

## **Attitudes of Music Teachers towards organizing Distance Learning in the Context of Lifelong Education**

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### **Abstract**

At the time of the Covid-19 virus pandemic, all teaching, including music, underwent sudden and unexpected changes. The focus on technology and its use have emerged as a major challenge for educators. Teacher competencies have always been crucial in educational work, but they have been particularly pronounced during distance learning. Distance learning is characterized by physical distance and complete digitalization of the teaching process. This paper is aimed at determining the attitudes of teachers of Music Culture and Music Arts regarding the conduct of distance learning and their self-assessment of their own knowledge and skills for its realization. Data was collected through an online survey during the 2021/22 school year. 83 teachers of Music Culture and Music Arts were included in the research. The results showed that teachers believe that they receive satisfactory support from the school in the implementation of distance learning, that they have access to tools for organizing such classes, and that they are satisfied with their quality and role. At the same time, only a quarter of teachers believe that there are a sufficient number of courses and workshops in this area organized by the school, and a third also think about courses in the environment in which they live. Also, the respondents are of the opinion that they have competencies for conducting distance learning, but they believe that they did not acquire these competencies during their academic studies. Furthermore, most teachers believe that students do not acquire the same knowledge as in the classroom, and that grades are not a true reflection of their knowledge, so they grade them milder than usual. Finally, the results showed that none of the sociodemographic variables (gender, years of service, and school location) were statistically significantly related to their attitudes and assessments of their own competence ( $p > 0.05$ ). The results of this research indicate the need for lifelong learning so that teachers can respond to the challenges of contemporary pedagogical reality.

*Keywords:* teachers of Music Culture and Music Arts, distance learning, lifelong learning

## **Introduction**

Teacher competencies have always been crucial in educational work. During their academic studies, teachers should acquire competencies in the fields of subject matter and pedagogy, competencies needed to guide and support students, to understand the social and cultural significance of education, to work with information, technology, and knowledge, and to work with people – students, associates, and others. partners in education, for work in society and with society, at the local, regional, national, European and wider global level (Lončarić Pejić & Papak, 2009). Given the rapid development of all aspects of modern society, the competencies of 21st century teachers that are of particular importance are digital literacy, creativity and imagination, cooperation and communication, civic awareness, critical thinking and problem solving, and training students to manage their own learning. In modern times, it is important that the teacher has first and foremost digital literacy, which proved to be crucial during 2020, 2021, and 2022 distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is digital competence that has taken on a whole new importance for the normal functioning of the teaching process (MZO, 2019a). In 2017, the joint research center of the European Commission designed the Digital Competence Framework for Educators – DigCompEdu<sup>56</sup>. In this framework, the competencies that the teacher should possess in the fields of ICT and learning are proposed. The European framework of DigCompEdu consists of six areas, and they are: 1) professional engagement: the application of technology to support one's own profession; 2) digital resources: handling and use of digital content for learning and teaching; 3) digital learning and teaching: didactic use of technology; 4) evaluation and assessment: use of technology for the field of evaluation and assessment; 5) support for students: help for weaker students; 6) teaching digital competencies: guiding students in the acquisition of digital knowledge and skills. DigCompEdu helps guide the implementation of regional and national training tools and programs targeting teachers at all levels, from early childhood to higher and adult education, including general and vocational education, special needs education, and the non-formal learning context (Redecker, 2017).

## **Distance learning**

Distance learning is not new and is described as a special type of teaching process in which students and teachers are spatially and/or temporally distant from each other (Miražić-Nemet & Surdučki, 2020). Distance learning has existed for many years and has historically

