Distance education during pandemic

Contents

Distance education during the pandemic

The implementation of distance education is an enormous challenge for most teachers, a task they have not been prepared for.

It is a process that would require enormous resources and preparation to run smoothly.

It involves providing teachers and students with equal access to equipment and internet connection, increased monitoring of students from dysfunctional families as well as additional support for children with disability certificates and special needs.

It means developing a completely new teaching methodology, adapted to distance education and its limitations.

It also means taking into account brand new legal challenges, such as online security or the use of one's image in online lessons.

Finally, it means providing necessary psychological support for teachers and students. That is because as a result of the pandemic, the teaching and learning process became a highly traumatic experience.

4. Challenges and struggles

For the vast majority of teachers, distance education is a **great challenge. It requires dealing on a daily basis with multiple problems**.

From technological limitations, through communication problems with parents and students at school, ending up with psychological issues.

Many teachers admit their struggle is far from easy, primarily because they feel responsible for their students and also do not want to leave their colleagues behind on the "battlefield".

Every day, I feel like I'm a soldier on the front. I wasn't prepared for this at all. I learn everything on my own, I try my best for the kids and parents because I know they are counting on us. (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Pomeranian Voivodship)

Photo: Guilhem Vellut, Suspension Bridge Hatonosu Valley , CC BY 2.0

SPOŁ ED

CENTRUM CYFROWE

Lack of experience

This difficult situation and teachers' feelings should not be surprising in the light of the fact that **few have had contact with distance education before**.

What is more, their experience was not rich and limited to:

- individual consultations with students via Zoom, Skype, Messenger etc.
- active and passive participation in webinars, trainings and e-learning courses
- supporting lessons and extracurricular clubs (sending students links with additional materials)

Therefore, they experienced distance education in a more limited scope than today, when they are actively teaching online a larger group of children.

15% of teachers had some experience with distance education

85% had no experience with distance education before the coronavirus epidemic

We should have been trained first, while students should have been provided internet and computers. My school doesn't even keep an online gradebook, so I put my grades in a paper notebook. My own computer barely works, and computers at school don't even have the Word programme. Such teaching is a nightmare. (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, West Pomeranian Voivodeship)

SPOŁ ED

CENTRUM CYFROWE

Experience and self-assessment

Experiences with distance education, even if they were limited to consultations with students on Skype or participation in webinars, have a significant impact on the teachers' approach to the challenges they face today.

Those surveyed who previously had experience with distance education **better assess how they are currently managing to teach their students.**

Average self-assessment of distance education in teachers teaching in grades 1-3:

WITHOUT EXPERIENCE ↘ 6,7

WITH EXPERIENCE ↘ 7,5

Average self-assessment of distance education in teachers teaching in grades 1-8:

WITHOUT EXPERIENCE ↘ 6,8

WITH EXPERIENCE ↘ 8,3

Average self-assessment of distance education in teachers teaching in grades 4-8:

WITHOUT EXPERIENCE ↘ 6,7

WITH EXPERIENCE ↘ 7,0

Q: How would you assess your dealing with distance education? On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest mark.

