**Challenges Related to Teachers’ Work**

**in Pandemic Reality**

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**Abstract**

This article presents some benefits as well as drawbacks related to teachers’ work in pandemic circumstances. Significant difficulties connected with online teaching, which influenced the whole educational process, are enumerated. Both advantages and disadvantages related to teaching in the pandemic reality are supported with some findings based on the research conducted by the author. What is more, some attention is devoted to the description of problems experienced by the students during online learning. In the next part the author concentrates on presenting online sources which might be helpful for teachers to encourage their learners to work more efficiently. Virtual tools and online platforms suitable to develop receptive and productive skills are introduced to help teachers find necessary materials or create their own ones.

**Key words:** pandemic, online teaching, benefits, drawbacks, teacher, student, online platforms

**Introduction**

The beginning of pandemic empirical consequences became deeply experienced from the 10th of March 2020 when Polish government announced national lock down and the beginning of online work in many professions. Among these occupations were teachers who had to assail with new reality, and react immediately to new circumstances, sine?? the students and their parents expected the continuation of didactic processes. The initial phase was difficult for both sides because teachers had to find possibly the best way to communicate with learners and students had to show some maturity and eagerness to attend new kind of lessons. Because the 2019/2020 school year was coming to an end there was a serious conviction that after the holidays everyone would surely forget about pandemic and life will come back to normal. As a result, many teachers decided to survive, till the end of June, and a lot of educators limited themselves to sending materials to students via an email box, electronic register or communicate with the use of Messenger or WhatsApp if necessary. During the first wave of COVID -19, educational institutions were not technically prepared for the beginning of online teaching, that is why only few teachers experimented with platforms such as Skype to contact their learners. Unfortunately, not long after the beginning of a new school year, in October, the situation with COVID-19 repeated and pandemic became more serious than ever before. Students and teachers were forced to stay at home and conduct classes in an online mode in synchronic, to the schedule, time. They were expected to provide themselves with equipment, fast connection to the Internet and all technological gadgets necessary to organise the classes. What is more, they had to be trained in the field of using various platforms and, for example, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet, which their institution chose as a leading one to communicate and work on. The online education continued till May and then some hybrid solutions were introduced for classes 4th -8th of primary school as well as secondary schools and finally in June all teenagers came back to traditional learning at school. The past year was challenging for teachers, parents and students, this time brought some changes in various aspects of education and resulted in many positive as well as negative conclusions.

**1 Benefits related to teacher’s work in the pandemic circumstances**

When teachers faced the sink or swim moment during the second wave of COVID-19, in October 2020, they had to manage the situation for the sake and well-being of their students. It was a difficult time devoted to struggling with planning lessons on various platforms, learning how to operate technological devices, scrambling to figure out virtual instruction and encouraging the learners to stay focused without having a direct impact on students’ approach.

Although, it was the nerve-racking time full of uncertainty it must be emphasised that these experiences also brought some positive consequences for the teachers themselves and for the education. Among the most significant advantages one can find the development of technological awareness and the improvement of skills in this area. Teachers, especially those with long professional experience, often show a reluctant approach to new technologies. They got accustomed to certain methods and teaching techniques, which have been used for years and even the change of the coursebook, after some time, evokes hesitation and reluctance. They like things to stay as they are without any drastic transformations. Unfortunately, pandemic appeared and forced teachers to come out of their sphere of comfort and start searching for new solutions in creating lessons. Teachers, those who presented technophobic and technophilic attitude to technology, began cooperating with each other, sharing knowledge, and teaching their colleagues in the reciprocal process of exchanging information. Teachers became more friendly to each other as they all found themselves in a difficult situation. New reality united this professional group and powered teachers to improve skills in operating various programs of MS Office, create a professional email account and be able to apply its mail merge, various filters, or folders to save time. Use platforms, like Google Meet or Microsoft Teams, to plan lessons, create virtual classes and conduct online meetings. Learn how to shoot meetings, edit documents, upload various content, create database to store students’ works, search for worksheets and find quality webpages. What is more, teachers had to get familiar with social media like Facebook, Twitter, Messenger, WhatsApp, and the like, to contact students, inform them about certain expectations or collect various assignments. Furthermore, they had to learn, how to evaluate students’ progress by using online tools and creating tests or exams on virtual platforms such as https://forms.office.com, <https://testportal.pl>, https://www.quizme.pl <https://www.eduelo.pl>. All this effort was directed to prevent students from cheating and copying answers from other school mates or the Internet as well as to emphasise the most important value that scholars should basically learn for their own satisfaction and future success.

