had the opportunity to respond directly to the online questionnaire and remain completely anonymous. Another option was to send an email with completed questionnaire in their native language to the school project coordinator. The third option was to get a printed survey from the school and answer it in writing. School coordinator person or -team inserted all answers in English in the online version and submitted it.

The parents questionnaire consisted of five questions and teachers questionnaire 13. Parents questionnaire had three and teachers questionnaire four open ended questions. Open- ended questions responses were coded. Coding each response with one or more codes helped capture what the response is about, and in turn, summarize the results of the entire survey effectively. There were a total of 49 respondents in the parents questionnaire, 77 in the teachers questionnaire.

3 Results

According to the results parents found that helping the child/children to complete school tasks during the corona virus quarantine time at home was hard and difficult. Most parents brought out that they had to check the homework and help the child first explaining the task and then with learning. Few parents had the opportunity to send the child to school as they are a parent to a child with severe intellectual disability.

My child had an opportunity to go to school at that time. Ordinary schoolwork wasn't happening for students who have severe intellectual disability. They spent time in day care (in the school). Few parents pointed out that their work duties had to wait or they had to find ways while working from home office to teach the child. One parent saw the problem at school.

I observed that there was a lack of experience, methods and patience to help the child. At home there was a free regime that prevented from learning. Parents even had to leave their work in order to help their children to do the tasks. And children had a lack of socialization.

10 people out of 49 answered that there was no help needed or any problems.

He did not need help. He could do all homework's alone.

The results of the second question are shown in the table below (Table 1.). By using numbers: 18 people answered yes, 18 no, 7 maybe, 6 answered something else to experiencing any changes in child's behaviour during lock down.

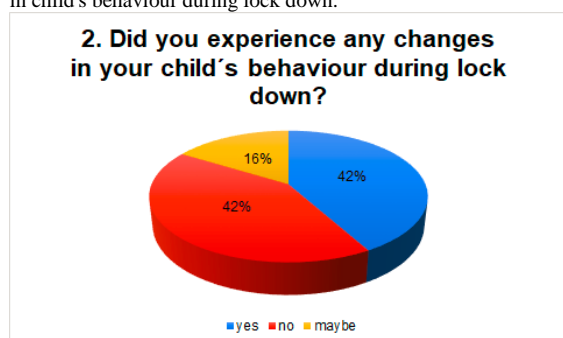


Table 1.

Six parents who answered something else pointed out the following: direct advance in child's development, child was doing sport, child was happy at home and doing the homework, child wanted to go outside but because of coronavirus they didn't do it that much, a child was tired and sometimes didn't want to continue studying and one parent didn't know the answer to that question. About the help and support parents got from their child's teachers or school according to dealing with the child's challenging behaviour were prolonging the deadlines for homework's, learning materials, working lists, presentations, videos, regular contact via email and phone, school's day care opportunity to children with severe intellectual disability, support and advice. One child got an electronic device from school. Also one parent pointed out the school's solution orientation.

My child's class teacher's sympathy and help here is commendable. For example, video lessons, which were available for watching on Facebook in addition to school time. The school was completely solution-oriented, i.e. that as many different solutions as possible had been devised to enable those children who could not be at home to still be in school and day care.

Some parents pointed out that the teacher gave them advice on how to handle a child's behaviour.

We were given directions for coping their behaviour.

One parent wrote that they used picture communication symbols cards in different situations.

We continued to use PCS (picture communication symbols) picture cards in various situations, if necessary we talked and communicated with the teacher mainly via e-channels or telephone.

14 people out of 49 answered that there was no help needed or any problems according to dealing with a child's challenging behaviour. One parent mentioned that they didn't ask for help.

About help what parents still need according to their child's challenging behaviour at home they mentioned immediate help, counselling, consulting- parent- special educator, adapted materials, psychologist visits, assistant at home for a child during distance learning, more environment exchange, consultation from teacher.

That's not an issue now. I would like to note that mainly stress situations can be caused due to complicated subjects/themes, where consultation from teacher is not received and parents aren't also in position to explain the subject.

Explaining instead of sending materials.

Some parents know exactly what their child needs, this can be more toys and new materials for learning or more walks with family. 15 parents found they don't need any help or challenging behaviour does not occur at home.