5. Key problems
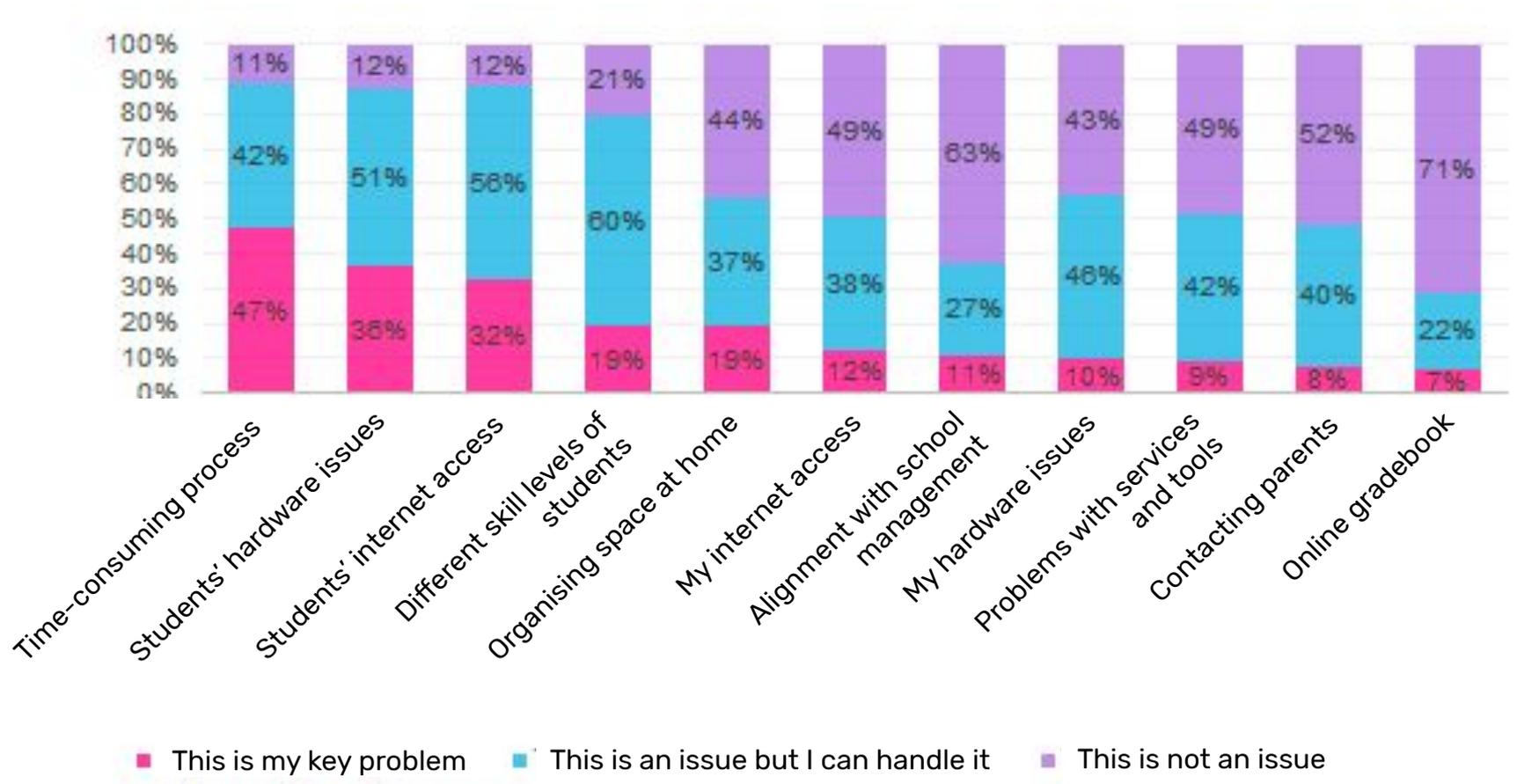
Q: What makes it difficult for you to conduct distance education?

Problems with online gradebooks

Although most teachers do not have experience with distance education, online gradebooks are widely used in most schools. Teachers who use Librus, Edu and similar systems on a daily basis have no problem using them for distance education as well.

The only problems arise from the fact that these systems are often overloaded. Lack of competences on the teachers' side is not an issue.

(Online gradebook systems are provided in Poland solely by commercial companies. Librus, Edu and Uonet are the three most popular solutions.

71% have no problem with the online gradebook

The big disappointment was when the online gradebook crashed – all the stress due to uncertainty if the system saved the data or not, whether I have to do it all over again. (IDI, F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Łódź)

My hardware issues

Only 10% of respondents indicated hardware issues as their key problem in implementing distance education.

This does not mean, however, that they do not face hardware issues at all.

The analysis of the answers to open questions indicates that teachers often have to secure themselves provide necessary equipment – they buy it (not hoping for the reimbursement of costs incurred) or borrow from family members.

The situation of teachers at private schools is slightly better, as these institutions are better equipped. However, lending school computers to teachers is not a common practice either.

Many respondents reported the need for official work equipment. Working on private equipment not only entails its excessive exploitation, but also raises concerns about the security of sensitive data or private documents. It also means making difficult decisions related to sharing such equipment with family members.

Photo: perzon seo, CC BY 2.0

My hardware issues (quotations)

*I need new equipment: a computer, headphones. **I ordered these at my own expense**. The parcel is on its way. (F, 0-5 years of teaching, private school, Greater Poland Voivodeship)*

***I've got one computer at home and that's the biggest limitation for me** because my daughter (high school graduate) has to use it often as well. Actually, I don't know from whom I could expect help in this regard. The school could rent me a laptop, but the quality of this equipment is so doubtful that working on it would take me twice as long. (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Łódź)*

***The danger of using private equipment, too** – private photos, online banking applications. It's dangerous, it shouldn't be like that. (IDI, F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Łódź)*

*The key problem is the equipment, or rather its quality. I didn't think that I would need a "powerful computer". The one I had been using for several years was enough to get the job done**. Maybe we should get some equipment voucher**. I believe that every teacher needs a computer in their work, regardless of the subject they teach. Perhaps it would be necessary to subsidize teachers in the form of some additional equipment, just as you pay a computer scientist extra to wear glasses, and the chemist to provide protective clothing. (F, 0-5 years of teaching, public school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)*

Students' hardware issues

36% of teachers indicate students' lack of equipment as their key problem with distance education.

