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*Published in:*

A Retrospective of Teaching, Technology, and Teacher Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Published: 01.01.2022

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Korte, S.-M., Upola, S., Paksuniemi, M., Väätäjä, J., & Keskitalo, P. (2022). A Model to Support Students' Psychosocial Well-Being: Promoting Student Self-Efficacy in Remote Learning. In E. Baumgartner, R. Kaplan-Rakowski, R. E. Ferdig, R. Hartshorne, & C. Mouza (Eds.), *A Retrospective of Teaching, Technology, and Teacher Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic* (pp. 25-29). Association for the advancement of computing in education. <https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/221522/>

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# A Model to Support Students' Psychosocial Well-Being: Promoting Student Self-Efficacy in Remote Learning

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This paper presents the findings of a study aimed at developing an interactive and participatory remote teaching model. The specific objective of this study was to support teachers in their use of exclusion-prevention teaching practices that take into account the psychosocial well-being of learners in upper secondary education and those in their last year of basic education. The need for this study arose due to increased student drop-out and burn-out rates during the COVID-19 pandemic. An online survey was conducted among students ( $N = 189$ ) to identify their experiences of distance learning, and three workshops were held, during which students ( $N = 45$ ) conducted a SWOT analysis of their learning experiences. The results revealed the students' diverse needs, including support for their sense of agency and self-efficacy, and the significance of social interaction in remote teaching. Based on the students' voices, the study identified effective supervision strategies and teaching organization as key issues to ensure no student is left behind. Consequently, the key features of interactive and participatory remote learning were used to design a model that can assist educators in planning and delivering remote education.

**Keywords:** remote teaching, youth, psychosocial well-being, learning environment, student voice and agency, self-efficacy, survey, workshops

## HISTORICAL REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic initiated a global transition to remote learning in early 2020. A study conducted by Frangou and Keskitalo (2020) among preservice teachers during the early stages of the pandemic recommended dialogical and interactive teaching and learning practices for remote education delivery and highlighted the importance of developing preservice teachers' technological and pedagogical competencies and content knowledge. These results and recommendations are still current. Indeed, the need to develop the recommended dialogical and interactive teaching and learning practices has become even more urgent. Research on experiences of remote teaching and learning after two years of

the pandemic (Kestilä et al., 2022; Valtioneuvosto, 2021) has revealed the diverse effects it has had on youths' everyday lives and psychosocial well-being, including increased drop-out and burn-out rates and a greater need for support among young people (Lavonen & Salmela-Aro, 2022; Tan & Chua, 2022). It has also highlighted the importance of developing teacher education that enhances preservice and in-service teachers' exclusion-prevention competencies for both remote and classroom activities. In this study, the researchers draw on their involvement in several development projects regarding remote teaching and learning since the beginning of the pandemic to expand knowledge on these timely themes.

This article presents a study examining young people's experiences of distance teaching and the development of a model based on these experiences. The pandemic has changed and diversified education delivery methods in many contexts and heightened educators' awareness of the need to adapt to changing teaching situations. In Finland, schools went into total lockdown in spring 2020, and further local (classrooms and schools) lockdowns were imposed from time to time until recently. The goal of this article is to determine the factors that promoted students' psychosocial well-being during distance learning and identify practices that should be retained as we attempt to return to normal. Hence, this study seeks to answer the following question:

1. What kind of remote teaching practices promote well-being and self-efficacy according to students?

To achieve this goal, we first present students' positive and negative distance learning experiences and then examine how students described their well-being during extended distance learning.

## METHODS

This article is based on a development study conducted as part of the eOPE (eTeacher) project, which was conducted in Finnish Lapland, in Northern Finland, and funded by the European Social Fund. The project connects scholars from the University of Lapland and Lapland Education Centre REDU. The overall study (Upola et al., 2022) is aimed at informing the Finnish-speaking research community about factors that affect distance teaching, while the paper at hand contributes to the international debate on distance teaching by reflecting on lessons learned and next steps.

