Article

Construction of Learning during the Inevitable Distance Learning Period: A Critical Perspective of the Experiences of Young People in Estonia

Gertha Teidla-Kunitsõn [1,2,*]**, Halliki Põlda** [2] **and Merike Sisask** [1]

1   School of Governance, Law and Society, Tallinn University, 10120 Tallinn, Estonia
2   School of Educational Sciences, Tallinn University, 10120 Tallinn, Estonia
*   Correspondence: gertha.teidla-kunitson@tlu.ee

Abstract: Background: As a result of the global school closures in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning, educational technology and learning by oneself has gained the attention of both teachers and parents, as well as schools worldwide. So far, knowledge regarding distance learning has been contradictory and gathered mostly in a quantitative manner. Aim: The aim of the following article is to examine the distance-learning experiences of four youngsters aged 16 from the DigiGen project exploratory pilot study in Estonia—a country known for its digital development. The study focuses on how learning was construed during distance learning in the experiences of young people. Method: These experiences, gathered in four semi-structured in-depth interviews, are placed in the framework of the theory of transactional distance and critical discourse analysis. Results: As the results indicate, the distance-learning experiences are derived from the structure and organisation of the distance learning—the more rigid the structure, the more difficult it was for the students. Five main discourses emerged regarding how youngsters construed learning during distance learning: (1) school building is for learning; (2) teachers teach instead of self-learning; (3) learning as a forced activity; (4) avoiding asking for help; and dominant in all the discourses was (5) avoiding responsibility. Discussion and conclusion: According to the results, distance learning is multifaceted and young people have ambivalent experiences from a distance learning.

Keywords: distance learning; COVID-19; risks; opportunities; critical discourse analysis; DigiGen

1. Introduction

Distance learning and the educational technology that enables it were in use long before COVID-19, yet the pandemic still challenged schools and education in general, highlighting the need for such educational technologies and the professional development of teachers [1], as well as the development of students' digital skills [2]. At this point, the "transition to online training has become a necessity" [3] (p. 1). As a rather extreme test situation, the pandemic has called attention to the readiness of learners, families and teachers to move to an educational model that is based on learners' self-management (Self-management in that specific study referred to a student with a positive and adequate self-image who achieves the goals set, adequately assesses the complexity of the task, and who is better in applying what has been learnt (Lauristin et al., 2020)) and responsibility for one's own learning as well as the use of digital technologies, while also showing the limits and conditions for implementing this model [4].

Estonia, known for its long history of digitalisation and integrating information communication technology (ICT) into the learning processes [5], had a fairly good foundation for the quick shift to distance learning to be a success. In Estonia digitalisation in education started already in 1996, when a new national curriculum included an informatics course and information technology was a recurring theme in the curriculum. To implement the new curriculum, a national ICT program "Tiger Leap" in education was announced to

provide both primary and secondary schools with computers and Internet access and provide teachers with training in computer literacy [6]. The use of digital solutions in learning was also a priority in the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 [7], as it was reflected also in the new Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035 [8]. This illustrates well that "on a national level, efforts in the name of students as well as teachers being digitally competent have been made for years" [9] (p. 5). Therefore, it is not surprising that in comparison with other post-Soviet countries, teachers in Estonia were better equipped with ICT skills [10]. In addition, schools globally recognise the need for students' digital literacy skills [11] and look for ways to incorporate digital competencies in school content [12]. This applies beyond distance learning, as "the protagonist of educational action is the student, who must face this technological society" [13] (p. 3), placing the responsibility to prepare young people for their adult life in the digital age on the educational system. Nevertheless, teachers and students in Estonia still face several challenges concerning distance learning [4,14].

There are already several studies published in Estonia regarding distance learning caused by the spread of COVID-19 [4,9–11]. These studies show that the experience of teachers as well as students are contradictory—for some it was very good, whereas for others it was poor [4]. A follow-up study concluded that the shift to distance learning depended on technology and socioeconomic factors, as well as the attitudes and fears of the parties in education [14]. A challenge also lies in determining the objectives of the learning itself; this applies both in distance and contact learning. Perhaps even more concerning is the finding that distance learning either embeds or even aggravates some of the known gaps in education [14]. Kutsar and Kurvet-Käosaar [15] (p. 6) add that "new learning environments and requirements challenged children who previously had learning difficulties, those with special educational needs and those where internet access was limited". In addition, Talaee and Noroozi [16] (p. 28) also observe that "mere ICT access may generate another social stratification in regard to educational success". Another study suggested forming agreements regarding environments for working and organising learning, using digital learning materials, developing teachers' digital competences, and meaningful video lessons, supporting students' self-regulation, and creating opportunities for students to plan their learning [17].

Among these studies, what has not yet been researched in the light of distance learning is how learning itself was construed by students in these new settings. Although we know the experiences of young people regarding distance learning, little has been offered to explain these experiences and construe the meaning behind them. Therefore, placing these experiences in a theoretical framework allows us to explain these experiences and offer an "explanation of a particular social phenomenon" [18] (p. 178). Understanding how learning is construed in the settings of distance learning and being able to explain the experiences of young people offers useful insights when designing a distance-learning experience that can support all the students in the learning activities as well as the quality of education provided in the form of distance learning. In addition, this input could also help to narrow education gaps that are embedded or aggravated during periods of distance learning.

Although there have been several studies conducted in the context of Estonia [2,4,9,14,15,19] capturing the coping methods of schools, families and students, they do tend to remain on the level of description, as their intention is not to study the social relations and their meanings in these settings. At the same time, it is necessary to understand the experiences of young people together with the social relations and their meanings in the settings where these experiences take place. This way we can provide distance-learning experiences that decrease social inequalities and support learners with different needs and talents [11]. As Kutsar and Kurvet-Käosaar [15] (p. 10) highlight "political decisions affecting the delivery of, and access to, any of the services provided by local authorities could have severe implications for children both by exacerbating the negative impacts of the pandemic on their well-being and by increasing the social inequalities between them." Hence, it becomes

necessary to profoundly understand the experiences of distance learning among young people [2,4,9,10]. Therefore, this article seeks to answer two research questions:

RQ1: How did young people describe their experiences of distance learning?
RQ2: Through which discourses and social relations was learning construed in the experiences of young people?

Understanding the experiences of young people together with the social relations and discourses that these experiences entail allows educators and teachers to plan and implement distance learning in a manner that supports all the students in their learning process. This will also be reflected in the quality of education provided from a distance and provide the opportunity to narrow gaps in education.

2. Theoretical Framework as a Means of Interpretation

The theoretical framework of this article is built on the construction of distance learning, on the theory of transactional distance and on discourse analysis. These three theoretical frameworks serve as an interpretative framework for the distance-learning experiences of young people. To do so, distance learning is explained, as well as how it was applied in Estonia during the first school lockdowns in spring 2020. Second, the theory of transactional distance (TTD) is used built on discourse analysis and Fairclough's [20,21] three dimensions of discourse. As critical discourse analysis (CDA) forms both a method and a theoretical framework, it is also reflected on in this section.

2.1. The Construction of Distance Learning

Distance learning first appeared in the 19th century and holds a diverse range of meanings, influenced both by technologies and pedagogies of the current time, as well as the societal circumstances surrounding them [22]. In its early days, correspondence offered the first opportunities to learn from a distance that would be later replaced by radios, followed by television teaching programmes [23]. The last decades have brought remarkable changes in the field of distance education [24], especially the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced schools to find alternative methods for teaching.