 Another aspect concerning positive changes in relation between the teacher and the students should have been observed in the field of educators’ expectations towards the learners. According to the psychologist dr Beata Rajba, from the University of lower Silesia in Poland, it is crucial to select and lower various expectations during the pandemic time to feel deeper satisfaction of who we are.[[1]](#footnote-1) It can be disputed whether limiting requirements, truncating material, constraining the number of assignments and preselecting exercises will have good influence on students knowledge, but when teachers concentrate on analysing the core curriculum and its content they often make similar conclusions that, generally speaking, teaching programmes in Polish educational system, are overloaded with theoretical issues which mainly require the learner to study by heart, they rarely encourage young people to use practical skills or develop more universal abilities. As a result of pandemic, teachers were forced to verify their teaching methods, improve certain techniques, select material, and devote time to the most valuable issues since the pace of distant learning was slower than the one at school, during regular meetings in the classroom. Many teachers struggled with conducting all stages of the lesson and doing all the exercises included in the lesson unit. They often finished the classes with the feeling of failure because the initial phase of introducing the subject and checking students understanding of it took longer time, in remote teaching, than in the traditional circumstances where the teacher had control over all the students in the classroom at one glance. Consequently, the next stages, of practice and production, were influenced by the pressure of time and teachers’ dissatisfaction with the plot of the classes. Online teaching bared some imperfections of not only the core curriculum but also the ways of passing knowledge to students. This experience led educators to be more thoughtful about what and how they teach young generations. What is more, this experience can permanently encourage teachers to forsake their past teaching habits accompanied with safe routine and search further for more contemporary solutions which put emphasis on gaining practical skills by the students and minimizing the theoretical input. Most teachers have already drawn correct conclusions which will probably lead to deeper reformation in the educational process because pandemic reality pushed educators to make the first step in the direction of using online platforms, various computer programs, applications, or different virtual tools and now they feel more self-confident in experimenting with new solutions.

The next advantage is connected with the slower pace of work that teachers could experience in some aspects. On the one hand, they spent hours in front of the computer, which could have been more mentally exhausting than traditional lessons at school, but on the other hand, these activities did not require the investment of significant amount of physical energy. The number of various contests and competitions, theatrical performances, school trips and public events were limited to minimum. Teachers were forced to concentrate on the most important Local Education Authority or ministerial contests because they had to pre-select their priorities and set realistic goals to achieve in the time of pandemic. They knew that only the most significant aims were possible to accomplish because they did not have the traditional face-to-face contact with the students, which complicated the process of preparation and cooperation substantially.

Teachers could also rest from the rat race, which they often speed up by themselves when they need to impress their employer, show off among colleagues or shine in the local environment. Because of not being physically present in the walls of the educational institution they could distance themselves from, typical in this profession, stressful situations which are mainly related to meeting parents or the headmaster. Face-to-face contacts became solemnly limited, traditional school life became dormant and as a result teachers could concentrate on teaching itself rather than on doing clerical and administrative work related to creating or improving piles of various school documents during the school year.

It can be generally assumed that working in the comfort of one’s own house should be treated as a privilege. There are certain benefits, which teachers notice and enumerate, when asked, in relation to distant teaching. They often mention saving time normally devoted to travelling to and from work as a significant benefit of the while-pandemic time. What is more, they appreciate the comfort of working at home in terms of possessed equipment, the speed of the Internet, general safety, and positive emotions they associate with this place. Furthermore, some educators admit that online teaching gave them the freedom of conducting the classes from various locations in and beyond the country. Because of this opportunity, in the latter part of pandemic and the time of softening limitations teachers could visit and spend some time with relatives whom they did not see for a long time or travel to various destinations regardless to the calendar limitations which clearly set winter or summer holidays.