About sanctions which could be used to encourage children to behave better are shown in the table below (Table 2.), 20 parents pointed out doing sport activity and 15 found this could be having a break from activity. Also 14 mentioned change topic and activity. Being given extra work and a change place for teaching, those answers were both chosen by six people. Some parents added their thoughts which were not options, as a sanction to encourage a child to behave better could also be creating a distraction, discussion about the problem, going on a trip with the family and also not overloading children with tasks.

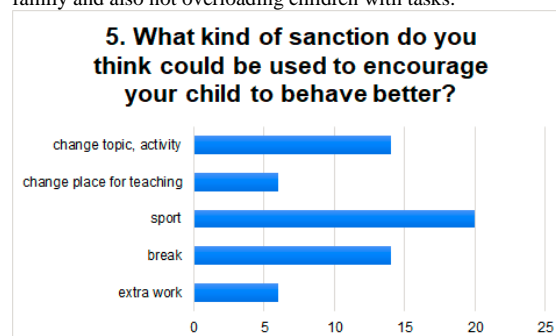


Table 2.

Parents should always use some extra help from the teachers. In the period of quarantine, parents rarely asked for any help from the teachers (44). Also once a week is often mentioned- with 16 teachers and twice a week 8 teachers (Table 3.). Most important part was that parents who asked for help from teachers everyday are few- only 4 answers .

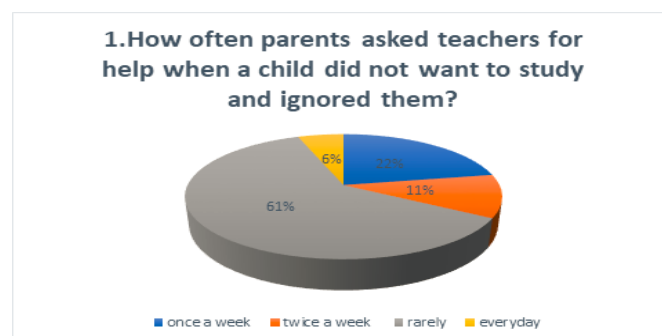


Table 3.

Morning routine is hard for most of the people, but we consider that for children with behavioral problems is harder than for anyone else. Concerning the difficulties with early morning waking up and studying, 31 teachers answered that parents had difficulties with their children (Table 4.). 30 teachers answered sometimes. Only 8 teachers answered that it was no problem situation.

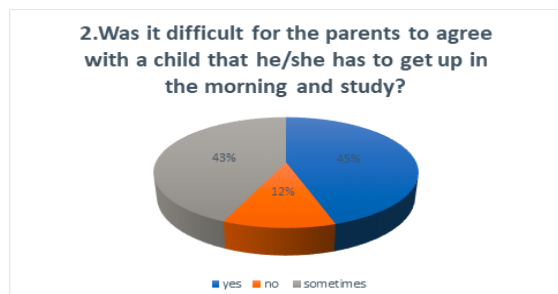


Table 4.

38 teachers (Table 5.) answered that there were some cases when pupils reacted with anger. Also, 14 teachers proved that pupils did not show any aggressive behaviour and 13 teachers answered that pupils showed it often.



Table 5.

Children with special needs are usually very friendly and most important is the friendly behaviour at home, especially with their siblings.

37 teachers proved that children were showing „friendly“ behaviour with siblings (Table 6.). We can't neglect the high percentage of children with challenging behavior at home expressed in 22 answers. It is low (6 answers), but also interesting to mention that children also showed depressed behavior.

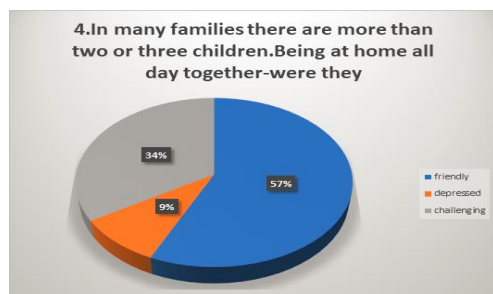


Table 6.