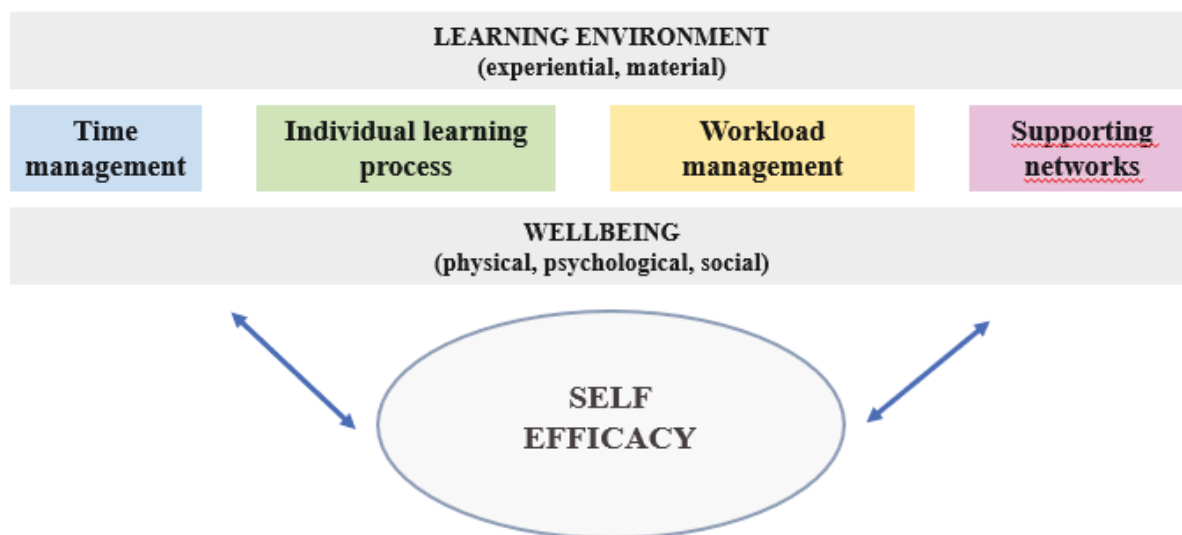
For this research, we chose a participatory, qualitative approach based on data-driven content analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). The data were collected between May 2021 and January 2022 through an online survey and workshops. The researchers became acquainted with the data by reading through the materials and abstracting key phenomena (see Johnson & Christensen, 2020).

The participants in the study ( $N = 234$ ) were final-year students completing basic education and students completing upper secondary education. In the first phase of data collection, the students were asked to describe their experiences of distance learning through an online survey ( $n = 189$ ) based on Salmela-Aro and Näätänen's (2005) measurement tool for youth school burn-out indicators. This paper presents the findings derived from the responses to the open-ended, qualitative survey questions.

The second phase of data collection consisted of three workshops for upper secondary students ( $n = 45$ ). In the workshops, the students conducted a SWOT analysis to assess youth actions and experiences in pedagogical settings (van de Vijver, 2017; see also Madsen, 2016) and classified their remote learning experiences into four categories: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In total, 173 definitions of distance learning were obtained.

## FINDINGS

The students' responses showed that they regarded distance learning as a multidimensional phenomenon that can be examined with respect to two dimensions. The first concerns the learning environments, and the second relates to students' own experiences of coping, and third relates to well-being. Students were found to have heterogeneous personal learning environments, which either supported or hindered the learning process by affecting their sense of self-determination and self-efficacy (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Factors Affecting the Meaningfulness of Distance Teaching, Based on Students' Experiences.

Learning environments were seen as a cross-cutting factor affecting the entire distance learning process and one that had both material and experiential dimensions. It is important to understand the learning environment in a holistic way because students' learning experiences are affected by both the material environment, e.g., the reliability of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure, and the experiential or psychosocial environment. The students' well-being was found to be dependent on social, psychological, and physical factors. Their self-determination skills were dependent on four factors: time management skills, workload management, individual methods of studying, and a network to support learning. Success in these four self-determination factors was found to have a positive effect on the students' experiences of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was seen as closely connected to the overall distance learning process because a considerable number of experiences of success and failure were mentioned in the data. Positive and negative factors were reported for each category of psychosocial well-being.

Students reported many positive aspects of distance learning, with many seeing it as a new opportunity to foster enthusiasm, flexibility, and a sense of control. However, they also reported negative and discouraging features of distance learning, namely stress, loneliness, and passivity. Successful distance learning includes both interactivity and the ability to study in one's own way and according to one's own schedule. At the same time, it is important to provide students with proper support and offer them a safe atmosphere in a cooperative learning environment.

## IMPLICATIONS

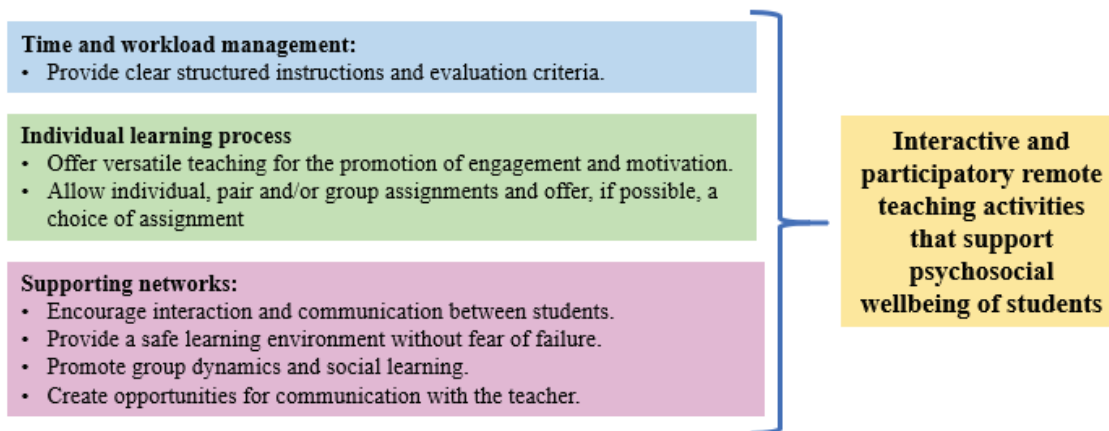
Many of the responses to the open-ended questions in our survey described negative remote teaching experiences. However, all categories of analysis included positive aspects, such as the ability to increase time at home and work in the peacefulness of one's own home. Consistent with a study by Petillion and McNeil (2020), the principal concerns reported by the participants related to challenges in managing time and workload, as well as a loss of social interaction.