The first definition of distance learning was offered by Moore [25] (p. 76): "the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviours are executed apart from the learning behaviours [. . .] so that communication between the learner and the teacher must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other device". Holmberg [26] (p. 107) describes distance learning as something that "occurs without students' and tutors' meeting personally and without any class-room teaching [. . .] the overall characteristics of distance education is that it is based on *non-contiguous communication,* which, however, does not exclude supplementary face-to-face sessions". Keegan [27] (p. 50) lists five characteristics of distance education: (1) teacher and learner are quasi-permanently separated; (2) the effect of an educational organisation; (3) technical media are used to bring together both teacher and learner and to provide the content of study; (4) two-way communication; and (5) students are taught as individuals rather than groups (In saying that distance education treats learners as "individuals rather than [. . .] groups", Keegan argues that "distance education is different in that it does not compel students to join the learning group in order to study" and therefore "most distance systems treat the student basically as an individual" [27] (p. 47)). While all these characteristics were visible in the practices of distance learning in Estonia during the COVID-19 lockdown, the last element of the list (students are taught as individuals rather than groups) can be overturned with the Community of Inquiry framework (CoI). CoI is built on three elements needed for successful online learning experience: (1) cognitive presence; (2) social presence; and (3) teaching presence [28,29] Social presence "encourages a *collaborative* online learning environment" [29] (p. 557) and the technology in use allows that to happen and as it was found "learners build collaboration channels using the affordances of the technology available to make meaningful learning" [29] (p. 557). Therefore, CoI illustrates well that the distance learning

does not have to be individualistic in its nature but can be built on collaboration among learners, even if it was not the case in Estonia.

According to the practices of Estonia, distance learning is defined as a study form, where students and teachers are physically separated from each other. In addition, Estonia defined other forms of learning that can be, and at least some parts are already, part of distance learning, e.g., digital learning where learning is supported by digital devices whether through distance learning or in contact classes. Hybrid classes were taught wherein some of the learners were physically present in the classroom while others joined the class virtually via digital technologies. Blended learning is another example: a form of learning where some of the learning is carried out in contact-learning, while other parts of the learning are done in the form of distance learning [30]. During the first lockdown in spring 2020, distance learning was mostly applied, while in subsequent months (autumn/winter 2020/2021) more flexible approaches were possible (e.g., blended learning, hybrid classes etc.). Therefore, the starting point of distance learning for Estonia corresponds to the six characteristics offered by Keegan.

A discussion needed here is whether the Estonian practice of distance education during the first lockdown should be considered as emergency remote teaching and learning (ERTL) than distance education. Emergency remote teaching and learning applies to teaching and learning, taking place in a crisis, lacking preparation resources—whether necessary training of teachers or the infrastructure needed for it—that the implementation of distance education would expect [31]. While the shift to distance education in Estonia was indeed a reaction to a crisis and an extreme situation, therefore being emergency remote teaching and learning in its essence, it has been still treated as a situation of distance education. This creates a contradiction—while ERTL was essentially applied, it was still named and titled as distance education. The previous paragraph illustrates it well, similarly to the studies carried out in Estonia during the time of the first lockdown [2,4,17] that name the situation itself as distance learning and teaching or distance education. This was not only the case in Estonia, but rather globally, as the term 'online learning' was preferred [32]. As the current article also derives from the DigiGen project (DigiGen (The impact of technological transformations on the digital generation) is a European research project that is developing significant knowledge about how children and young people, a group growing up today often referred to as the DigiTal Generation, use and are affected by the technological transformations in their everyday lives. See more at digigen.eu.), the concept and language use follows the term distance education and distance learning. Therefore, the article follows the terms used in Estonian education and in the DigiGen project. Nevertheless, caution is needed when considering the results of the study as an inevitable part of distance education, as there is inconsistency between what the situation in its nature was and how it was approached and labelled in the educational sphere in Estonia.
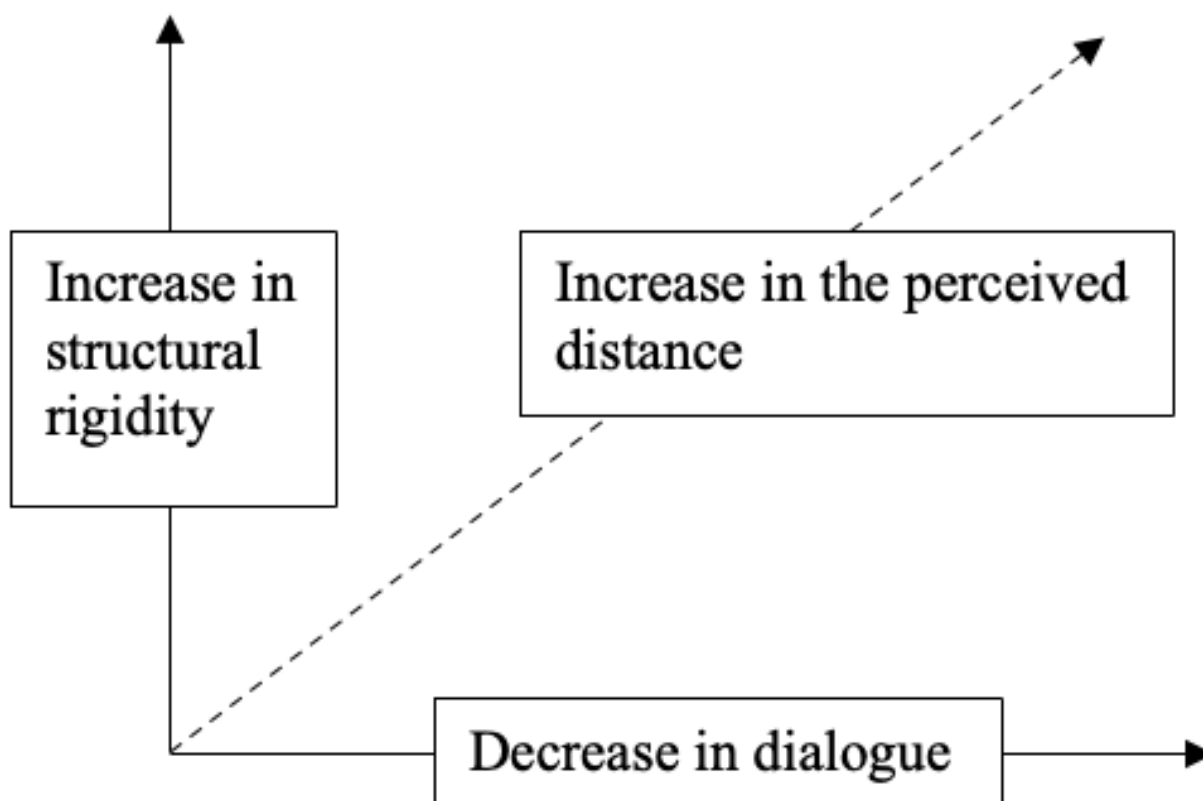
2.2. Theory of Transactional Distance

Distance learning and the theories used in planning teaching from a distance have been in use for decades. One of the theories in the field is the theory of transactional distance (TTD), developed in the 1970s by Moore [33] and described as one of the most favoured and used theories regarding teaching from a distance [33,34]. Moore [35] (p. 2) expresses the need for a theory as follows: "the use of the term 'distance learning' is troublesome since it suggests actions of one person, i.e., the learner, that are independent of the actions of teachers. Yet every so-called 'distance learning' program is in fact a teaching program as well as a learning program and, therefore, can only correctly be referred to as a distance education". TTD regards distance as a "pedagogical phenomenon" that is not merely geographical but transcends it and relates to "student interaction and engagement in the learning experience" [36] (p. 3). Therefore, TTD should be seen as "the interplay of the behaviours of teachers and learners in environments in which they are in separate places and have to communicate through a technology" [37] (p. 33).