Finally, the next benefit worth attention relates to teachers’ constant improvement of professional skills and knowledge. Due to lasting for more than two years pandemic circumstances many teacher training institutions had to prepare an offer containing postgraduate studies, various webinars, and online meetings in the virtual world. These professional courses were conducted via online platforms, streaming channels in synchronic time or they were recorded and then made available for the participants in more flexible and convenient time. All these solutions, possible to retrieve and access via the Internet, gave teachers unlimited possibilities of improving their skills without leaving their room or their hometown. Teachers could listen to the authorities, refine knowledge, and share experiences with colleagues from their local area, country or even the globe. Because of pandemic COVID-19 all kinds of boundaries, borders and limitations disappeared, in a way.

**1.1 The research findings**

As it can be assumed there are certain advantages which have unexpectedly appeared in a difficult time of pandemic COVID-19. Teachers clearly admit that some of them simplified their work to a significant degree and are worth continuing, when or if, epidemic comes to an end. The research was conducted on one hundred teachers from various primary and secondary schools in Poland. This group contains opinions of twenty-seven students from the University of Technology and Humanities in Radom, who attended the last year of teacher training specialization during their master’s degree studies. The researched group were all asked questions about the most substantial benefits they happen to notice when conducting the process of distant teaching as well as the most crucial drawbacks related to this situation. The first part of the questionnaire was devoted to possible advantages that teachers notice, and the results are as follows:

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| --- | --- |
| Question | Answer |
| 1. Do you notice any benefits related to online working? | Yes | 77% |
| No | 23% |
| 2. Did you improve your knowledge and technical skills during the pandemic? | Yes | 95% |
| No | 5% |
| 3. Did your professional relations with colleagues improved in the pandemic? | Yes | 88% |
| No | 12% |
| 4. Do you regard decreasing the pace of work with students positively? | Yes | 35% |
| No | 65% |
| 5. Do you feel that you had to produce and improve fewer school documents during the epidemic? | Yes | 50% |
| No | 50% |
| 6. Did you feel comfortable with conducting online lessons at home? | Yes | 59% |
| No | 41% |
| 7. Did you experience benefits related to distant working? | saving time devoted to travelling – 74% |
| saving money – 63% |
| feeling calmer – 58% |
| not being exposed to noise and turmoil during the breaks – 65% |
| 8. Do you enjoy participating in teacher training courses online? | Yes | 79% |
| No | 21% |

Table 1a. The results of the research, source: author

It was quite predictable that 95% of questioned teachers noticed their personal improvement in the technological area. They almost unanimously confirmed that they gained an insight into the diversity offered by the virtual world. They explored various platforms, apps and online tools prepared for making the teaching process interesting and challenging for the students. They selected necessary instruments and learnt how to operate them, they became more active on the Internet and could suit the needs of 3,0 generation more accurately. Regardless of varied age of the respondents, most teachers developed new skills and appreciated unlimited possibilities that the Internet has to offer.

Many of the questioned teachers, as much as 88%, reflected on the positive influence of pandemic on their mutual relationships with other colleagues. The significant increase in warming up reciprocal attitudes could have been observed among members of this professional group. During the research they declared their disposition to help the other person, willingness to cooperate in groups and readiness to invest personal engagement as well as effort to achieve collective goals.

As far as decreasing the pace of work is concerned, teachers did not judge this aspect positively. Many of them, 65%, regarded this area as a complete failure. On the one hand, teachers often feel overwhelmed by the number of various competitions, contests, and school events, which they prepare with the students during the school year, but on the other they understand that lack of them leads to lowering learners’ motivation to achieve success. The result of 65% unsatisfied educators proves that Polish teachers are very ambitious, they treat their profession seriously as a king of mission to conduct, they are determined to work with students and ready to accept appreciation for their effort. What is more, they treat material included in coursebooks with respect and they feel obligated to practise various issues in detail. They feel responsible for knowledge their students acquire and they want to inspire young people to expend horizons.

Another surprising outcome relates to the fact that the researched teachers did not confirm the decreasing amount of clerical work during the pandemic time. Only half of them noticed this advantage, which may lead to the conclusion that many teachers understood this question more generally. From the author’s point of view, there is a suspicion that teachers regarded paperwork as not only the part related to producing and improving school documents but also creating tests, checking homework, and preparing additional exercises to individualize the educational process.

