

SUPPORTING REMOTE EDUCATION IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE PANDEMIC IN POLAND

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Purpose: The aim of the paper is to compare the possibilities of providing education in the field of on-line learning by presenting tools enabling teaching in the pandemic conditions.

Design/methodology/approach: The following methods are used: literature review, analysis of websites of companies, which offering the use of education platforms necessary to conduct distance learning, case study analysis of platforms, which are a remote education tool: Integrated Educational Platform, Microsoft Teams, Google Classrooma and ClickMeeting.

Findings: One of the first solutions to prevent the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic in Poland was the suspension of teaching, educational and care activities in schools and educational institutions for designated periods. The next stage was the introduction and implementation of the obligation to carry out educational tasks using distance learning methods and techniques. Remote learning, which was introduced in a relatively short time, requires meeting many conditions by potential users, i.e. having efficient computer equipment, a place at home to study, access to high-speed internet and educational platforms.

Research limitations/implications: The article contains an analysis based on the examples of various educational platforms applied in Poland. In further research, it is possible to create a survey to find out about users' opinions on educational platforms. With the advancement of technology as well as users' feedback, online learning can be significantly improved in the near future. There are some limitations in research related to conducting distance learning in the country, due to the short period of analysis, lack of information and the difficulty of obtaining comparable data.

Originality/value: The presented different solutions, which are used for distance learning, are a comparison of various educational platforms and may constitute their recommendations. Hence the analysis of the case of using various educational platforms in the pandemic reality. The article presents the value of teaching for the society and for its continued proper functioning. Currently, the conditions of the pandemic place significant restrictions on all kinds of education, in schools, colleges, businesses and other training. The article is addressed both to pupils, students, as well as to professionals who use the platforms for training or improvement of their business activities.

Keywords: education, on-line learning (remote learning), educational platforms.

Category of the paper: case study analysis, content analysis.

Introduction

The main goal of general education in Poland, as well as university education, is to provide knowledge that is an essential element of active and creative participation in the life of the community. Educational units shape the values important for the proper functioning of free citizens, acting in accordance with democratic principles. The pillars for citizens should be elements such as tolerance, respect for human rights as an individual, including the rights of minorities. Any society should function in freedom, share the sense of solidarity, and the goal of citizens is to develop respect for the idea of the common good. Education is supposed to educate people in the spirit of patriotism and create the sense of bonds in the society. Teaching in a balanced way creates active cooperation of individuals, both at the professional level and in family life, in order to select and achieve jointly set goals. Educational units are designed to stimulate social responsibility towards themselves and the ability to account their activities to others (Pietrzyk, Sieprawska).

In addition to the above values, education should provide skills, i.e. the ability to learn effectively, to think critically, to know at least two foreign languages, to use the foundations of mathematics at the fluent level, to use information transfer techniques in the advanced manner, and to communicate. In addition, the school aims to implement in students the skills of understanding and using information that is typical and most common in everyday life, i.e. at work, school, public life and local communities (Pietrzyk, Sieprawska).

The above-mentioned skills should be shaped on a level that allows to implement elementary skills in everyday life. The scope of teaching should be defined at the primary as well as secondary level, using gradually improved standards. On the other hand, the level of mastery of these skills should be verified using standardized, nationwide external exams.

Education in Poland is common and available to all, while the current pandemic situation generates the need to introduce new solutions in the field of education. According to the Report of the Minister of National Education, legal solutions were applied in Poland, which also enabled distance learning (Pietrzyk, Sieprawska).

One of the first solutions to prevent the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic was the suspension of teaching, educational and care activities in schools and educational institutions for designated periods. The next stage was the introduction and implementation of the obligation to carry out educational tasks using distance learning methods and techniques. The very method of organizing the work of teachers and students in the field of distance learning was decided by the directors of the institutions themselves, in consultation with teachers, taking into account the students' abilities. Poland was among the countries that reacted the fastest to the developing pandemic situation, and on March 4, 2020, the first decision was made to suspend educational activities in educational institutions (Report of the Minister of National Education, 2020).