TTD is based on three aspects: (1) structure; (2) dialogue; and (3) autonomy of the learner [38]. Structure refers to the design of the course and the organisation of the learning [33] and how it affects student engagement [36]. It is the structure of the course that determines the "rigidity or flexibility of the course's educational objectives, teaching strategies, and evaluation methods", while also determining to what extent the course meets the learner's own needs [37] (p. 35). A more flexible structure allows students to express learning objectives of their own, while also supporting learners in finding their own 'pathway' through the content with their own materials [37].

Dialogue stands for two-way communication as well as other forms of interactions, but the frequency of the communication is not as important as is the quality of the communication [38]. To determine the quality of the dialogue, several factors are weighted (e.g., the number of students, means of communication, etc.), although the most comprehensive is the structure of the course [37]. For example, a synchronous online class has the potential to be very dialogical, yet the dialogue is limited if the structure of the course sees students as mere 'listeners' and 'consumers', not as active participants in knowledge creation [37].

The third component—autonomy—marks the self-management and self-determination of the learner. As Moore [37] (p. 36) describes, "the effectiveness of varying degrees of structure or the dialogue in each teaching program appeared to interact with the extent to which learners in those programs were able (or unable) to participate in the design and execution of their own learning program". In TTD, these three aspects—structure, dialogue and autonomy—are inversely related, meaning that if one of the aspects emerges, the other withdraws. For example, a rigid and inflexible organisation of the learning (structure) decreases the learner's dialogue and autonomy. [38] This is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The transactional distance theory (TTD) based on Moore [37] (p. 37).

To understand how Keegan's definition of distance education and TTD interact with each other, Table 1 juxtaposes the two, with reservations.

Table 1. Juxtaposing distance learning with TTD, compiled by the authors.

Principle of Distance Education According to Keegan [39]	Components of TTD [37,40]
Teacher and learner are separated	Structure
The effect of an educational organisation	Structure
Technical media are used to bring together both teacher and learner	Structure and dialogue
Two-way communication	Dialogue
A chance for meetings	Dialogue
The form of education participated in is industrialised	Structure

Juxtaposing distance education and TTD illustrates that the characteristics of distance education do not display any signs of autonomy, the third aspect in TTD. Therefore, when applying distance education by the definition offered by Keegan, it does not pay attention to autonomy, as does TTD. The relevance of how distance learning was organised is visible in the studies conducted in Estonia. The study of Tammets et al. [17] (pp. 5–6) highlights the need to support the learner's self-regulation and to provide learners with a possibility to plan their own learning (e.g., knowing the structure of the learning process weekly). A stronger focus on the autonomy of a learner seen as one's self-management and self-determination is also visible in the study by Lauristin et al. [4]. Whereas both studies had learners' autonomy as one of the focus points, the way distance learning was applied in Estonia, at least during the first lockdown, did not leave much space for learners' autonomy. As the structure of distance learning and its practices during the first lockdown did not allow youngsters to practice autonomy, it is understandable why the studies identified the need to support learners' self-management and autonomy.

2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis

Another theoretical framework the study relies on is critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA, while being seen as both theory and method [20], is useful in educational research when studying the relationship between "educational practices and social contexts" [41] (p. 117). One of the central components of the CDA is discourse. Discourse can be understood as "a particular way of talking and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)" [42] (p. 1); furthermore, discourses mediate power [43]. In Foucauldian understanding, discourse constitutes power in social life and the way the world is described and talked about defines the way these phenomena are perceived [44]. Fairclough [20] (pp. 3–4) concludes that discourses are "diverse representations of social life which are inherently positioned–differently positioned social actors 'see' and represent social life in different ways, different discourses". These (re)presentations are mediated with language that "is structured according to different patterns that people's utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life [...]" [42] (p. 1); CDA aims to analyse these patterns.

Language as a social construct is a form of social practice that is placed in its 'social context'. This leads us to an understanding that language "is socially shaped, but it is also socially shaping, or constitutive" [21] (p. 134). In CDA, text and social practices are deeply intertwined as the social practices are shaping the text, while the text is also shaping social practices [17].

Fairclough [21] (p. 134) uses discourse to refer "primarily to spoken or written language use [...] in a social-theoretically informed way, as a form of social practice". His CDA is based on three dimensions: (1) detailed analysis of the text, involving both the meanings and forms of the text; (2) discourse as a practice, involving both the creation and interpretation of the text; and (3) discursive events and an analysis of social practices [21]. In this manner, analysing language use reveals the "social functions it has come to serve" [20] (p. 6).

According to Fairclough [45] (p. 2), "ideologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behaviour [...]". These ideologies are linked to discourses as "discourse is ideological in so far as it contributes to sustaining particular relations of power and domination" [20] (p. 7). As our everyday language

involves so-called common-sense assumptions (ideologies), we unconsciously legitimise those ideologies and the power relations the ideologies hold. Fairclough also points out that "it is possible […] to find assumptions of this sort embedded in the forms of language that are used". CDA tries to describe, interpret and explain how discourse is constructed and preserved, and how a discourse can legitimate social inequality [41]. Discourse as a form of social practice reproduces but also changes knowledge, identity and social relations (including power relations), while being affected by other social practices and structures [42].

Hence, turning towards the experiences of young people regarding distance learning, CDA can be used to examine the language constructions of young people to reveal any hidden ideologies or power relations. CDA allows us to analyse what social relations (and therefore power relations) are visible in their experiences and what meanings are given to them. According to some of the critics [46,47], the educational system is hierarchical and embedded with power relations; during distance education this raises the question of whether these relationships were visible outside of the physical school space.

3. Research Methodology and the Analysis Procedures

The data were gathered using semi-structured in-depth interviews, and the study served as an exploratory study for DigiGen project's main study. Semi-structured interviews allow the understandings, views and thoughts of the individual to be studied, hence the study of the experiences of distance learning among youngsters in Estonia [48]. This aligned well with the nature of the exploratory study, serving the DigiGen project as a pilot-study, enabling a wider examination of the phenomenon under study [49] and the collection of input for further studies.

The purposive sample consisted of four young people, three male and one female, all aged 16 and representing both rural and urban schools from different regions of Estonia. Description of the participants is shown in Table 2. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Tallinn University (Decision No 10, 15 April 2020). Informed consent (written and signed) was obtained both from parents and the participants. The interviews were carried out in November–December 2020, and although planned as in-person interviews, the suggested measures both from the Government of Estonia and the Tallinn University regarding the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 favoured online interviews. Therefore, all the interviews were carried out in Estonian and recorded on the Zoom platform. For transcription, audio files of the recordings were used.

Table 2. Overview of the sample.

Participant	Description of the Participant
I	Male, lives and attends school in one of the wealthiest local municipalities near the capital Tallinn
II	Male, lives in the capital Tallinn and attends one of the most prestigious schools in Estonia. Personal interests include programming and e-sports.
III	Female, lives in central of Estonia and attends an average Estonian city school. Actively participates in school and local life via different organisations and events
IV	Male, lives in central Estonia and attends an average Estonian city school. Personal interests include technology hardware.