The next question concerned the comfort of working at home and this privilege was regarded positively by 59% of respondents. This indicates that conducting lessons from home might be a challenge for as many as 41% of educators. It is related to the characteristics of this profession due to which a teacher is expected to turn on a webcam and stay focused on his students minute by minute. The teacher and his closest surrounding are carefully observed and judged. There is also a pressure that something unexpected may happen at home, for example, some other members of the family will need immediate help or start quarrelling, what generates a huge stress for the teacher. On the one hand, the teacher tries to behave professionally, on the other hand, home is where the family life takes place. Not like in other professions working as a teacher in a remote mode differs from other jobs and is more demanding. Although it can be summarized that most teachers have comfortable conditions to conduct online lessons in terms of accommodation or equipment, many of them believe that home is not the best place to perform their duties. What teachers appreciate in the pandemic circumstances is saving time devoted to travelling to and from work, 74% of respondents regarded this fact positively, saving money for the fuel and daily expenses gained 63% and being in distance from constant noises during the breaks is important for 65%. In the questionnaire, teachers answered that being able to attend various webinars, trainings and after graduation studies in the comfort of one’s own house is an advantage for 79% of those who took part in the research.

**2 Drawbacks related to the teacher’s work in the pandemic circumstances**

Difficult pandemic time brought some negative conclusions, which teachers drew from their everyday experiences. These assumptions were related to their personal well-being and the standard of cooperation with students and their parents. Unfortunately, the pandemic caused exposure to several stressful factors, which had an impact on teachers’ mental health. First, the beginning of the second wave of Covid-19, in October 2020, rushed the teachers to gain necessary knowledge of how to operate certain platforms to be able to plan the lessons. It was a rough time devoted to numerous training sessions, bombarding teachers with emails, short messages and announcements, fast flow of an enormous amount of new information which teachers had to select, check, re-practise and then use in the new reality. They were forced to learn new functions that the electronic registers had to offer, how to download and use necessary operating systems, search for supplementary materials on platforms such as You Tube to support lesson phases with short presentations, experiments, and demonstrations. They had to find quality e-materials to practise the most important issues with the students. All these actions were done under a huge pressure of time, expectations and demands directed at this professional group.

When teachers mastered essential skills to prepare their online meetings other problems drew their attention. They had to face the challenge of being listened to and understood by the students. The question of motivating students to take an active part in the lessons appeared. Many teachers struggled with giving instructions and explanations, which would lead the learners to the successful state of knowledge. It frequently happened that teachers devoted extended amount of time to explanations and repetition of the same theoretical information because students were out of control. Without their webcams turned on an educator had little influence on what students did during the lessons, whether they listened and took notes or concentrated on other aspects of life. Very often teachers felt frustrated after the classes which, on the one hand, required longer time to prepare when compared to the time before the pandemic but, on the other, did not inspire young people enough to concentrate fully on what was being discussed. What is more, talking for about five hours a day to the black screen without any guarantee of being given feedback or evoking the expected reaction from the students could consequently depress many educators and cause serious mental disorders.

Another serious problem, which gave many teachers sleepless nights were home assignments. As the pandemic reality showed it was a chapter of endless accidents. The main problem concerned lack of responsibility in sending homework on time, in the format required by the teacher and via a chosen virtual tool. This resulted in constant misunderstandings, which racked teachers´ nerves and put them in the circumstances in which they had to cope with naive excuses, cheating and agonizing demands that the students and their parents had. To make matters worse, the quality of students’ assignments was often not acceptable because they copied answers from the Internet without reading or analysing them first. This approach, lack of involvement and ambitions had a negative impact on teachers’ conclusions related to their everyday routine.

Another problem came to light when teachers had to test their students’ knowledge. The situation was difficult because new solutions had to be introduced to prevent learners from cheating and rewriting answers from various sources. This process could be compared to a permanent and exhausting struggle with the students to find the way to force them to acquire knowledge, which then would be used independently during a test. Most teachers had to resign from testing materials prepared in Word or PDF files by the publishers if they wanted to stop this unacceptable procedure. This generated time devoted to preparing completely new revision materials on various interactive platforms, which helped to limit, to some extent, the process of copying answers among students.