A great number of teachers find it hard to work in the quarantine period (Table 7.). Teachers also frequently answered with „ok, no problems“, „difficult“ and „challenging“- like middle rated answers. Less frequent answers are „more work than usual“, „low student motivation“ and „good“. Other interesting answers on this question were- the stressful and tiring impact on teachers, no parents interest for work and cooperation or that they had no computers or appropriate technical support.

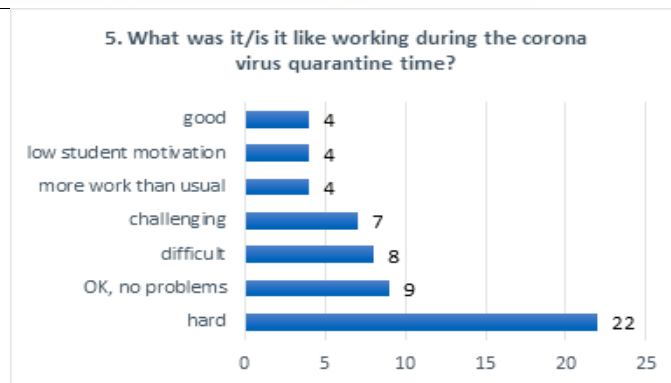


Table 7.

Concerning the amount of support that teachers provided for the parents - 46 teachers answered „maybe“ (Table 8.) which means like sometimes or depending on situations and parents needs in different fields. Then on, we have 18 answers as „no“, which we can connect with low parental motivation for work and support from the previous question, as teachers say. And 13 teachers answered that their parents provided more support than usual.

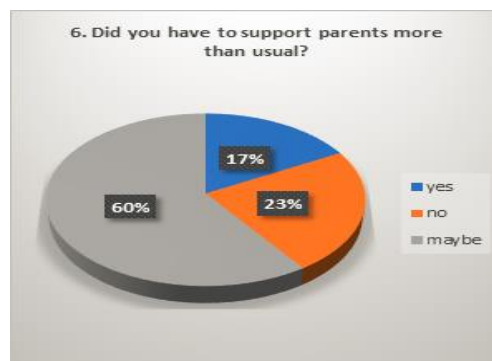


Table 8.

Teachers answered that they support parents for everything they need about their children (65%), including: learning, playing, working, long children's crying, behaviour problems, food and health care supplies). Giving directions to parents about homework is expressed in 22% (Table 9.), having long talks to parents to resolve existing problems on a daily basis has 9%, and providing psychological support in hard times is expressed in 4%.

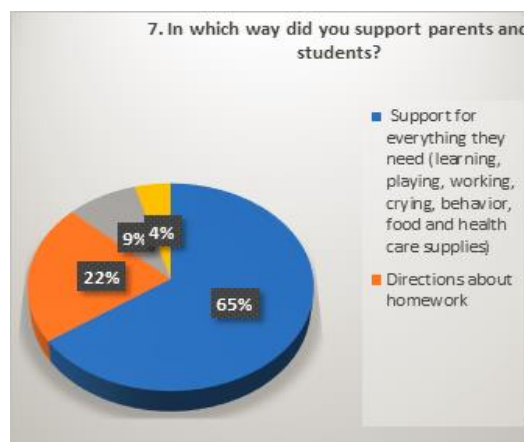


Table 9.

Answering this question about “facing student's challenging behaviour during online teaching” is with gradation from 1 (not at all likely) to 10 (extremely likely). Results (Table 10.) show us that teachers mostly have “not at all likely” answers, which means that

they didn't experience any challenging behaviour during online teaching. Next we have No.5 in line, which we can comment as so-so answers, meaning teachers sometimes faced challenging behaviour, or at some students only. No.9 we can translate as almost extremely, has also lots of answers.

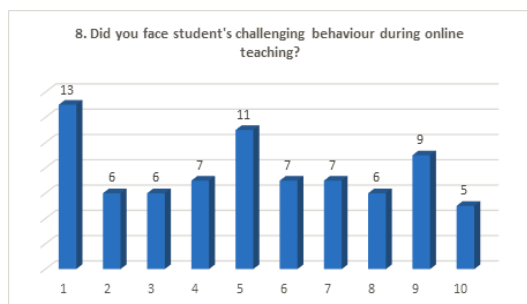


Table 10.