Methodologically, the researchers learned that workshops are a useful arena for establishing connections with young people and enabling them to share their ideas (see Vassiliou & Dragonas, 2015). The researchers encourage educators and other researchers to use participatory approaches to facilitate interaction between learners and supervisors so that they can share their realities and discuss challenging situations. Our discussions with learners enabled us to identify risks and gaps related to distance learning, many of which are aligned with the findings of Mason et al. (2013).

In sum, we identified many short- and long-term consequences of the implementation of remote learning during the pandemic. However, the key finding of our study is that the learning environment affects the entire distance learning process and encompasses not only the equipment used for the provision of teaching but also the socioemotional experiences that influence students' well-being. Thus, as we attempt to return to normal, we should not forget that this matter is multifaceted. We should keep in mind the positive aspects of remote learning, e.g., flexibility, as well as the challenges faced

by youth during the pandemic. We are currently in a crucial phase, one in which we must redress the disruption to young people's education due to the pandemic and learn from the challenges it brought. This article highlights young people's own experiences of remote learning and identifies what factors should be considered in future education and educational policies.

Based on our findings, the researchers offer the following recommendations for preservice and in-service teacher training, as well as policymaking related to remote teaching practices that promote well-being and self-efficacy. These recommendations reflect the key features of interactive and participatory remote learning and are formulated as a model to assist educators in planning and delivering remote education that supports the psychosocial well-being of students (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Interactive and Participatory Remote Teaching Activities that Support the Psychosocial Well-Being of Students.

Figure 2 presents a set of recommended interactive and participatory remote teaching activities. These recommendations are aimed at supporting students, promoting interaction through group-based activities based on social learning, and promoting self-motivation and a sense of flow during the learning process. This requires that teachers plan and conduct their learning activities by drawing on in-depth knowledge of learning theories and pedagogies, as well as how digitalization can be used in teaching. In addition, the importance of supervision should not be underestimated. Discussion should be promoted, and the supervision and facilitation skills of teachers should be developed.

Negovan (2010) identified several dimensions of psychosocial well-being: subjective well-being related to everyday events, subjective well-being related to the actions of education institutions, psychological well-being, and social well-being. Conscious actions are necessary to support students' psychosocial well-being during distance learning because a lack of interaction with peers and supervisors can have detrimental effects on students' well-being. By taking conscious actions to further distance teaching, educational professionals can support students' psychosocial well-being by being conscious of the fact that, if students are left alone, without interaction with their peers and supervisors, often, their well-being begins to move in a negative direction. Furthermore, activities that are flexible and support students' individual learning styles and help them to manage their time and workloads begin with clear and structured instructions and evaluation criteria, as well as a choice of assignments. Versatile teaching practices that take advantage of both digital tools and non-digital methods are motivating and engaging and can, therefore, help prevent student passivity.

These recommendations, summarized in Figure 2, are largely in line with those of Petillion and McNeil (2020). However, the latter highlighted the significance of adapting assessment for remote learning and creating flexible assessment systems, which were not mentioned by our participants. The needs and ideas reported by students in the workshops are also in line with current research on learners and learning organizations engaged in distance learning (Nummenmaa, 2011).

Today, many technical solutions are available to facilitate remote learning. These solutions offer a variety of ways in which to increase interaction between learner groups, as well as between learners and teachers, to enrich the learning situation. In Finland, virtual and digital learning have been promoted in national strategies for over 10 years. In practice, however, many hindrances exist that hamper the efficiency these strategies (Nummenmaa, 2012). Among these are teachers' hesitance regarding digitalization and a shortage of available digital devices (Mikkonen et al., 2012). Thus, policy-

makers should ensure that there are enough digital resources available to teachers and that teachers understand how to use these devices.

Another issue is the need to increase the understanding of and competency in digital teaching content among both in-service and preservice teachers, sensitize and train educators in the use of digital tools, and keep them updated on emerging remote teaching and digital pedagogies.

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