The instructions needed to participate in a Zoom interview were forwarded to the participants. No technical problems occurred, and all the participants had used the Zoom programme before. During the interviews, the interviewees had their cameras off while the interviewer's camera was on. It may be asked whether conducting interviews online favours the sample more used to technology, but as the original agreements were formed to

conduct the interview in-person and the sample did not change when the interviews were moved online, this possible bias was most likely not an issue. In addition, all the participants had used Zoom before and, therefore, it was a familiar procedure and environment for them. Altogether, 84 pages of transcriptions were used for the analysis.

In the interviews, the participants were asked to describe and share their experiences regarding the first lockdown and distance learning period in spring 2020. At the time of the interviews in autumn 2020, the participants were in 10th grade, but as the focus point of the interviews was spring 2020, the experiences are from the period when they were finishing their 9th grade, which also marks the end of compulsory education in Estonia and traditionally coincides with national exams.

To find out how young people describe their experiences with distance learning (RQ1) content analysis was carried out. With a moderate level of interpretation, qualitative content analysis entails techniques for systematic text analysis, with the central part being categorisation of the text [50]. The objective of content analysis is to describe the meaning of the data, allowing to "focus on selected aspects of meaning, namely those aspects that relate to the overall research questions" [49] (p. 2). To explore the construing of learning and social relations embedded (RQ2) during the distance learning period, CDA was used, whereby content analysis also formed the first level of analysis. The following (Figure 2) illustrates the methods used and the process of analysis to answer the research questions.
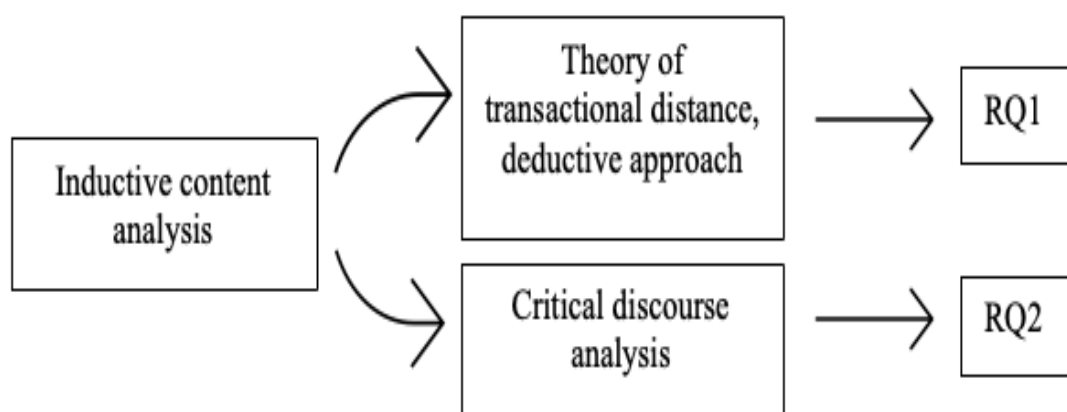
Figure 2. The use of analytical methods to answer the research questions.

The first step of the analysis included preparing the data for analysis. The interviews were fully transcribed, followed by the selection of the data to be analysed, leaving non-relevant data from the interviews aside. All the data implying the experiences of the young people were collected from the transcripts and read thoroughly several times to gather the sense of the data as this serves as an input for pilot coding. With the pilot coding, two main categories were first derived from the data (opportunities and risks), followed by several subcategories to specify the content of the two main categories. The process of data analysis was conducted in NVivo.

After the qualitative content analysis, the already categorised data were once again analysed in NVivo, both in the frameworks of TTD and CDA. For the former, the analysed data were analysed following the deductive approach as the experiences were placed in three main categories: (1) structure; (2) dialogue; and (3) autonomy. This was done to place the experiences of distance learning in a theoretical framework, allowing us to explain these experiences from a more theoretical standpoint.

Finally, to answer RQ2, the descriptions from the already carried-out qualitative content analysis were once again analysed in NVivo in the framework of CDA. This involved analysing the text from the perspective of vocabulary and grammar, followed by the language choices representing the discourses. Finally, five main discourses emerged that were placed in the wider social context, allowing the hidden meanings and ideological beliefs to be highlighted.

4. Results

The results are presented accordingly to the RQs and the course of the data analysis. Therefore, results from the qualitative content analysis are presented, followed by the analysis carried out within the framework of TTD and CDA.

4.1. Opportunities and Risks Experienced by Young People Regarding Distance Learning

The experiences of young people regarding distance learning are described mainly as (1) opportunities or (2) risks in distance learning. The former indicates aspects related to positive experiences during the time of distance learning, whereas the latter describes the negative experiences associated with it. These categories include several sub-categories presented in Table 3 and are elaborated on as follows.

Table 3. Experiences of youngsters regarding distance learning.

Opportunities in Distance Learning	Risks in Distance Learning
Easy access to school-related assignments	Challenges self-persistence
New ways and comforts for learning	Challenges concentration
Managing one's own time	Learning on your own is challenging
Using computer for homework	Need for breaks
	Not knowing how to use ICT
	Overusing ICT
	Too many platforms in use

Opportunities in distance learning were experienced by the easy access to school-related assignments. This meant that all the assignments could be found in one place (I: *everything we had to do was on Stuudium* (Stuudium is a digital learning management system used in Estonia, bringing together teachers, students and parents. Stuudium entails grades, assignments, communication with teachers and comments for parents. Although used widely before COVID-19, according to the participant, the distance learning period, the importance of Stuudium and having everything available in one place was experienced as an opportunity.)). Distance learning brought new ways and comforts for learning (e.g., silence; hybrid classes) that was considered something that could be used in the future as well (III: *it is quiet*; I: *Hybrid lessons . . . [. . .] students can do much better*). As distance learning changed the regular schedule of students, managing one's own time was highlighted (IV: *some of the classes were like . . . they just started later. And then it was good and nice to act*). Distance learning also gave the students an opportunity to use computer for homework, which was welcomed by the participants (II: *I write a lot better in computer than in paper. So . . . Some of the homework I did, I was very happy with them [. . .] it is more homely environment for me*).

As the above illustrates, there are several aspects of distance learning that were considered as opportunities by the young people. School-related assignments were always accessed easily and just as well as the classes held as hybrid lessons. Online classes also brought a quiet environment, allowing participants to feel comfortable when learning. As some of the classes began later than usual, this allowed participants to carry out their daily activities according to their own needs. In addition, being able to complete the assignments using a computer allowed some of the participants to work in a more homey environment.

Risks in distance learning as experienced by the young people formed another large part of the experiences of the young people. Distance learning challenged the self-persistence and motivation of the young people regarding learning (II: *One of the biggest things I noticed was the loss of motivation*). In addition, distance learning also challenged concentration (IV: *Many had the problem of not being able to focus [. . .] And that is why it was difficult for me to learn as attention and concentration were completely at zero*). Another issue highlighted in the experiences was that learning on your own is challenging (III: *You had to teach yourself the topics. And that's a big thumbs-down, because you could teach yourself completely the wrong*

thing, and then you'll do it wrong. But by then you've already learned it, and so it is difficult to re-learn it).

