

Q: What are the major challenges while teaching online during COVID_19 pandemic?

The most serious problem is that Polish government doesn't support schools. Everyone knows the time of pandemic is hard and we should support one another, cooperate to achieve the best results as possible – but at the same time we get a new minister of education, who claims his main task is to get rid of teachers who take part in strikes all over the country and to prove that schools and universities are not the places to discuss things like freedom of speech, sexuality or equality of women and men. Because of the way Polish school and teachers' work is shown on public television (which is under control of the ruling party) most of the people treat online teaching as a waste of time. The fact that our government neglects us is also visible in another thing: teachers weren't trained to teach online. Especially the eldest ones have a lot of difficulties, because they don't know useful tools or applications and their lessons usually look like lectures, so students don't get involved. As we don't have one recommended tool to be used during online classes, every school uses something else. In our school, for example, most of teachers use Google Meet, but other schools in our area chose Teams or Webex. There are even some schools that don't have online lessons – teachers only have to send the materials via email and students are to complete the tasks as soon as possible and send them back. There's also a big problem with the Internet connection, especially in rural areas, where the connection isn't stable – students join the lesson and suddenly they disappear and are no longer available to take part in the meeting. That can be really frustrating.

Q: What are the good behavioural changes that happened during this Covid-19 pandemic period?

When it's about my students, I can see they've become more independent and responsible for the results of their work. Most of their parents work, so they can't sit with their children or check if they're really learning all the time. I can also see that people started appreciating what they had before the pandemic: freedom, opportunity to meet friends and relatives whenever we wanted to, travelling to other countries... We were so used to these things that we didn't even think one day they could be forbidden or taken. This is a bitter lesson for all of us: appreciating the tiniest things, even if we perceive them as something natural.

Q: Do you think online education will be a stronger 'trend' in post-pandemic education compared to what it was prior to the pandemic?

I think it may become more popular in case of tutoring, but it will probably take years to switch completely from traditional way of learning to online education at schools, especially state ones. Everything depends on people, their attitude towards new technologies and the needs of students themselves.

Q: Do you think that the lockdown in your country was useful? Did it help to reduce the number of new cases?

Yes, of course. However, if our government had reacted faster, we probably wouldn't have had so many new cases in autumn. Now – end of December / beginning of January – the number of new cases varies from 3000 to 13000 every day, so it's smaller than in November, but it still cannot be called „a victory over the pandemic“, as our prime minister repeats from time to time.

Q: How did the people in your country react on the rules connected with covid? Do they respect them?

Most of them do respect the rules – these are the people who suffered from covid themselves or have someone ill in their families. However, there are still some claims that covid is just an imaginary illness, created by the most powerful governments in the world. People are mostly tired of restrictions, sitting at home is being treated as the worst punishment now. The ones who rebel against the rules introduced by the government don't wear masks and, in fact, that's the only thing they can do.

Q: Are you afraid of being infected by COVID 19?

Maybe not of being infected, but of a hard tenor of it. I know a lot of people who suffered covid – some of them are well now, but the others still feel the effects of it. They can't walk fast or spend too much time in stuffy places, like rooms with windows closed. Some of my friend lost their family members and this is, in my opinion, the thing we should be mainly afraid of.

Q: What is your opinion about distant learning in Poland? Would you like to change anything?

It's definitely not easy, but challenging and completely not prepared. However, when a teacher is highly motivated and creative, his or her lessons are good no matter if they are held in the classroom or at home. We often joke that Polish teachers are like cockroaches – nothing can kill them, even online education 😊 I'd like to change the attitude of Polish people towards teachers – my dream is to see all the students and their parents cooperating with school, not looking for its weak points only.

Q: What do you think about lockdowns, its pluses and minuses?

Pluses: the pandemic can be stopped, people start appreciating what they have

Minuses: lower mood, constant feeling of having lost our freedom, almost no possibilities to travel or meet new people

Q: Did you have national testing or wide-area testing? If you went to school, would your students get tested? If yes, what kind of testing would it be?