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<sup>56</sup> Digital Competence Framework for Educators (DigCompEdu). [https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcompedu\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcompedu_en)

been used to educate people who are prevented from actively and physically attending classes. Before the technological revolution, distance learning took place by mail, while with the advent of the first technologies, the first media appeared that enabled new technological solutions in a very short time. Thus, distance learning in its beginnings of technology took place through radio and television programs. Today, distance learning takes place in the virtual world and there are many tools and aids for the purpose of education (Simonson & Berg, 2016), i.e., formal and non-formal learning. Distance learning is characterized by the use of educational media for the purpose of presenting educational content and communication; ensuring two-way communication between teachers and students; and placing emphasis on controlling the acquisition of teaching content via the Internet (Budić & Hak, 2014). Čubrić (2021) discusses the benefits and drawbacks of distance learning, emphasizing the development of personal skills through continuous learning, the safety of introverted students, the availability of materials and lectures on the Internet, and the ability to watch them again and develop the ability to process data independently. In addition to the positive characteristics according to Čubrić (2021), distance learning also has negative characteristics such as lack of physical contact that affects younger students, reduced classical educational task of teachers, more difficult individual commitment to students, poor student motivation caused by poor computer literacy and mandatory technology. He also points out that it is almost impossible to conduct distance learning in lower grades. Švelec (2020) states that in distance learning the lesson should have a different organization than the usual one present in a traditional classroom and that the reverse classroom model is more appropriate for this way of working, requiring activities of both students and teachers before, during and after class. Before the lesson, the student gets acquainted with the topic and applies reading and writing techniques for critical thinking, followed by a self-assessment of additional needs for the implementation of activities.

Distance learning around the world began to be actively applied in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which, with its rapid spread, marked the implementation of physical education as risky. Despite these shortcomings, distance learning has enabled the organization of primary, secondary, and higher education. Distance learning in Croatia began on March 16, 2020. The coordination process led by the Ministry of Science and Education involved the Croatian Academic and Research Network (CARNET), the University Computing Center, the Agency for Education, the Agency for Vocational and Adult Education, and the Agency for Mobility and EU Programs. The Ministry of Science and Education has published an Action Plan for the Implementation of Distance Learning (MZO, 2020), i.e., a document with a list of the most important steps and procedures carried out during distance learning in schools and

universities. The action plan lists the technical solutions available through the AAI@Edu.Hr platform recommended to schools for distance learning, which are Moodle, Teams, Yammer, Google Classroom, and Edmodo. On the Distance Teaching<sup>57</sup> subpage, CARNET published information, advice, recommendations, and instructions on the selection and use of technological solutions for distance learning and published the document Online systems for the organization and conduct of distance learning (CARNET, 2020), which explains the most important features, advantages, and disadvantages of recommended tools such as Google Classroom (and related Google Meet tool), MS Teams, Yammer, CARNET Loomen, and Zoom. It is recommended that each school choose the platform on which it will work and that all teachers or students work on it (Politiscope, 2021). The framework annual implementation subject curricula and the accompanying video lectures for primary and secondary education were continuously published on the School for Life<sup>58</sup> website, and then on the website of the Ministry of Science and Education (video lectures<sup>59</sup>; implementation curricula<sup>60</sup>). During the COVID-19 pandemic, television classes were organized for lower primary school students in the Republic of Croatia, while distance learning classes were organized for upper primary and secondary school students and university students through various platforms for such classes. Miražić-Nemet and Surdučki (2020) believe that distance learning is a great challenge for all participants in the educational process – teachers, students and their parents. The new roles in which teachers, students, and their parents find themselves, with additional aggravating circumstances such as isolation, limited movement, stress, and altered family dynamics, has raised the question of how to ensure adequate distance learning in current conditions, given the insufficient readiness of the education system for this type of teaching.

### ***Distance music teaching***

Music teaching in the Republic of Croatia was also organized as distance learning, i.e., teaching music culture in primary schools, teaching music art in grammar schools, teaching in music schools, and teaching music at higher education institutions. Due to its specificity, music teaching was a challenge in the transition to distance learning due to the impossibility of physical presence and contact between students and teachers (Ambruš-Kiš, 2020). The specificity of music teaching is reflected in the fact that in music teaching, most musical

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<sup>57</sup> CARNET – Distance Teaching (Nastava na daljinu). <https://www.carnet.hr/usluga/udaljenoucenje/>

<sup>58</sup> School for Life (Škola za život). <https://skolazazivot.hr/e-ucenje/>

<sup>59</sup> Video lectures (Videolekcije). <https://mzo.gov.hr/vijesti/nastava-na-daljinu-raspored-3629/3629>

<sup>60</sup> Framework annual performance curricula (Okvirni godišnji izvedbeni kurikulumi).