The need for breaks from the screen was also described (II: *Since during distance learning we had to use it* [computers], *not more, but in addition to our regular use of it* [. . .] *that led to a greater need to make more breaks and spend more time outdoors, as it were*.). Not knowing how to use ICT posed a challenge to some of the students (III: *Maybe learning new topics only through digital tools can be very difficult, because half of their thoughts, so to speak, are whether they are using it correctly or they don't know how to go to that site or whatever*). Overusing ICT was brought out by one of the participants, who was also actively involved in e-sports (II: *I definitely don't sleep enough and that is probably directly linked to my use of technology*). Participants also stressed that too many different platforms were used (I: *One teacher uses one app, and another teacher uses a different app and the third teacher a third website. And then the constant . . . file sharing* [. . .] *It would have been better if everyone had used the same platform*).

When juxtaposing the opportunities and risks experienced during distance learning, opportunities can be related to comforts, whereas risks appear to be at least mostly connected to ones' self-management. The loss of motivation and inability to concentrate, or the need to learn on your own without being sure how much or what exactly to learn, are all related to learners' autonomy and self-management.

What calls for attention is the ambivalent meanings of the aspects raised by the young people regarding distance learning. For example, while carrying out homework using a computer was perceived as an opportunity, at the same time, the overuse of ICT and need for screen breaks was perceived as a risk. In addition, while learning on one's own was challenging and difficult, planning your own time and starting school lessons later was described as an opportunity, allowing the students to proceed based on their wishes. This illustrates well how the experiences of the young people cannot be divided merely based on opportunities or risks but are more intertwined as one aspect can create both risks and opportunities.

One point of discussion is how much weight is given to any of these aspects when planning distance learning. For example, whereas some of the participants felt more in charge of their own time planning, would this aspect have the same weight when the risk of teachers using too many different platforms is considered? In this respect, as these results were derived from the experiences of four people, no generalisation was sought here as this was not the aim of the study.

4.2. Experiences in Light of the Theory of Transactional Distance

Simply knowing the experiences of young people alone does not help us to explain these experiences. This leads us to the next step of the analysis—placing the experiences of the young people regarding distance learning in the TTD. For this, the same interviews were analysed deductively based on the three elements of the TTD: (1) structure; (2) dialogue; and (3) autonomy.

The structure in TTD considers the design of the course and its overall organisation. Therefore, regarding the current study, the structure is set by the teachers and those responsible for organising the learning. Examining how learning was organised for them, what emerges first is that most of the learning was passed on via Stuudium in the form of assignments.

> *Everything we had to do was on Stuudium . . . and there it was what I had to learn. And then, well, there were a couple of teachers who made video-lessons. And then some also had, that they wanted photos. Of workbook.* (I)

This clearly illustrates that there was little synchronous contact with the teachers as there were only a couple of teachers who organised the learning with video-lessons, showing that most of the teachers did not use the option of video lessons and just uploaded the assignments in Stuudium. Second, another noticeable element is that some teachers also wanted photos of the workbook as proof that the assignment had been carried out. Similar experiences are also seen in examples 2 and 3.

> *Basically, the assignment of the class was just uploaded in Stuudium.* [...] *read these pages from the textbook, write these pages in the workbook.* (III)

> *They* [video-lessons] *were not done very often . . . But since we had that time that you had workbook and then textbook, we were given just these tasks.* (IV)

The excessive use of different apps and environments is also evident regarding the organisation of learning.

> *One wants one app, the other wants another app and the third wants the third page. And then . . . the constant sharing of files.* [. . .] *one wants to have the meeting in one place and then in another place and third wants to use Skype. The constant looking at where someone is.* (I)

The above indicates that the structure and organisation of learning was rather rigid; the assignments were mostly uploaded to a learning management environment, where students could access them and carry them out on their own and submit either the assignment or forward a photo of it. These examples (1–4) reflect how the usual practices for teaching and learning in contact classes were simply put online, and the diverse possibilities that the digital world has to offer for distance learning were not harvested. Participants also noted that there were a few classes and teachers where real-time video-lessons were used, meaning that there was little dialogue between students and teachers. The fragmented organisation of learning is also an element that illustrates the rigid structure of learning during the period of distance learning.

Dialogue in this context refers to the quality of the dialogue between the learner and the teacher. Therefore, the focus is not so much on the quantity of dialogue but rather considering it in terms of two-way interaction. When examining the structure of learning organised in the section above, signs of this limited dialogue are visible (examples 1–3), and the following suggests that communication with the teachers became more difficult during the period of distance learning. The most common method of contacting the teachers was written communication in a learning management environment (examples 5–7).

> *We sent letters with teachers in Stuudium* (II)

> *That, like this contact definitely got harder, because you had to wait for their responses in Stuudium or whatever* (III)

> *If you asked a question, then a lot of teachers did not do that synchronous video lesson. There were maybe three [who did]. And for those [who did not do video-lessons] you had to send a long letter on how do I solve this. And then you wait a little and then you get the answer and then you did not understand, and you wrote a new letter.* (I)

As is evident, mainly written communication was used. In addition, the participants clearly emphasised that the contact between students and teachers was not good or became even worse.

At the same time, in some cases, teachers did try to reach out to students (examples 8 and 9).

> *Well, every teacher actually asked . . . in video-lessons it is asked that . . . did you understand, feel free to ask if there is any problem.* (I)

> *Teachers still had consultations, where you could ask questions.* (II)

Only one participant experienced more diverse and easier contact with the teachers, as the following illustrates (example 10).

> *If necessary, you could have separate Zoom lessons or, for example, if someone had Messenger, you could make a video call through it. To learn this way then.* (IV)

As most of these examples illustrate, the contact between the teacher and student became more difficult and was mainly carried out in written form, with some exceptions. The decrease in dialogue in distance learning is, according to TTD, related to the more rigid and inflexible structure of the course.

The last aspect of TTD—autonomy—also appears in various ways in the experiences of young people. Lack of autonomy, expressed in lower self-management and learners' self-determination, was visible when discussing the risks in distance learning (e.g., II: *One of the biggest things I noticed was the loss of motivation*), but one can also see decreased autonomy in the following (examples 11–13).

Well ... [thinks] maybe it made [me] lazier (I)

It was little difficult to get oneself to learn (II)

But then in the end it seemed a bit as if the teachers had also given up. As there were no exams, there was a very little ... no more motivation to learn anymore. (II)

What is interesting in example 11 is the language that is used—*it made me lazier*, instead you become lazy yourself. Another interesting point was made in example 13, where the decrease in self-management and self-determination was seen in teachers as well and reflected in the students' own motivation to learn.

Self-management and self-determination as a sign of autonomy is still visible in the experiences of young people regarding their time planning or helping themselves to do the assignments asked by teachers (examples 15 and 16).

As of the day, I got a lot more to plan, in what order I will do my lessons. (I)

You can search, you can find. So, thanks to it [digital technology] it is much easier to help yourself in studying (III)

Aah, everything is like so available ... and ... well ... you search little, sniff around, and you'll find. (IV)

Placing the experiences of the young people in TTD, we can observe how the structure dictates both dialogue and autonomy in the settings of distance learning. A rigid structure, visible in the experiences, is related to the decrease in dialogue and the increased difficulty of contact with the teachers and is also related to the decrease in autonomy. Therefore, to offer the distance-learning experience that would support both dialogue between students and teachers, and also the autonomy of the learner, the structure of the learning should become more flexible and elastic.