Teaching methodology and tools for SEN children are rarely available, so we can conclude that teachers were left on their own creativity, knowledge, computer competencies, capabilities etc. Results (Table 11.) say that teachers did NOT use or can not recommend any online teaching methodology to help reduce or prevent children's challenging behaviour. It is interesting to mention that some of the teachers however put some effort to reduce this challenging behaviour using different tools or methodology like: MS Teams, Recorded materials- videos, preparing visual materials and PCS, Edupage, Skype, Live streams and so on.

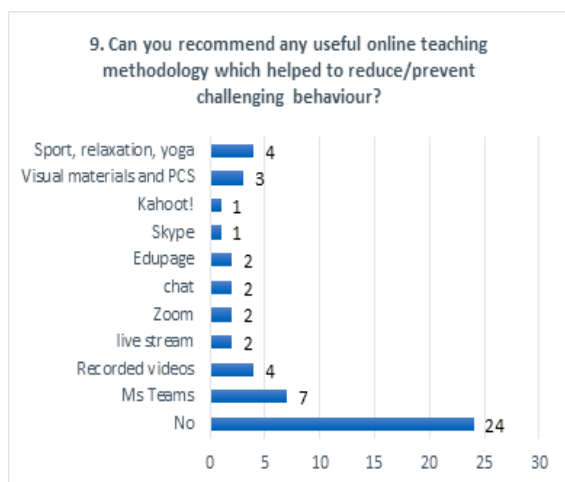


Table 11.

Answering this question about the existence of problem behaviour during online teaching is with gradation from "never" to "always" expressed in percentages in between (Table 12.). Most frequent answer is that problem behaviour was very rare, or never to 10% range. Then, teachers answered that they met problem behaviour in 50% of pupils. Very few answers we meet in always or 90% section, meaning that very few pupils show problem behaviour during online teaching.

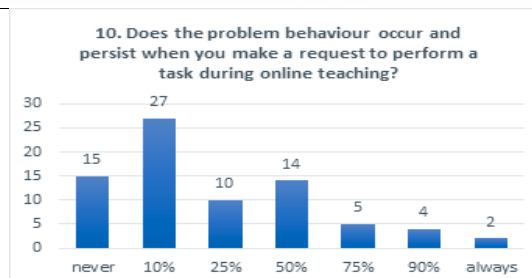


Table 12.

Question about redirecting students is again with gradation from „never“ to „always“ with percentages in between (Table 13.). Most frequent answer is that teachers were ALWAYS redirecting students when problem behaviour occurs while pupils are working on their task. High frequency is noticeable in 50% of cases, or it means- depending from case to case and least answers we see in 25%. Lowest frequency we meet at 25%, expressed with only 4 answers.

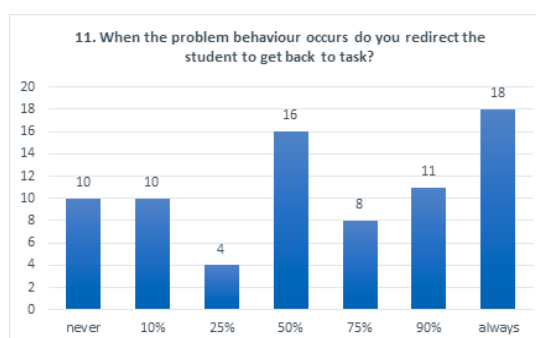


Table 13

Quarantine period was hard for all of us. As expected, it was hard for the students also. Hard time in quarantine specially shows in scheduling and organizing time for everyday routines. Scheduling time for our students is a challenging activity, which is confirmed by the results of 45 teachers (Table 14.). 25 teachers answered "maybe" and 7 teachers said that students had no problems with the time schedule in this period of quarantine.

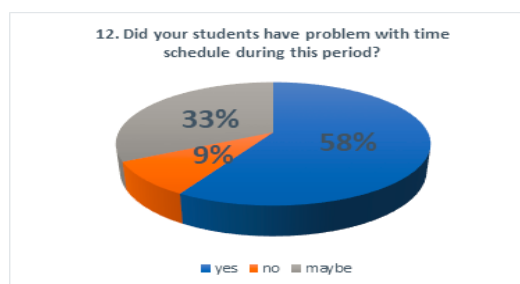


Table 14.