During the videoconference with ministers of education from different countries of the European Union, views and experiences in the field of the functioning of the education systems were exchanged and compared. Solutions for the forms of distance education of students were discussed and legal regulations were developed, enabling the so-called remote learning. Among state initiatives, schools were allowed to use the Integrated Educational Platform (www.epodreczniki.pl) (Report of the Minister of National Education, 2020).

As part of the preparation and implementation of distance education, the Minister of National Education appointed a team for the implementation of distance education in order to prevent the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The tasks of this team include coordinating and monitoring all distance learning, the [epodreczniki.pl](http://www.epodreczniki.pl) platform, cooperation with education curators at the distance learning level, the functioning of a network of methodological advisers in helping teachers in the new reality of teaching, cooperation with Telewizja Polska S.A. as a part of ongoing educational programs, ongoing review of EU activities in the field of distance education, as well as monitoring legal solutions and cooperation with all representatives of electronic journal platforms. The work of the above team is supervised by the Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of National Education (Report of the Minister of National Education, 2020).

Methods

Currently, there is a noticeable digital revolution and the associated widespread use of technology in everyday life. Hence, as already mentioned, the prevailing pandemic situation forced the necessity to use the above solutions in everyday education. On-line lessons were conducted instead of teaching in schools. Thanks to these solutions, the school was to become a modern place that functions in the era of the socio-technological revolution. The new information and communication solutions are aimed at supporting the didactic process, and thus developing digital competences in society. Preparing all e-learning users to fully and properly function on-line requires broadening their knowledge of technology. In addition, the proposed educational solution requires constant access to appropriate computer equipment, as well as to a reliable internet connection for all participants of the educational process, i.e. teachers, students, parents, lecturers and students. The available equipment and internet infrastructure should enable the realization of education in various forms, either collectively or individually (Ptaszek, Stunża, Pyżalski, 2020).

The rapid implementation of education on-line in Poland met with a wide response from IT companies in terms of creating new educational platforms. The aim of the paper is to compare the possibilities of developing and providing education in the field of on-line learning by presenting tools enabling teaching in the pandemic conditions. The proposed purpose of the

study was assigned the following question by researchers: do the educational platforms offered in Poland meet the expectations of different audience? To answer the question, the methods used are literature review, analysis of websites of companies, which offering the use of platforms necessary to conduct distance learning, case study analysis of platforms, which are a remote education tool.

Currently functioning remote education both in schools and as a part of vocational training courses has advantages and disadvantages. The following table lists the pros and cons of online learning (Wedel-Domaradzka, Raczyńska, 2013).

Table 1.
Advantages and disadvantages of distance learning

Advantages	Disadvantages
Freedom in choosing the place of study, and saving time in terms of commuting.	There is no suitable place at home to allow proper concentration.
Increase in users' competences in the field of IT.	Difficulty operating a wide variety of learning platforms.
Adapting to the needs of students – creating an individualized didactic offer.	Lack of sufficient motivation and the ability to organize independent work.
New forms of integration and networking.	The need to have an appropriate IT infrastructure.
Often freedom and possibility to independently choose the time to study – in the case of training based on recordings.	Feeling of loneliness.

Adapted from: How to effectively conduct classes on the educational platform?, A. Wedel-Domaradzka, A. Raczyńska, National Center for Supporting Vocational and Continuous Education, Warsaw 2013, pp. 6-7.

According to the above study, the visible advantages, allowing a better organization of the working day, are confronted with numerous disadvantages. The on-line learning solution for people working professionally may be a significant organizational facilitation, while among children and adolescents who only devote themselves to education, it may generate numerous problems due to the feeling of loneliness.