<https://mzo.gov.hr/rezultati-pretrazivanja/49?pojam=Okvirni+godisnji+izvedbeni+kurikulumi+za+nastavnu+godinu>

knowledge and skills are acquired by students through teachers because their adoption requires constant feedback. The teacher is, therefore, the only person who can supervise the process of multiple repetitions as a necessary condition for acquiring a skill, often based on a trial-and-error mechanism (Rojko, 2012). This statement refers primarily to the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to the contents of solfeggio, i.e., musical literacy, but also to learning to sing songs, play instruments and engage in musical creativity. In the teaching of Music Culture and Music Arts, a mitigating circumstance related to distance learning is that in general education schools, according to the Curriculum of Music Culture for Primary Schools and Music Art for Gymnasiums (MZO, 2019b), listening to and getting to know music is the predominant domain of music teaching. Therefore, teachers in general education schools mainly focused online classes on organizing active listening to music, because other activities such as singing, playing, and creativity were difficult or almost impossible to implement. Jurkić Sviben and Jambrošić (2021) point out that with the declaration of the pandemic in March 2020, almost all singing activities were suspended for a long time in music lessons, as well as singing activities in ensembles and choirs, or were organized much less often and in very limited conditions and circumstances. If they were organized, video communication platforms did not provide quality singing due to the problem of sound synchronization, which prevented simultaneous group singing (Grushka et al., 2021), but also any other group music (Hash, 2021). Wallace et al. (2020) believe that it should be possible to engage in music despite the global pandemic because singing and playing are widespread human activities and are lacking in those who engage in them. The results of the research (Moscardini & Rae, 2020) show that about two thirds of teachers are considered insufficiently competent to teach music at a distance or are estimated to be averagely competent (Kibici & Sarikaya, 2021). Rucsanda, Belibou and Cazan (2021) believe that more educational initiatives are needed to promote distance teaching methods in distance music teaching because research results (Parkes et al, 2021) showed that organizing distance music teaching for two thirds of teachers caused stress. Kaleli (2020) believes that future music teachers should acquire competencies for working with software and computer programs during their studies. Hash (2021) believes that the success of distance music teaching in the future will depend on how much music educators develop curricula, create work materials, build infrastructure, and prepare students for online and offline teaching. He emphasizes the importance of lifelong learning for music teachers in the areas of technology, teaching, assessment and motivation of students, and helping students with disabilities. These findings were the impetus for the research that we will present in this paper, which was aimed

at determining the attitudes of teachers of Music Culture and Music Arts in relation to the teaching of music at a distance.

## Methodology

### Aim and research hypotheses

The aim of the research was to determine the attitudes of teachers of Music Culture and Music Arts towards distance learning and their self-assessment of their own knowledge and skills for its realization. The research was based on the following hypotheses:

H1: Teachers are of the opinion that they have sufficient support from the school and the local community to organize distance music lessons.

H2: Teachers are not considered competent enough to teach music at a distance.

H3: Teachers are of the opinion that in distance music teaching, the evaluation of students' knowledge and students' acquisition of their knowledge is the same as in classroom teaching.

H4: Teachers positively assess the quality and role of the tools they use to teach music at a distance.

H5: There is a statistically significant difference in teachers' attitudes about distance music teaching with regard to sociodemographic variables (gender, years of service, school location).

The hypotheses are based on assumptions derived from the results of other research (Kaleli, 2020; Kibici & Sarikaya, 2021; Moscardini & Rae, 2020; Parkes et al., 2021; Rucsanda, Belibou & Cazan, 2021).

### Sample and data collection

The research took place during the school year 2021-2022 and included 83 teachers of Music Culture and Music Arts from 16 Croatian counties. Data was collected through an online survey. The research was funded by the authors of the paper. The sample of respondents is visible in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Sample description (N = 83)*

Sex	Male	17 (20,5%)
	Female	66 (79,5%)
	In total	83 (100%)
Years of service	0-5	19 (22,9%)
	6-10	11 (13,3%)
	11-20	27 (32,5%)
	21 and more	26 (31,3%)
	In total	83 (100%)
School location	City	51 (61,4%)

Village	17 (20,5%)
Combined	15 (18.1%)
In total	83 (100%)

As can be seen from Table 1, 83 teachers participated in the study, one-fifth of whom were male. Considering the length of service, most teachers have more than 10 years of experience (almost two thirds of them). Also, almost two-thirds of respondents work in schools located in urban areas.