Only the ones with covid symptoms (high temperature, problems with breathing) are tested for free. When you don't have the symptoms, you need to pay for the test. The situation may change after releasing the first doses of vaccine in Poland.

Q: How many waves do you think will await us?

I think we will have one or two more waves of covid. Hopefully, the pandemic will slow down after the first round of vaccination. I'm really looking forward to the day when we'll be able to leave our houses freely, visit our relatives and travel within our countries and abroad.

Q: Would you say that we must wear masks all the time (like at home) or should it be more open/free?

In my opinion, wearing masks at home would be too much. Of course, we should wear masks and disinfect our hands while we're in public places, like shops or offices, because they are visited by hundreds or even thousands different people a day. At home, we stay in a closed group of our relatives, so extra protective measures would be useful only in case of living with someone chronically ill, with lowered immunity.

Q: Do your students like distance learning or would they rather be at school?

My students mostly miss school. It's not because of the lessons, of course – they can't wait to meet their classmates! Only few claim they are looking forward to come back to school because they miss traditional lesson, with the presence of a teacher nearby. Some of them, especially the older ones, 13 and 14-year-olds, say they like staying at home: they can sleep longer and have fewer lessons (our head teacher decided to shorten the schedule and introduced a five-hours-long school day). Students often complain about teachers who have problems with using interesting ICT tools or conduct their lessons in the form of a lecture only. At the same time, teenagers appreciate creative and innovative approach towards teaching.

Q: How was the situation in Poland during spring? Did you have to wear masks then?

In comparison to current situation, the first wave of pandemic in spring wasn't so difficult in Poland. From March to June, we had only about 100-700 new cases of covid a day. There were just three or four days when there were more than 1000 cases and it was said to be a lot then. But during the second wave, from the end of October, the numbers of cases started rising very quickly and we got really scared. One day it was about 10 000, the next day it escalated to 15 000 and 24 hours later we read that the border of 20 000 had been crossed. It was terrible. Of course, we had to wear masks in spring, just like we do wear them now, but the extent of the problem was much smaller then.

Q: Did your government manage situation about COVID-19 well?

No, it doesn't. A good example to prove it is our prime minister, who was boasting about the victory over covid in the summer. The government decided to repeal the restrictions in July and August only because presidential elections were to be held. The ministry of family even decided to give some extra money – so-called touristic coupons – for every person under 18 years old to encourage whole families to go on holiday to popular destinations in Poland together. The second wave of covid started right after we came back to schools in September, but the government tried to pretend the situation is still under control. After that the strikes across the country broke out – people started fighting for the recalling of the most important politicians. So far, this fight is not finished. Unfortunately, the government decided to introduce national quarantine from 28 December to 17 January, so we have to wait.

Q: How many COVID-19 cases did your school have so far?

We know about only 4 or 5 cases of covid among our students, but most teachers have already gone through covid. Their cases were mostly quite serious, with really high temperature and problems with breathing. Our head teacher suffered the most – when the ambulance came to her house, the paramedics told her they can take her to the hospital, but there are no free beds and she will just lie on a mattress on the floor for two weeks. Her family decided to leave her at home, so the only thing the paramedics could do was to give her some injections with anti-suffocation medicine. Fortunately, she recovered, but she's still very weak (she got covid almost two months ago and suffered for almost a month).

Q: Did your school have any anti-pandemic measures, so the disease would not spread so much? For example, disinfection, temperature measuring etc.

Yes, when we are at school (we'll probably go back to traditional education on 17 January) every principal, teacher and student in Poland is obliged to stick to certain rules, introduced by Polish Ministry of Health in September. First of all, every class has all the lessons in one and the same room (it's the teacher who moves from one classroom to another, not the students) and the classrooms must be ventilated every 45 minutes, during breaks between the lessons. Students have to spend their breaks outside, on the school playground. When the weather is bad, they can stay at school, but they cannot mingle – every class has to stay on the floor where their classroom is located. Both teachers and students have to disinfect or wash hands with soap as often as possible (it's recommended to do so after entering school in the morning and after every break). When there's a suspicion that a student may have covid, he or she gets isolated in a designated room and waits for parents to come and get him or her home. The temperature is being measured only in case of covid suspicion.