The basic element necessary for remote education is the possession of efficient computer equipment. According to data collected by PISA 2018, this condition was not met by all countries before the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. In Poland, 96% of students have computer equipment and can use it to work at home.

In addition to the appropriate equipment, each student must have a suitable place and atmosphere for home education. According to the above research, as many as 96% of students in Poland reported having a quiet place to work and study at home (Report of the Minister of National Education, 2020).

The aforementioned platform for schools, introduced by the Polish ministry, as part of the Integrated Educational Platform, is a modern and safe educational tool, enabling distance learning with an extensive database of proven and widely developed digital educational materials. The integration of the platform with the Educational Information System allowed the creation of 5.7 million user accounts, while teachers gained access to data on classes and schools in which they conduct educational activities. The introduction of this platform was

dictated by the will to continue teaching in the pandemic reality (Report of the Minister of National Education, 2020).

The Integrated Educational Platform epodreczniki.pl (ZPE) was implemented in February 2019. It is currently a professional and safe for users tool for distance learning, recommended by the Minister of National Education. All content made available on the platform in question is free and available anytime, anywhere. All content available on the platform can be printed in PDF version. The proposed materials on the platform facilitate education through forms of communication activity, as well as interactive exercises and multimedia materials. ZPE gives the opportunity to create interdisciplinary lessons, acting, teacher versions of the textbook, group work and individual education (Centrum Informatyczne Edukacji, 2021).

The e-textbooks portal is distinguished by accessible and free e-materials. The platform also allows the teacher to import classes based on data from the Educational Information System, create their own e-materials using a wizard, edit and personalize materials, as well as share notes with other users and check learning results. Additionally, ZPE allows for the creation of videoconferences and the inclusion of links to meetings in the calendar (Centrum Informatyczne Edukacji, 2021). Certainly, the distinguishing feature of the proposed solution is the possibility to access free materials and exercises for specific groups of students.

Another distance learning solution is a platform created by Microsoft, called Microsoft Teams. It is a tool that facilitates on-line learning as well as hybrid learning (Microsoft, 2021b). Teams is a digital hub for students and teachers. All conversations, content and applications are accumulated in one place. Thanks to synchronization, work is more efficient, and the flow of information is more readable. This tool enables teachers to create personalized learning environments. The app highly supports collaboration between teachers and students and facilitates communication in the classroom (Microsoft, 2021a).

Unlike the previous solution, the Microsoft Teams platform is a paid learning tool. The application is aimed at handling not only meetings as part of lessons and lectures, but also business videoconferences. The tool does not offer any teaching materials directly. Any sharing of notes, presentations or materials must come from teachers. However, operating in the Windows environment, it is certainly a highly advanced technological solution that allows to integrate many applications and environments necessary for on-line learning.

Another platform that enables distance learning is Google Classroom. This solution is available to schools that use Google Workspace for Education. The bundle includes drive, docs, sheets, presentations, and other Google services all in one place. By combining services, teachers and students are able to access all proposed services through standardized tools. It is free for all users (Google Classroom, 2021b). In the platform, the teacher has the opportunity to start a video meeting, create classes, projects, and give grades to students. On the other hand, the student can monitor tasks and submitted projects, hand them over via the platform and correspond with lecturers, as well as share their materials and communicate in the stream of classes and send synchronized e-mail messages. The tutor can easily summarize the activities of the students and also check the advertisements (Google Classroom, 2021a).

Another solution is the ClickMeeting platform. The platform allows communication between lecturers and recipients through chat conversations, as well as direct participation in classes. In addition to standard options, such as sharing materials, recording meetings, organizing tests, ClickMeeting also allows to promote business models. One of the users of this form is the Subway company, which promotes itself to franchisees and educates them in the field of running a business using distance learning tools. Using a platform to present new ideas and business strategies within a functioning franchise network. Subway is a company with 44,000 locations worldwide. Hence, the use of the ClickMeeting platform enables quick and easy communication between individual branches and easy exchange of opinions, experiences and the clash of new ideas (ClickMeeting, 2021).