### **Instrument and statistical procedure**

The anonymous online questionnaire that the teachers filled out consisted of questions and statements that sought to find out their socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, school location). At the same time, we wanted to find out what the teachers' attitudes were about teaching music at a distance. The survey questionnaire contained a total of 25 items.

Teachers' attitudes about the support they receive from the school and the local community were examined with an instrument consisting of five particles, three of which were dichotomous (answers offered were yes / no) and two in the form of the Likert scale (example: On a scale of 1 to 5 indicate the extent to which you agree with the statement that the school where you work by organizing courses / workshops contributes to the quality organization of distance learning where 1 means that you do not agree with the statement, 2 that you do not agree, 3 that you have no opinion, 4 that agree, and 5 to fully agree with the above statement). Self-assessment of competencies for distance learning was tested with an instrument consisting of three particles in the form of the Likert scale. Furthermore, the opinion of teachers on the evaluation of student knowledge and the acquisition of student knowledge was examined by an instrument that also consisted of three particles in the form of the Likert scale. Teachers' attitudes about distance learning tools were examined with an instrument containing seven particles of different types (Likert scale, single choice questions, multiple choice questions, open type questions). To test the H5 hypothesis, a t-test was used to determine possible statistically significant differences in teachers' attitudes about distance learning music with respect to sociodemographic variables, where the attitudes of the respondents were treated as a dependent variable. Quantitative data were processed by the computer program SPSS.

### **Results and discussion**

#### ***Assess the support of the school and the local community in teaching music at a distance***

At the beginning of the questionnaire, teachers wanted to find out how they assessed the support of the school and the local community in teaching music at a distance (Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 2***Teachers' opinion on school support*

Question / answers	yes	not	total
Do you think that the school provides you with sufficient support in the organization of distance learning?	72 (86,7%)	11 (13,3%)	83 (100%)
Do you have the tools you need to conduct distance learning?	80 (96,4)	3 (3,6%)	83 (100%)
Is the internet connection good enough for the uninterrupted realization of distance learning?	65 (78,3%)	18 (21,7%)	83 (100%)

As can be seen in Table 2, every eighth respondent believes that the school does not have enough support for the implementation of distance learning music, and only every thirtieth stated that distance learning tools are not available. More than three-quarters of teachers believe that the Internet connection for teaching is satisfactory.

**Table 3***Teachers' opinion on courses*

Claim / answers	I don't agree at all	I disagree	I have no opinion	I agree	I totally agree
The school where I work by organizing courses / workshops contributes to the quality organization of distance learning	17 (20,5%)	19 (22,9%)	25 (30,1%)	11 (13,3%)	11 (13,3%)
In the environment in which I live, there are a sufficient number of courses/workshops to improve the use of digital tools needed for distance learning	17 (20,5%)	13 (15,7%)	23 (27,7%)	16 (19,3%)	14 (16,9%)

From Table 3, it can be seen that only a quarter of teachers believe that there are a sufficient number of courses and workshops in this area organized by the school, and a third also think about courses in the environment in which they live. On the contrary, Parkes et al. (2021) report that music teachers are generally satisfied with the number and quality of courses and workshops offered. Given the results obtained, and in order to test the H1 hypothesis, which read Teachers are of the opinion that they have sufficient support from the school and the local community to organize distance music lessons, the hypothesis was partially accepted. Namely, teachers are satisfied with the support of the school and the conditions for teaching music at a distance, but believe that the school and the local community do not organize enough courses and workshops to develop their digital pedagogical competencies in lifelong learning.