4.3. Construing Learning and Emerging Social Relations and Meanings Visible in the Experiences of Young People Regarding Distance Learning

To describe how learning was construed in the experiences of young people regarding distance learning, CDA was used, and it revealed five main discourses through which learning was construed: (1) school building is for learning, not home; (2) teachers teach instead of self-learning; (3) learning as a forced activity; (4) avoiding to ask for help; and, as is visible in all of the discourses, (5) avoiding responsibility.

The school building is for learning discourse showed that learning is strongly related to being physically in the school building (I: *If you are at school, then there is nothing else you do, but learning. You are there, you are supposed to learn*). This reveals that learning itself happens in a specific place—the school building—as this serves the function of it. In addition, more spiritual attributes such as aura for learning were admitted to the school building that was not present at home in one's room (II: *You are not used to working so much at home and school has this sort of aura. That I am going there to study. There is no such feeling at home, in your room*). Another example also favours the schoolhouse for learning (IV: *If I already have difficulties in concentrating in the class ... Now try to do these lessons at home*). As seen, the school building itself does not support learning by default, although it does so more compared to the home environment.

The discourse of 'a school building is for learning' strongly represented the social norm surrounding schoolhouses, educational institutions and the purposefulness of a school as a place to learn (see Põlda & Teidla-Kunitsõn, 2020). A contradiction appears here regarding what is set down in the Education Strategy 2035 (HTM, n.d.), which states that

learning should also extend to youth centres, nature, digital environments etc., whereas the everyday practices of the participants do not reflect that.

Connected to where teaching occurs, a second major discourse emerged—teachers teach, as opposed to students learn. This was visible in the language, whereby the teacher was the one doing the teaching (III: *if the teacher is teaching a new topic, it is all quiet and you can just listen to what the teacher is saying*). This discourse was found when the young people tried to elaborate from the perspective of a teacher when there was a need for a rapid shift to distance learning (I: *Look, if the school is closed the next day, then it was that how to teach students*). The vocabulary of *teaching* instead of *learning* seemed to be deeply rooted in the practices of everyday life so that when one of the young people was describing her own learning during the distance learning period, the *learning* itself was understood as *teaching* oneself (III: *You had to teach yourself the topics*).

This illustrates well how the discourse of teacher-centred practice is still dominant. In this case, teachers pass on the knowledge that is 'consumed by students' in a monological manner (teacher talks, students listen), referring to the unidirectional movement of knowledge (from teacher to students). This aligns well with Freire's [47] (p. 72) idea of education as a banking concept, whereby "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing", leaving the learners in a rather passive role. Both Freire [47] and Apple [46] claim that education itself is built on a hierarchy where teachers are in a more powerful and higher position than students, leaving students with little power to negotiate their learning. While engagement serves a critical role in learning and its outcomes [51], there has been a decrease in learners' engagement with their studies [52]. The discourse of 'teachers teach' clearly shows that teaching is considered more important than learning and, in the case of distance learning, students had to teach themselves instead of learning on their own.

Another discourse on how learning was perceived during the distance learning period was that of learning as a forced activity. Interestingly, here everyone's learning, including teachers as well as the schools and education in general, was considered forced, rather than voluntary or optional (III: *Many older teachers had to learn to use a computer in order to use either the Teams environment or Zoom* [. . .] *especially teachers or schools at all because they had to find solutions to deal with this situation*; I: *teachers have learned that digital . . . Well the use of all kinds of apps and pages*). Because the experiences were discussed in a commanding way (*had to learn; had to find*), the learning was portrayed as unavoidable with no other options (not learning, deciding on one's own whether to learn or not). Furthermore, this forced learning of teachers as well as schools as institutions was visible through the development and evolution of teachers or schools as institutions in general. This enabled us to conclude that both teachers and schools did not have the skills or knowledge needed for distance learning beforehand, but they had to learn it on an ongoing basis.

Another discourse regarding learning that quite visibly distinguishes distance learning from contact-learning was avoiding asking for help (III: *And it was that many did not dare to ask or whatever* [. . .] *because you don't dare to ask for help*). This suggests that there was fear in asking for help (*did not dare to ask; you don't dare to ask for help*) and overcoming that fear —resulting in asking for help—required effort (III: *If I was very-very confused then I pulled myself together and so, teacher, please help me*). The fear in asking for help is explained by the fact that the act itself—asking for help—is carried out in settings where it is perceived as a performance (III: *maybe what happens is some sort of performance to some extent.* [...] *in that very moment you're talking to everyone or whatever*). Asking for help was considered easier during the period of contact learning (II: [in contact study] *you could or . . . it was much easier to ask things*).

Being in need yet avoiding asking for help and trying to manage on your own illustrates, on the one hand, the wish to manage on your own, even if it makes things more difficult. On the other hand, a contradiction appears in the role of education regarding the curiosity of the learner. The learners once again took the rather passive role in the process of learning, even if it left them with confusion or misunderstandings. It was also clear

that learners did not act in these situations as autonomous learners; their role was rather passive and forced. Another point of discussion here is whether learning itself should precisely encourage the opposite to avoiding asking for help—it should invite students to ask questions and make their hesitations or confusion visible instead of 'hiding' them.

The last discourse is avoiding responsibility. This was visible when examining the autonomy of the learners in the framework of TTD, but it also appeared in the CDA (I: *Well . . .* [thinks] *maybe it made me lazier*). Furthermore, concerning the need for help, the emphasis fell on teachers to recognise and acknowledge the need for help, instead of the student asking for help or instructions (I: *The teacher usually sees from the students' faces whether help is needed or something*), placing the responsibility on the teacher to notice the need, instead of highlighting that on one's own. As the previous example suggests, even in contact learning the responsibility tends to be placed on teachers to notice someone in need. Although it was described above that it was much easier to ask for help in contact learning, it does not necessarily mean that students did that. In addition, this is also a sign of low self-determination and agency. Another sign of avoiding responsibility and therefore illustrating low agency is a (specific) behaviour which participants realised did not support their learning at the time, yet they continued with the behaviour. This could be having your phone next to you (II: *Well, what of course does not support it* [. . .], *is if I have a phone next to.* [. . .] *And then finally I get stuck there* [in the phone], *because I have seven homework assignments for today and I could have done them earlier, but then I didn't*), or having mobile data on during school assignments and learning (IV: *Since I use social media a lot myself, every little pling and then in my mind goes through that damn, I want to* [. . .] *I just disappear into the world completely*). In the latter examples, although the participants acknowledged that the current behaviour did not help them with their learning at the moment, no correction in behaviour appeared. Furthermore, the correction in behaviour would not mean the student had to abandon social media completely, it just assumes that the focus is either on learning or on social media. However, no modification in behaviour or habits followed.

The last discourse—avoiding responsibility—was also seen as the dominant one. Although it reflects on low agency and taking little action in ones' learning, so do the other discourses (school building is for learning, not home; teachers teach, instead of self-learning; learning as a forced activity; and avoiding asking for help). This becomes especially significant as the new, by now already in force, Estonian education strategy 2021–2035 [8] highlights that to achieve its goals, learners need to be self-directed.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

As the results illustrate, the experiences from a distance learning are ambivalent and distance learning itself is multifaceted. Although creating opportunities for students, distance learning also raises risks which should be remembered when planning and conducting learning experiences from a distance. Even more challenging is the knowledge that some aspects of distance learning correspond simultaneously to both opportunities and risks, e.g., although computers and the internet make information available and improve the quality of work, they come with the risk of overusing ICT.