One of the drawbacks related to distant teaching in epidemic time was also difficulty in introducing pair or group work during the classes. Students were not enthusiastic about cooperating with each other in virtual circumstances and teachers, especially foreign language teachers, struggled with conducting tasks focused on collaborative work, communication, and information exchange. Coursebooks stayed the same as they were before the time of online teaching, educators were left with the problem of how to teach in the spirit of Communicative Language Teaching in the new reality. It must be emphasised that developing speaking skills in traditional circumstances, at school in the classroom, is difficult but it became more complicated during online lessons and many teachers did not find a remedy to improve this situation.

The next disadvantage is lack of privacy in the teacher’s profession intensified by the pandemic. Especially at the beginning of the first wave of COVID-19, in March 2020, teachers were forced to find solutions to contact the students on their own. Schools were not technologically and technically prepared for such changes. School life became transferred and activated through more indirect channels like, for example, an email, Messenger, WhatsApp, or a smartphone. Teachers shared their private accounts, email box addresses and telephone numbers with students and their parents. The consequences of being easily accessible at any time convenient to students or their caretakers ruined teachers’ expectations about working from 8am to 4pm. Ignoring generally accepted norms, regardless to holidays and weekends or late evening hours, parents as well as their children often disturbed teachers’ time off. It was difficult, for the educators, to find a moment rest from constant calls or messaging of various kinds. This resulted in working long, unsociable hours and being more concentrated on other people’s problems than on personal life. Many teachers found it difficult to put a clear division line between working and private time, many of them felt overwhelmed with several problematic matters they were expected to solve instead of taking care of their own needs. Although, three waves of COVOD-19 have already passed and scientists expect the fourth upcoming, teachers are still left with their conclusions, expectations, and emotions alone. Neither the government nor the headmasters take actions, propose realistic improvements to rectify the situation and limit the insanity of working in this way. As the reality shows, teachers will have to cope with difficulties, which they experienced individually.

**1.2 The research findings**

The second part of the research was devoted to possible disadvantages that teachers notice in a new reality and problems they experience in online teaching. The research introduces two main questions, one related to stimuli, which evoke stress and the second related to the most exhausting aspects arising from distant teaching. In both questions, teachers could choose multiple answers. The findings are as follows:

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| Question | Answer |
| 9. What stresses you the most in online teaching? | using new teaching tools and online platforms – 67% |
| the fear of failure in everyday duties – 36% |
| selecting appropriate and interesting e-materials – 43% |
| the amount of information I must familiarize with – 57% |
| limitations in teaching I encountered in new reality – 36% |
| lack of control of what students do during the lessons – 72% |
| students’ lack of motivation – 86% |
| consciousness that students cheat – 45% |
| parents’ expectations and their judgement – 21% |
| 10. What aspects did you find the most exhausting and frustrating during the pandemic? | working long unsociable hours – 97% |
| lack of privacy – 71% |
| constant involvement in other people’s problems – 62% |
| inadequate teaching results to the amount of repetition and explanation involved – 87% |
| students’ lack of responsibility – 74% |
| copying with students’ excuses and unwillingness to attend the lessons actively – 83% |

Table 1b. The results of the research, source: author

As the table presents the most stressful factors for the teachers during the pandemic time were lack of students’ motivation to learn indicated by 86% of the respondents and lack of control of what students do during the online lessons marked by 72%. When it comes to the lack of motivation, regardless to the time of the pandemic, it is a general problem in education often identified by teachers as the main source of stress in their profession. Lack of control over students is a new phenomenon which intensified during the epidemic, many teachers admit that it was difficult for them to conduct classes especially with older learners because in every virtual group they could identify at least a few teenagers who were concentrated on doing other things than learning. The third stressful factor for educators was using virtual tools and new teaching platforms, chosen by 67% participants of the survey, which is a normal reaction to innovative ideas requiring experimenting and exploring. The next question was related to the factors which evoke exhaustion and frustration in this professional group. The results present that the most oppressive aspect was connected with working long, unsociable hours chosen by 97% of the researched teachers. Educators were also tired of constant repetition of the same material (87%) which had little positive influence on the test or exam results, and it was difficult for them to cope with naive excuses and students’ general unwillingness to be active during the lessons (83%).