**Self-assessment of competencies for distance learning**

Furthermore, teachers were asked whether they were assessed as competent enough to conduct distance learning (Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Self-assessment of competencies*

Claim / answers	I don't agree at all	I disagree	I have no opinion	I agree	I totally agree
I am competent to organize and implement distance learning	-	3 (3,6%)	11 (13,3%)	28 (33,7%)	41 (49,4%)
During the study, I acquired sufficient competencies for the implementation of distance learning	51 (61,4%)	12 (14,5%)	10 (12%)	6 (7,2%)	4 (4,8%)
Independent work and learning help me in the design and implementation of distance learning	-	-	2 (2,4%)	22 (26,5%)	59 (71,1%)

The data from Table 4 indicates that only every thirtieth respondent is assessed as competent enough to teach music at a distance. The results of other research (Moscardini & Rae, 2020) show that as many as 62% of music teachers believe that they are not competent enough to teach music at a distance, and Kibici and Sarıkaya (2021) state that music teachers in upper primary and secondary schools are assessed as competent for distance learning. However, only one in every eight respondents in our survey believes they have acquired the necessary skills to teach such classes during their academic studies. Future music teachers should attend courses during their studies to develop the necessary competencies for working with computer programs and software (Kaleli, 2020) and be of the opinion that individual work and learning contribute to the better realization of distance learning. Therefore, hypothesis H2 Teachers are not considered competent enough to teach music at a distance, is not accepted.

**Teachers 'attitudes about the evaluation and acquisition of students' knowledge**

Teachers were also asked to find out what they thought about the evaluation of students' knowledge and the students' acquisition of knowledge during distance learning music (Table 5).

**Table 5***Attitudes about the evaluation and acquisition of knowledge*

Claim / answers	I don't agree at all	I disagree	I have no opinion	I agree	I totally agree
When conducting distance learning, students acquire the same knowledge that they would acquire in regular classes	21 (25,3%)	26 (31,3%)	26 (31,3%)	8 (9,6%)	2 (2,4%)
Student grades that are the result of distance learning are a reflection of students' actual knowledge	22 (26,5%)	27 (32,5%)	23 (27,7%)	9 (10,8%)	2 (2,4%)
When grading students, I am milder than usual	1 (1,2%)	6 (7,2%)	19 (22,9%)	32 (38,6%)	25 (30,1%)

As can be seen from Table 5, only every ninth teacher considers that students acquire the same knowledge during distance learning as in classroom teaching. At the same time, more than half of the teachers are of the opinion that the grades resulting from distance learning do not reflect the actual knowledge of students. Moscardini and Rae (2020) point out that students are just as active and acquire the same knowledge as in classroom teaching, and the only disruptive factor is technical prerequisites. More than two-thirds of respondents say they rate students more leniently during distance learning music. Given the above results, hypothesis H3 Teachers are of the opinion that in distance music teaching the evaluation of students' knowledge and the student acquisition of knowledge is the same as in classroom teaching, which is not accepted.

***Teachers' opinions on distance learning tools***

Furthermore, the teachers wanted to know how they assess the quality and role of the tools they use to conduct distance learning. For this purpose, they were asked seven different questions or claims. The first statement was: distance learning tools contribute to the quality of music teaching. 55 (66.2%) respondents fully agreed with this statement. Twenty-one (25.3%) respondents did not have an opinion, while only two respondents (2.4%) disagreed with this statement. To the next question, which was which tool for distance learning did you prefer? Most respondents, 51 (61.4%), prefer MS Teams, then 14 (16.9%) teachers prefer video conferencing tools such as Zoom and Google Meet, and only a few teachers use Yammer, Google Classroom, Skype, and digital textbooks, while no respondent marked Loomen. To the question, what tools do you use for distance learning? Respondents were able to choose multiple answers. Most teachers, 61 of them (73.5%), voted for MS Teams, followed by 48 (57.8%) for