When these experiences were placed in TTD [25,27], a more rigid and inflexible structure of learning emerged. This in turn created the conditions for a decrease in dialogue between teacher and student—as is highlighted both in the experiences of the young people, and in the TTD. The latter suggests that the more rigid the structure of the class and learning itself, the less dialogue there is. In addition, as is both visible from the data and suggested by TTD, autonomy in the form of self-management and self-determination decreased. This lines up well with the identified risk of the challenge of concentration which emerged from the experiences as it illustrates low self-management and self-determination. Therefore, in conclusion, the structure of distance learning has the potential to affect the perceived opportunities in the experiences of young people. This allows us to understand the experiences of young people and invites practitioners of

distance learning to reflect on how to implement more dialogic and autonomy-emphasised learning experiences.

This becomes especially important as the Estonian education strategy 2021–2035 [8], among other goals, emphasises the importance of a learner-centred approach in education, while also acknowledging that this can be applied effectively "when learners are self-directed and able to choose a learning pathway based on their interests and abilities, unhindered by barriers in the educational landscape".

The experiences of the young people also showed that during distance learning, teaching practices from contact learning were merely placed in the reality of distance learning without adjusting them to new circumstances and learning from a distance. This can be explained by the need to rapidly change the environment for learning from the classroom to the digital space and therefore focus more on the learning space itself, thus restricting the focus on the substantive aspects of learning. This illustrates well that the practices of Estonia aligned rather with emergency remote teaching and learning than with distance education. Still, the pattern—focus on the space where learning happens, instead of the substantive aspects of learning—is also observed in education in general, where learning spaces tend to attract more attention than the teaching and learning itself [53]. As the discourse analysis showed, the school building was seen as a space of learning, overshadowing the processes of learning itself.

In addition, as physical space affects how people interact in that space, spaces created for learning (e.g., classrooms) shape the social roles and hierarchies of relations that emerge in them [54], and these roles and hierarchies transfer to all kinds of public learning spaces (e.g., online classes, etc.). This transition was also evident in the experiences of the young people, whereby teachers were the ones doing the 'teaching' as opposed to students' learning.

When it comes to student learning, inactivity, low agency and a passive role in the learning process were visible throughout all the discourses that emerged from the experiences of the young people. In addition, low(er) autonomy was also evident when the experiences of the young people were placed in the theory of transactional distance. As the theory states, a rigid structure of learning decreases the quality of dialogue and this was evident when placing the experiences of the young people in the context of Moore's theory [25,27]. This indicates that the way distance learning was applied did not encourage students to be autonomous.

The need to support learners' self-management and involve students in the planning of their learning process is also highlighted in the study by Tammets et al. [17] (pp. 5–6). In addition, the current article highlights similar if not the same needs as those indicated by Tammets et al. [10]. For example, Tammets et al. [17] (p. 4) stress the need to have mutual agreements in the school on which online environments to use as students and parents both found that too many different platforms were used—a similar issue was visible in the experiences of the young people.

Another point of discussion this raises is that whereas low autonomy might have been amplified by the rigid structure of teaching practices during the first lockdown, as teaching practices for distance learning were taken from classroom practices, there might not be a noticeable difference between them. Whether distance learning or not, there appeared a need for external pressure (teachers, parents, etc.) for learning to happen. However, this could be changed by actively involving students in their learning and creating a space—whether physical, digital or, perhaps, social—where students could develop self-directed learning and the autonomy that comes with it.

One limitation to remember about the study is the small size of the sample. This is especially important when considering how well both the critical discourse analysis and the theory of transactional distance fit with the data gathered. With a larger sample this might not be so evident. Nevertheless, the data gathered were sufficient to meet the objective of the study. In addition, the experiences in focus here should not be elevated as

the experiences of overall distance education. These experiences should be interpreted only in the context of the first experiences of distance learning.

For future research, it would be valuable to make the discussion between distance learning and emergency remote teaching and learning more vocal, considering already the studies conducted under the theme of distance learning and education. In addition, it would be valuable for future research to focus on changes taking place when implementing distance learning and teaching in Estonia. Especially valuable would be ethnographic research in the field of distance education. In addition, a valuable focus of future research would be to see how to encourage autonomy of the learner and involve students in the planning phase of the learning processes both during distance education and in the learning processes taking place in the classroom.

References

1. Eradze, M.; Bardone, E.; Dipace, A. Theorising on COVID-19 educational emergency: Magnifying glasses for the field of educational technology. *Learn. Media Technol.* **2021**, *46*, 404–419. [CrossRef]
2. Adov, L.; Mäeots, M. What can we learn about science teachers' technology use during the COVID-19 pandemic? *Educ. Sci.* **2021**, *11*, 255. [CrossRef]
3. Belousova, A.; Mochalova, Y.; Tushnova, Y. Attitude to Distance Learning of Schoolchildren and Students: Subjective Assessments of Advantages and Disadvantages. *Educ. Sci.* **2022**, *12*, 46. [CrossRef]
4. Lauristin, M.; Loogma, K.; Erss, M.; Vernik-Tuubel, E.-M.; Sarv, E.-S. Õpilaste, Õpetajate ja Lastevanemate Toimetulek Koroonakriisi Aegses Kaugõppes. 2020. Available online: https://haridusfoorum.ee/images/2020/Distantsppe_uuring_EHF_250720.pdf (accessed on 5 May 2022).
5. Aru-Chabilan, H. Tiger Leap for digital turn in the Estonian education. *EMI Educ. Media Int.* **2020**, *57*, 61–72. [CrossRef]
6. Toots, A.; Laanpere, M. Tiger in focus–a national survey of ICT in estonian schools. *EMI Educ. Media Int.* **2004**, *41*, 7–18. [CrossRef]
7. Eesti Elukestva Õppe Strateegia 2020. Available online: https://www.haridusfoorum.ee/images/haridusstrateegia/Eesti_elukestva_oppe_strateegia_loplik.pdf (accessed on 10 September 2022).
8. Haridus- Ja Teadusministeerium. *Haridusvaldkonna Arengukava 2021–2035*; Haridus-Ja Teadusministeerium: Tartu, Estonia, 2019.
9. Lepp, L.; Aaviku, T.; Leijen, Ä.; Pedaste, M.; Saks, K. Teaching during COVID-19: The decisions made in teaching. *Educ. Sci.* **2021**, *11*, 47. [CrossRef]
10. Radó, P.; Munkácsy, B.; Scharle, Á.; Kende, Á. Adapting to Future Challenges to Education Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. 2021. Available online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354705388 (accessed on 22 November 2021).
11. Gerick, J.; Eickelmann, B.; Bos, W. School-level predictors for the use of ICT in schools and students' CIL in international comparison. *Large Scale Assess. Educ.* **2017**, *5*. [CrossRef]

12. Acevedo-Borrega, J.; Valverde-Berrocoso, J.; Garrido-Arroyo, M.d.C. Computational Thinking and Educational Technology: A Scoping Review of the Literature. *Educ. Sci.* **2022**, *12*, 39. [CrossRef]

13. Vázquez-Cano, E.; Urrutia, M.L.; Parra-González, M.E.; Meneses, E.L. Analysis of interpersonal competences in the use of ICT in the Spanish university context. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 476. [CrossRef]

14. Erss, M.; Lauristin, M.; Loogma, K.; Sarv, E.-S.; Sirp, L. Teine Koroonakevad Õpilaste, Õpetajate ja Lastevanemate Vaates. 2021. Available online: https://haridusfoorum.ee/ (accessed on 1 October 2021).