**1.2.1Problems experienced by the students**

In the time of the national lockdown not only adults but also children and teenagers went through a rough period of strong and often inconsistent emotions which were hard to control. It is difficult for a dedicated teacher to stay unconcerned about the problems young people experienced during the pandemic. First, they lost the opportunity for socializing with other schoolmates which, in general, has a negative impact on their functioning in a group. Young people, who are the proud representatives of 3,0 generation brought up on the Internet, prefer spending time at home in front of the computer. Because they rarely go out or hang out with friends after school, they need intensified exposure to various social interactions. Young students from the integrated learning, grades 1-3, were also deprived of the possibility to meet other children and develop social skills, which may have serious consequences and negative influence on building their future relations.

In addition, lack of socializing and being partially imprisoned in the house escalated the feeling of being excluded. Constant fear of health, sharing the same space with family members round the clock, misunderstandings and tense atmosphere at home, helplessness, lack of possibilities to release stress pushed young people to risky behaviours. Many children and teenagers suffered from loneliness and depression, as the research conducted by the scientists from University of lower Silesia in Poland showed 38,5% of teenagers had the symptoms of depression and every fifth respondent thought about committing a suicide during the pandemic.[[2]](#footnote-2) American Institute for Economic Research published information that the number of deaths among young people grew up for 23%, for one hundred thousand people, in 2020 when compared to the previous year. An extremely worrying fact is that 91% of reported cases among this group were American teenagers who committed a suicide.[[3]](#footnote-3) Furthermore, scientists from the foundation of We Give Power to Children found out that in two basic, for children, places of existence which is the house and school children experience a lot of violence. As the results present 57% of young students experienced acts of brutality from their friends and 41% from their closest relatives.[[4]](#footnote-4)

 Taking into consideration other disadvantages related to the pandemic, it should be mentioned that this time disorganized the lives of many young students and brought chaos to their existence. According to the psychologists, keeping the rhythm of the day, planning various actions, and controlling them helps to maintain good mental health.[[5]](#footnote-5) Unfortunately, a number of them showed very limited abilities necessary to keep control over their everyday routine. They lacked in responsibility and basic organizational skills what resulted in being late for the classes, logging in irregularly or disappearing during lessons. Furthermore, some students declared that they did not take notes during the classes or listen to the teacher because they were involved in playing computer games with other classmates, searching the Internet, checking their Facebook, texting on Messenger, or watching pictures on Instagram. They were often sleepy during the classes and absent minded due to long hours spend at night on gaming. They often began lessons lying in bed, as there was no obligation to turn on a webcam, they did not prepare necessary learning materials or equipment and were not ready to start the day at 8 am. They had no discipline to get ready for the classes and obey the rules respected at school like, for example, turning off their smartphones during the lessons. Their reluctant approach to learning could have been assumed from the excuses made up to avoid answering teacher’s questions or participating in a lesson actively, because of having the problems with the speakers or the Internet, as well as sending homework assignments often with a delay or being unwilling to do extra tasks. Pandemic time proved that Polish students are very immature in terms of their attitude towards education, many of them treat school as a must and they do not associate positive feelings with this place. They do not treat learning responsible and do not realise that they acquire knowledge for themselves. They also do not draw conclusions that good education may help them achieve success when they become adults.

Some students struggled with technical problems connected with the poor quality of the available equipment or slow connection to the Internet. This group had little chance to finish the lesson with complete notes and full understanding of the subject. As a result, the students felt frustrated and lost. Some of them had to share the same equipment with their siblings and attended only selected lessons. Furthermore, many students complained that background noises and turmoil at home disturbed them during the classes which resulted in lack of concentration and attention. All these life situations influenced students’ self-confidence and had bad impact on acquisition of new material.