digital textbooks, and a total of 35 (42.2%) for Zoom and Google Meet. Among other things, some teachers cited Wizer and Kahoot. Similar tools are cited by respondents from another study (Moscardini & Rae, 2020): Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Suite, Facetime, and Skype. The next question was: "Are you satisfied with the tools you use to conduct distance learning?" Almost all respondents, 79 of them (95.2%), expressed satisfaction with the tools available to them. One respondent stated that he felt uncomfortable and insecure when using them, and another stated that the tools were not adapted to the classroom. The next question in the questionnaire wanted to find out the reason why teachers choose a particular tool. The answers offered were: at the school level, the tool we use was selected; personally, I decided on a certain tool because I think it is better than others; and the rest. A total of 70 (84.3%) teachers stated that they use a certain tool because it was decided at the school level, while 13 (15.7%) choose the tools themselves. The results of some other research are similar (Parkes et al., 2021). Teachers then had to answer the question, "Do you think that without the tools intended for distance learning, the realization of distance learning would not be possible?" The vast majority of teachers, 82 of them (98.8%), said yes. The last question in the questionnaire was: "Whose materials do you use in the implementation of distance learning?" Teachers could, if they combined different materials, circle more answers. Most teachers (80, or 96.4%) cited their own materials, which is to be commended. Namely, during the pandemic, music teachers show their creativity by finding different ways to reach out to their students and how to help them (Thornton, 2020). The materials of publishing houses were cited by 58 of them (69.9%), the video lectures of the ministry by 36 (43.4%), and the materials of colleagues by a total of 27 (32.5%). The above results show that the vast majority of teachers are satisfied with the tools for teaching music at a distance, that they contribute to the quality of teaching, and that distance learning without these tools would not be possible. Therefore, hypothesis H4, which was stated by teachers and positively assesses the quality and role of the tools they use to teach music at a distance, is accepted.

### ***Sociodemographic variables and teacher attitudes***

In order to test hypothesis H5, which reads: There is a statistically significant difference in teachers' attitudes about distance music teaching with regard to sociodemographic variables (gender, years of service, school location), the obtained results were compared. The T-test for independent samples examined possible statistically significant differences in teachers' attitudes towards distance music teaching with respect to sociodemographic variables. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference in teachers' attitudes towards distance music teaching with respect to sociodemographic variables ( $p > 0.05$ ). Kibici and

Sarıkaya (2021) report differently, pointing out that male teachers and teachers with less work experience are assessed as more competent to teach music at a distance. Therefore, Hypothesis H5 There is a statistically significant difference in teachers' attitudes about distance music teaching with regard to sociodemographic variables (gender, years of service, school location) is not accepted.

Finally, one question was to find out whether teachers think that teaching music at a distance requires additional effort and stress for them. Two-thirds of respondents responded positively, which is in line with the results of other research (Parkes et al., 2021).

## **Conclusion**

The results of this research showed that music teachers believe that they receive satisfactory support from the school in the implementation of distance learning in music and that they have access to tools for organizing such classes and are satisfied with the quality and choice of tools. At the same time, only a quarter of teachers believe that there are a sufficient number of courses and workshops in this area organized by the school, and a third also think about courses in the environment in which they live. It is therefore up to education and local authorities to pay more attention to the current needs of teachers in order to respond effectively to today's challenges through lifelong learning. Also, music teachers are of the opinion that they have the competencies for teaching music at a distance, but they believe that they did not acquire these competencies during their studies. For this reason, academies that educate future teachers should also prepare students for various situations, such as the current pandemic, in order to successfully overcome the obstacles that may arise in the realization of music teaching. At the same time, most teachers believe that students do not acquire the same knowledge as in the classroom, and that grades are not a true reflection of their knowledge, so they grade them more gently than usual. This result is, in a way, in contrast to the very high self-assessment of teachers' competencies for teaching music at a distance, because it is to be expected that a competent teacher conducts effective teaching. The main limitation of this study follows from this conclusion. Namely, in order to get a more objective picture of the success of distance music teaching in primary schools and gymnasiums, as well as a more complete insight into the research issues, future research should include students and possibly parents of students.

The results of the research indicate the need for lifelong learning so that music teachers can respond to the challenges of contemporary pedagogical reality. Namely, according to Jurčić (2012), the job of a teacher accompanies lifelong learning through a formal and informal way. It is important because it nurtures and improves the competencies that are needed when

performing teaching processes. Science, theory and innovation are a completely changeable part of everyday life, and in every aspect, it is necessary to maintain the pace of learning so that new, modern knowledge can be transferred and connected with old teachings (Jurčić, 2012). Distance learning imposed due to the global state of health was the only way to continue the educational process in times of crisis. Thanks to the lifelong education of teachers in the context of digitalization and the many opportunities brought by the virtual world, but also the various reactions of publishers who have greatly facilitated this process by digitizing textbooks, distance music teaching has mostly been successfully mastered.

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