While online teaching we were facing lots of problems and obstacles. Teachers had most problems in realization of online teaching with technical aspects of work (not everyone had a computer, smart phone, tablets- teachers or students, or the equipment is old) and internet connections, tools and resources. Always persisting issue with our students is also low attention and the need for physical contact, teacher- student. Certain number of teachers answered that there were other problems like passing homework deadlines, lack of feedback, using printed materials (regularity in lifting or downloading materials), using the educational platform (which is not so stable for using), lack of ideas for work.

4 Conclusions

Despite challenges and substantial changes in habits that happened overnight, parents overall experience has been largely positive during lock down at spring 2020. The questionnaire gives insights into how digital schooling can be further developed in the future. At the same time we must not forget that parents need to get help with counseling, advice in the learning process and instructions to deal with children's challenging behaviour at home. This was an unprecedented model in education in European countries and elsewhere that all family members had to change their daily routine. It was difficult to help children in the learning process during this model in education for parents, who responded that they had to explain, teach them and handle both their own work and the child's studies during working hours. Some children waited for the parents at home, because they could not study without help. However, sometimes parents lacked more experience, methods and patience in the learning process while children lacked motivation and concentration. Accordingly to the results, sometimes a compromise had to be sought in some families. Also, many parents indicated that the child did not need any learning assistance nor did occur any challenging behaviour. Overall, the research findings about the help and support parents got from their child's teachers or school according to dealing with the child's challenging behaviour is helpful for all schools. Parents' knowledge of their child's/children needs during the distance learning period is very important for every school. Thanks to this knowledge, schools can provide more effective assistance.

Teachers questionnaire results show on the other hand that parents rarely asked for help from the teachers, instead of using them every day for consultations and advice about passing the hard time in lockdown period. Teachers help and support is essentially for parents, especially in hard times. Children with challenging behavior have difficulties with getting up in the morning and studying, which is expected for them. We also expect some aggressive, angry and inappropriate behaviour in these children, especially when they are not allowed to do what they want to do at a moment. That includes meeting and playing with friends and as the results came, we confirmed this statement. If we count the answers with often and sometimes as affirmative, we have a huge percent of children that show inappropriate behaviour when not allowed to socialize or to do things they have need to. Challenging behavior in children with SEN is very often and this questionnaire confirms this. About teacher's obligations, especially in quarantine period, we can express in one word- HARD. Most of the teachers have answered that working during Corona virus quarantine was hard for them and we can freely use the other answers to confirm this, such as: they had more work than usual, students had low motivation to work and learn etc. Teachers support parents all the time and for every need they have connected with the pupil. Pupils are a common interest between parents and teachers.

During this quarantine period, some parents were asking for help and some didn't. That depends from different types of developmental disabilities they have. We can freely conclude that the teacher's role was very important for parents and that teachers are not here only for their students, but also for supporting the whole family. Any kind of suggestions is useful for parents, mostly giving them suggestions on how to cope with challenging behaviour in the lockdown period, which is exactly what teachers did. Conclusion is that some children/ pupils show challenging behaviour and analysing the answers, we can notice that the number of students showing challenging behaviour is high. Knowing the problems of our work, we can freely conclude that there are no specialized online tools for this kind of behaviour as support that we can suggest, most of the parents did not have any technical devices (computers, smart phones, tablets etc.), parents were low motivated to communicate with teachers, some of the teachers had no computers and all that points to conclusion that we need more online support (programs, platforms, games etc.)

for these children. According to the teacher's answers, pupils don't show problem behaviour if asked to perform tasks during online teaching. Students are used to being asked to perform different tasks during classes, so online tasks are not so strange for them. Obviously, we all have different types of students and while some of them don't matter redirection, or they sometimes mind, a good number of students have serious problems with redirection while having problem behaviour. Redirecting students' work sometimes can be very helpful, but sometimes can be very frustrating for them. We asked this question so we can draw a conclusion made by teachers, about the impact of redirecting students.

We can conclude that more than half of students in the four surveyed schools have problems with time scheduling in this period of quarantine. While online teaching teachers were facing lots of problems and obstacles, mostly technical nature of problems.

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