**1.2.3 Online sources (Subchapter number 1.2.2 is missing)**

Although many teenagers demonstrated their reluctant attitude towards learning during the pandemic, teachers did not resign from searching for new solutions to create interesting lessons and test students’ knowledge in the most transparent way. Online teaching forced educators to incorporate TIK technologies into this process and helped teachers familiarize with tools, which can be used in virtual and traditional classrooms. Teachers improved their skills in operating various computer programs to create notes, store and exchange information or introduce new material in a visually attractive way. In Polish educational system the most popular teaching platforms during the pandemic time were Microsoft Teams and Google Meet. They give several possibilities to meet students in a safe environment. Teachers can create virtual classes from the inner database and plan meetings in the calendar. On Microsoft Teams students are automatically informed about the event as soon as it is planned by the educator, on Google Meet they can attend the meeting from the position of the planner included in the electronic register where the teachers place links for the virtual meetings. Both platforms create opportunities for sharing presentations in Power Point, e-materials or videos, which can be introduced both by the teachers or their students. When conducting the lessons on Google Meet teachers can use a tool of a virtual whiteboard to create, share and save notes. MS Teams on the other hand offers the function of creating assignments for students, which looks like virtual homework or attach different files, which can be modified and improved if necessary. What is more, this platform offers individual chats with students, communication channels for virtual groups to place announcements and important information as well as the inner base of contacts, which enables the teacher to contact a student or a parent in a telephone or a video conversation. On Google Meet teachers can use an email box with various improvements to send messages to individual learners or selected groups of students. Microsoft Teams offers an easy access to various applications like Microsoft Forms, Testportal, Quizlet, You Tube, Images, OneNote, and others, which are extremely useful in teachers’ work. Both platforms provide convenient solutions to save time in preparing the classes, however Microsoft Teams seems like a complete working space with all necessary tools and apps to conduct online lessons. Other popular applications suitable for contacting students virtually in a form of chats or video-chats are Skype, Cisco Webex Teams, Google Hangouts, Facebook, or WhatsApp. There are also useful tools which help in planning and organizing virtual meetings like: Google Calendar or Doodle.

The Internet offers various applications to share documents, pictures, or films. They become very useful when teachers decide to send a bigger number of attachments or the content, which takes much space on a disc. There are communicators, or in other words TIK tools, which are created for the purpose of sharing ‘heavy’ files. One of them is Google drive, called the Cloud, where users can send and share important materials. They have 15 GB of space on a Google disk, they can improve materials or work collectively on their improvements. The same opportunity for collaborative work provides Padlet, which is a kind of a virtual board suitable for summarizing, ordering, and revising information before, for example, big class tests. Another example is a social service called Pinterest, which is used to find and collect visual materials. This virtual base contains pictures, photos and worksheets, which are links to various websites where these materials can be downloaded or shared during online meetings.

There are useful apps suitable to create graphics. They may be inspiring for the students and teachers when improving some visual aids like pictures, photos, or films. These tools are often complicated and posses many functions as well as filters to achieve certain effects, but they are worth exploring. Some of them like Canva facilitates ready-made templates to its users, which allows for the creation of a virtual poster, advertisement as well as a book or a film cover. Cacoo or Creately help to design mind maps or diagrams by a group of learners in an online mode. In the group of TIK tools appropriate to improve photos are Gimp, Pixir Editor and PiZap. As far as interactive films are concerned, they can be found online or recorded by students and then modified by adding sound effects, commentaries, subtitles, open or multiple-choice questions to emphasise their educational value. This can be achieved via EDpuzzle or Ted Ed platforms.

During the national lockdown, it was very important to practise and check students’ knowledge regularly. There are certain applications, which help teachers create interactive exercises in the form of games, quizzes, and puzzles to practise and revise necessary information, among them one can find Wordwall, Kahoot, Bamboozle, Quizlet or LearningApps. Generally speaking, these platforms allow teachers to create their own exercises or use the ones existing in the base. The exercises can be created on the existing templates like in Wordwall to design tasks like match up, group sort, unjumble, wordsearch, anagram, true or false, quiz, missing words, matching pairs, random wheel, crosswords, and the like, but they are mainly directed at individual student’s work. Quizlet and Learning Apps are perfect to prepare flashcards to revise vocabulary, design quizzes, fill in the gap exercises or multiple-choice tasks. Bamboozle platform requires creating or selecting a game in a form of puzzles which contain quiz questions. They often require writing down the answer in a missing part of the sentence. This platform allows for playing in groups it seems exciting for the students because some puzzles contain extra points or a loss of them what often changes the course of the game and its result. Another very popular and appreciated platform is Kahoot, which is used to create online games in the form of multiple-choice tasks. It allows the students to play in the individual or team mode to which they need personal smartphones. When creating exercises on the Kahoot platform teachers can add images, photos, sound effects or short films to create questions. After each question students get feedback about their results, at the end of the game the podium is presented with three best players who won.