15. Kutsar, D.; Kurvet-Käosaar, L. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Families: Young People's Experiences in Estonia. *Front. Sociol.* **2021**, *6*, 732984. [CrossRef]

16. Talaee, E.; Noroozi, O. Re-conceptualization of 'digital divide' among primary school children in an era of saturated access to technology. *Int. Electron. J. Elem. Educ.* **2019**, *12*, 27–35. [CrossRef]

17. Tammets, K.; Ley, T.; Eisenschmidt, E.; Soodla, P.; Sillat, P.J.; Kollom, K.; Väljataga, T.; Loogma, K.; Sirk, M. Eriolukorrast Tingitud Distantsõppe Kogemused ja Mõju Eesti Üldharidussüsteemile Vahearuanne. 2021. Available online: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/vaheraport_do_tlu_final_28.10.2021.pdf (accessed on 5 March 2022).

18. Abend, G. The Meaning of 'Theory'. *Sociol. Theory* **2008**, *26*, 173–199. [CrossRef]

19. Luik, P.; Lepp, M. Local and external stakeholders affecting educational change during the coronavirus pandemic: A study of facebook messages in Estonia. *Educ. Sci.* **2021**, *11*, 113. [CrossRef]

20. Fairclough, N. Critical Discourse Analysis As A Method in Social Scientific Research. In *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*; SAGE Publications, Ltd.: Newbury Park, CA, USA, 2001. [CrossRef]

21. Fairclough, N. Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: The universities. *Discourse Soc.* **1993**, *4*, 133–168. [CrossRef]

22. Saykılı, A. Distance education: Definitions, generations, key concepts and future directions. *Int. J. Contemp. Educ. Res.* **2018**, *5*, 2–17. Available online: www.ijcer.net (accessed on 5 March 2022).

23. Simonson, M.R.; Smaldino, S.E.; Zvacek, S. *Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Foundations of Distance Education*; Information Age Publishing: Charlotte, NC, USA, 2015.

24. Gunawardena, C.N.; McIsaac, M.S. *Distance Education*; Taylor and Francis: New York, NY, USA, 2003.

25. Moore, M. Learner Autonomy: The Second Dimension of Independent Learning. *Convergence* **1976**, *5*, 76.

26. Holmberg, B. Aspects of Distance Education. *Comp. Educ.* **1980**, *16*, 107–119. [CrossRef]

27. Keegan, D. *Distance Education*, 3rd ed.; Routledge: London, UK, 1996.

28. Garrison, D.R.; Anderson, T.; Archer, W. Critical Inquiry in a Text-Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education. *Internet High. Educ.* **1999**, *2*, 87–105. [CrossRef]

29. Castellanos-Reyes, D. 20 Years of the Community of Inquiry Framework. *TechTrends* **2020**, *64*, 557–560. [CrossRef]

30. Harno. Digipädevuse Sõnastik. Available online: https://digipadevus.ee/sonastik/#digioppe-terminid (accessed on 27 July 2022).

31. Seabra, F.; Abelha, M.; Teixeira, A.; Aires, L. Learning in troubled times: Parents' perspectives on emergency remote teaching and learning. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 301. [CrossRef]

32. Barbour, M.K.; Labonte, R.; Hodges, C.B.; Moore, S. *Understanding Pandemic Pedagogy: Differences between Emergency Remote, Remote, and Online Teaching*; School Educational Technology Planning in Georgia View project Examination of the Field of K-12 Distance, Online, and Blended Learning View project; Canadian eLearning Network: Halfmoon Bay, BC, Canada, 2020. [CrossRef]

33. Garrison, R. Theoretical Challenges for Distance Education in the 21st Century: A Shift from Structural to Trans-actional Issues. *Int. Rev. Res. Open Distrib. Learn.* **2000**, *1*, 1–17. [CrossRef]

34. Ukwoma, S.C.; Ngulube, P. Trends and patterns of theory use in open and distance education research journals 2009–2018. *Open Learn.* **2021**, 1–15. [CrossRef]

35. Moore, M. Distance Education Theory. *Newsl. Distance Educ. Online Symp.* **1991**, *1*, 1–8. Available online: https://www.nooa.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/deosnews1_25.pdf (accessed on 21 August 2022).

36. McBrien, J.L.; Jones, P.; Cheng, R. Virtual Spaces: Employing a Synchronous Online Classroom to Facilitate Student Engagement in Online Learning. *Int. Rev. Res. Open Distance Learn.* **2009**, *10*, 1–17. [CrossRef]

37. Moore, M.G. The theory of transactional distance. In *Handbook of Distance Education: Fourth Edition*; Taylor and Francis: New York, NY, USA, 2018; pp. 32–46. [CrossRef]

38. Falloon, G. Making the Connection: Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance and Its Relevance to the Use of a Virtual Classroom in Postgraduate Online Making the Connection: Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance and Its Relevance to the Use of a Virtual Classroom in Postgraduate Online Teacher Education. *J. Res. Technol. Educ.* **2011**, *43*, 187–209.

39. Keegan, D. *Distance Training: Taking Stock at a Time of Change*; Routledge: London, UK, 2000.

40. Moore, M.G. *Theory of Transactional Distance*; Routledge: London, UK, 1997.

41. Mullet, D.R. A General Critical Discourse Analysis Framework for Educational Research. *J. Adv. Acad.* **2018**, *29*, 116–142. [CrossRef]

42. Jorgensen, M.; Phillips, L.J. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*; SAGE Publications, Inc.: Newbury Park, CA, USA, 2002.

43. Machin, D.; Mayr, A. *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction*; SAGE: Newbury Park, CA, USA, 2012.

44. Foucault, M. The Subject and Power. 1982. Available online: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197 (accessed on 18 December 2022).

45. Fairclough, N. *Language and Power*; Routledge: London, UK, 1989.

46. Apple, M.W. Comparing neo-liberal projects and inequality in education. *Comp. Educ.* **2001**, *37*, 409–423. [CrossRef]
47. Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Continuum International Publishing Group: New York, NY, USA, 2000.
48. Adams, W.C. Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews. In *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, 4th ed.; Wiley Blackwell: Hoboken, NJ, USA, 2015; pp. 492–505. [CrossRef]
49. Flick, U. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*; SAGE Publications, Inc.: Newbury Park, CA, USA, 2014. [CrossRef]
50. Mayring, P. Qualitative Content Analysis. 2000. Available online: http://www.zuma-mannheim.de/research/en/methods/textanalysis/ (accessed on 6 February 2022).
51. Kuh, G.D. The national survey of student engagement: Conceptual and empirical foundations. *New Dir. Inst. Res.* **2009**, *2009*, 5–20. [CrossRef]
52. Kumpas-Lenk, K. Implementation of Outcome-Based Education in Estonian Higher Education: The Design of Learning Outcomes Matters. Ph.D. Thesis, Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia, 2019. Volume 124.
53. Carvalho, L.; Yeoman, P. Framing learning entanglement in innovative learning spaces: Connecting theory, design and practice. *Br. Educ. Res. J.* **2018**, *44*, 1120–1137. [CrossRef]
54. Jessop, T.; Gubby, L.; Smith, A. Space frontiers for new pedagogies: A tale of constraints and possibilities. *Stud. High. Educ.* **2012**, *37*, 189–202. [CrossRef]