Q: How are hospitals in Poland managing it? Are the hospitals able to help people who are not infected but have different kind of need?

Doctors and nurses in every hospital worked very hard in spring and from October to December, sometimes without any breaks. The staff often decided to stay at the hospital and didn't go back to their houses to reduce the possibility of spreading the disease. In October most of hospitals weren't prepared for seriously ill patients (lack of beds, the scandal with respirators – former Minister of Health spent a lot of public money on respirators of illegal origin). Some

patients had to lie on mattresses on the floor and doctors had to choose between patients to be rescued. Now the situation is much different – the number of cases decreased and there are more beds in hospitals and respirators than patients. However, health service is still in a poor condition. Young doctors earn less than 700 euro (about 2800 zlotys), so most of them prefer working abroad. Those who are experienced often work in two or three different places or even different towns – they are exhausted and often treat patients just as numbers, „another brick in the wall”. The pandemic proved that Polish health system is ineffective. At the moment, the biggest problem is that people who suffer from other illnesses than covid aren't treated properly.

Q: Do you think that situation in Poland would be different if the government proceeded with arrangements about Covid 19 earlier? Do you think that changing the dates of winter holiday will help the situation in Poland?

The situation probably would be different, if the government decided to listen to people and their actual needs. Instead, the politicians preferred to continue their fight for keeping their seats. Some of them even focused on looking for new seats for their relatives and friends during the pandemic! In the meantime, numerous ridiculous rules were introduced. For example, the government forbade children and teenagers under 16 years old leaving houses without an adult from 8 am to 4 pm and today (4.01) we heard that this rule will be probably cancelled tomorrow, because politicians has just changed their mind. The government definitely lacks reasonable, careful thinking. Changing the dates of winter holidays won't help the situation in Poland – the vaccine probably will.

Q: What is other people's reaction on lockdown or closing gyms, schools...?

It depends on the lifestyle people had before the lockdown. The ones who were active, travelled a lot, did some sport are furious, because the restrictions – which are often unreasonable – affected them in a severe way. Elderly people, whose life hasn't changed a lot, do not complain.

Q: Is your school prepared for distance learning? Do you use cameras during lessons?

More or less, our school is prepared. We use Google Meet during lessons. It depends on the teacher and on students' needs if we use the cameras or not. There are some teachers who still focus on using pen and paper – they require cameras being switched on. Teachers who use different ICT tools don't need cameras, because these tools (like Nearpod or Wordwall) prevent students from cheating or inaction.

Q: Do you think that there is a bigger risk of riots since you closed gyms and other places where people spend a lot of time?

No, because there are more serious problems in Poland than lockdown. We've got riots in every bigger town or city because of the abortion case (Polish government wants to outlaw abortion) and because of the fact the working people live in expanding poverty. At the same time the ones who don't work get a lot of money from the government and laugh while hearing about any job offer.

Q: How would you compare the situation in March and now? Do you think your government handled the things better then? What is different now? What would you suggest?

In spring, people treated the problem of covid more seriously. Now it can be said we almost got used to it. However, there were not any many cases of covid in spring – the second wave was much harder both for patients and for medical staff. Polish government didn't handle the situation well and we still have to count on ourselves, not on government's help. Lots of people lost their job, many places like restaurants, clubs or cafes got closed. The situation got even more difficult in the last two months. The only thing I'd like to suggest Polish government is to start listening to people and taking care of their actual needs instead of pretending that „something” is being done.

Q: What are your views on the mass-testing Slovakia held? Would it perhaps be helpful for your country as well?

Maybe – it would definitely calm the people down. Now we're waiting for vaccines, but it probably will last a few months until the virus stops spreading.