To test students’ knowledge platforms like Testportal, Microsoft Forms, Quizme, Eduello can be recommended. Quizme and Eduello contain a base of various quizzes to practise and revise material from subjects such as history, Polish, Mathematics, Chemistry, ecology, and the like. These quizzes can be used as tests, which students fulfil during the classes as well as after them. Like on the Eduello platform the results are immediately sent to the teacher and learners have only one chance to do the test. Tasks on both platforms are mainly designed as matching or multiple-choice exercises. Other enumerated platforms like, for example, Testportal require the teacher to prepare all the questions himself. First, the teacher starts with the basic configuration of the test, and then adds questions, which can be of multiple choice, fill in the gaps, short answer, true/false or open. In each question box there is a small toolbar with basic functions of editing the text as well as options to paste pictures, audio and video files, links, or attachments. Under every question the student can see the number of points to gain, the teacher has the optional function to click, that each question must be answered when it is projected because the student will not have a chance to see it again. When the questions are ready the teacher decides about their order, single tasks might be projected one by one or mixed up for every user. The test can be available as a link, individual code, or a group password. The teacher decides when and how to activate the test. The educator designs the starting page, which contains basic information about the questions and rules of writing it. Criteria for grades are also included and time frames after which the test will be automatically closed. After finishing writing the students get an immediate feedback about their results however this is just the artificial intelligence, and it is advisable to re-check the answers. Other platforms like Microsoft Forms are based on a similar idea of creating tests in the pandemic time.

The last group of applications relates to creating multimedia presentations. The most popular in this group is the PowerPoint program. In this app users can create presentations on ready-made templates, they can design every slide from scratch or use the built-in layout that includes all boxes necessary for the presentation. They can include text, pictures, images, pie charts, sound effects as well as videos. In the pandemic time multimedia presentations appeared to be an eye-catching aid helpful to grasp and focus students’ attention on the discussed issues. Teachers could present, summarise, or review material, which was selected, ordered, and presented in a pleasant way. Other applications, which give the opportunity to design presentations online and allow working in groups over one project, are Google Presentations, Prezi and Emaze.

**Summary**

Pandemic caused by the coronavirus and related COVID-19 pandemic changed the colours of education. It was a difficult time of many rough changes and challenges, but teachers managed to continue this process sustaining a high standard of online teaching. They gained an insight into the opportunities the virtual world has to offer, learnt new facts, and experimented with new technologies. These experiences helped educators understand their students better and convey knowledge in a more up-to-date way, they also created the opportunity for continuation of some ideas at schools in more traditional circumstances. The pandemic time brought some benefits as well as drawbacks. It revealed some imperfections of the educational system as well as the sad truth of how students often treat their responsibilities. It showed how difficult this profession is and that it deserves appreciation and social respect.

**Resumé**

Pandémia koronavírusu a s ním súvisiace ochorenie COVID-19 zmenili vo všetkých postihnutých krajinách charakter a formy vzdelávania. Máme za sebou náročné obdobie mnohých zmien a výziev, avšak učiteľom sa podarilo preklenúť počiatočné úskalia a veľmi rýchlo sa adaptovali na nové podmienky a pokračovali vo vyučovacom procese v snahe udržať úroveň výučby spred pandémie. Učitelia získali prehľad o možnostiach, ktoré ponúka virtuálny svet, zoznámili sa s doposiaľ neznámymi platformami a experimentovali s novými technológiami. Nové skúsenosti a zručnosti pomohli učiteľom lepšie porozumieť svojim žiakom a sprostredkovať im vedomosti modernejším spôsobom. Obdobie pandémie prinieslo do vyučovacieho procesu isté výhody, avšak bolo sprevádzané aj nepriaznivým dopadom na vzdelávanie. Odhalili sa niektoré nedokonalosti vzdelávacieho systému, ako aj smutná pravdu o tom, ako žiaci často pristupujú k svojim povinnostiam. Aj v dobe pandémie sa ukázalo, aké náročné je učiteľské povolanie, ktoré si v spoločnosti zaslúži uznanie a rešpekt.

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