Discussion

According to the research of subject platforms: Integrated Educational Platform epodfinansniki.pl (ZPE), Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom and ClickMeeting it has been noticed that they meet with different preferences in terms of recipients. Each of the platforms, has similar basic functions, but differs in terms of additional solutions, such as sharing files during classes or the possibility of synchronization with other applications.

The platforms presented above show how fast technology is developing in the current situation. The rapid introduction of on-line learning has received a wide response from leaders in the IT industry. The selection of the educational platform is dictated by the preferences of specific users. Of course, the wide range of distance learning platforms does not solve the problems of users related to the feeling of loneliness, less attention at home, and the generation of poorer learning results. Further research will not only improve the solutions offered by educational platforms, but will also be able to focus on the negative implications of confinement at home and distance learning.

According to the PISA research conducted in 2018, many developed countries in relation to the opinion of school heads do not have an effective e-learning platform that is available online and supports such learning. In Poland, 35% of those running educational institutions stated that there is an effective online learning platform available in the country. With regard to the pandemic situation, the situation has changed. It was forced by the necessity to introduce new teaching conditions. In response to the research, the ministry introduced the previously mentioned Integrated Educational Platform (Report of the Minister of National Education, 2020). Above are some of the most popular distance learning tools. Not only the free solutions proposed by the state began to function in new forms of education, but also IT companies took the opportunity to create new paid platforms, which in practice find a number of recipients.

In addition to introducing online teaching tools, already in 2019 more emphasis was placed on educating students' digital competences and skills in the use of modern technologies to solve problems in various fields. The new core curriculum referred, *inter alia*, to learning programming from an early age and the introduction of an increased number of hours of computer science. Extending IT education is aimed at preparing students to solve problems in areas, *i.e.* economy, life, science, while consciously using the available IT tools. Education in this field also supports logical thinking, creativity in the field of problem-solving, the ability to undertake and implement innovations and optimize tasks (Report of the Minister of National Education, 2020).

Results

The rapid introduction of distance learning in connection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic quickly stimulated the development of IT in Poland. Additionally, steps were taken to analyze students and teachers in terms of adaptation to new forms of education, *i.e.* the purchase of computer equipment for students, internet connection. The presented platforms, which are often used, offer the possibility of creating online meetings, along with joining participants in the conversation, conducting chats or sharing presentations. Hence, the presented educational platforms are to present a wide range of possibilities in the field of educational solutions for on-line learning. In Poland, the platforms used, among others, include Integrated Educational Platform epodfinansniki.pl (ZPE), Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom and ClickMeeting. The presented educational platforms differ in terms of operating costs, the possibility of using them with other applications. Due to the short test period of using on-line learning in Poland and the lack of comparable results of students' work, further research is necessary. In such research, it is possible to conduct not only a questionnaire among platforms' users, but also compare the results of learning of pupils, students as well as students taking part in improving their professional qualifications. In addition, further studies on remote education may enable the improvement of the on-line platforms and their functionality to the potential and diversify user. Significant technological advances and further research allow for rapid implementation of improvements to the platforms concerned.

According to the analysis of the case study and a critical analysis of the content of ministerial reports, remote learning in Poland, introduced in a short period of time requires the fulfillment of many conditions, *i.e.* having appropriate computer equipment, a place at home for quiet learning and access to the Internet. At the same time, it is necessary to have an appropriate and effective platform for online learning, depending on the expectations and the form of classes. In the case of learning after primary or secondary school level, information maneuverability is important so that the teacher can communicate with the student. With regard

to universities or training to a large number of users, it is important that the platform has the ability to conduct education with a large audience, while avoiding disruption. As can be seen in the case study analysis, there are currently several efficient educational platforms available, which, depending on the preferences and expectations of users, have various solutions to facilitate work on-line.

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