The detailed list of problems is long:

- Starting with difficulties arising from the fact that parents working from home use equipment that was previously intended for use by the child;

- Through problems in families with many children, where the equipment is present but not sufficient if everyone is learning remotely

- Ending up with situations in poor or dysfunctional families – for example Roma communities or refugee families - where equipment is lacking.

These problems were revealed at the beginning of the pandemic and have been gradually solved thanks to external help (municipal governments, etc.) or self-organisation (parents borrow computers from companies where they are employed, orcollect funds to cover the expenses of families in need etc.)

Photo: Ivan Radic, CC BY 2.0

Students' hardware issues (quotations)

The most difficult issue in distance teaching in our region (Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship) is the fact that students lack equipment. (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship)

The problem arises from sharing equipment with siblings and parents, *younger children use the internet (and can participate) in online classes only when parents are at home and – after all – they have different work schedules.* (F, 0-5 years of teaching, public school, Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship)

I don't need support, *but it should be provided to the students who don't have access to the equipment and the internet. Special care should be given to children from large families and children under the care of the Social Welfare Centers and from orphanages.* (F, 6-10 years of teaching, public school, Mazovian Voivodeship)

*We have Roma families and in some Roma families – not all, as I want to emphasize – **parents do not really respect children's education**. We visit the children and leave them materials explaining what to do and after a week we pick them up. And it works.* (IDI, F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Łódź)

*We have a big problem with Roma and refugee families. **Children have no equipment and contact with parents is difficult**. We print materials and send them by post.* (IDI, F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Łódź)

CENTRUM CYFROWE

Problems with internet access

Problems with internet access concern mainly teachers and students from small towns and villages under 10,000 inhabitants.

The problem concerns more often access by students rather than by teachers.

Many teachers point to unstable connections as the most severe problem, as they generate issues with students missing classes when the internet is down, and then the need to help them join the online class again if a new connection is established.

12% of teachers describe their own access issues as the key problem

38% of teachers describe students' problems with access as the key problem

*Some students use a **radio connection or other, unstable connection**. (F, 0-5 years of teaching, public school, Greater Poland Voivodeship)*

*The problem is **the internet connection going down during class**. (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)*

Students' internet access (quotations)

Unfortunately, I was late to discover that most children don't have a computer or they have just one for the whole family. The lack of computer and internet for some students - at the moment the headmaster hasn't attempted to solve the issue. (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship)

I wish all children had microphones. Without this their participation in the lesson is passive. Well, since the 500+ child benefit programme didn't help, I don't know whom I should ask for support anymore. (F, 0-5 years of teaching, public school, Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship)

Providing pupils and teachers with uniform, functional equipment, along with functional applications and tools as well as high-speed internet connections, which would ensure equal access to education and equalise educational opportunities among children. For now, it's a distant dream and an ongoing struggle. Local governments haven't started to provide schools with equipment, so it's necessary to act at the governmental and national level. (F, 6-10 years of teaching, public school, Mazovian Voivodeship)

Internet resources available in my area leave a lot to be desired. Some students are even excluded from access to information and online lessons due to poor coverage or lack thereof. Also, most of the tools I use, except Teams, crashes due to overload. (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Podlaskie Voivodeship)

Contacting parents

For 40% of respondents, contacting parents is problematic.

As it turns out, **the problem does not only concern the lack of contact with dysfunctional parents** who ignore the fact that despite the pandemic, children are still required to learn, but also with parents who abuse the possibility of contacting teachers.

Facing the challenge of taking over part of the responsibility related to teaching their children, **parents use all available forms of contact to obtain immediate answers to both curricular and technical issues.**

There are children I know nothing about. There is no contact with their parents. What is the point of giving these children a computer from the commune office, when their parents did not care to make them learn? (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Lubusz)

Most often, parents communicate by e-mail and the online gradebook. But they also call me, too. They don't respect my work time. Last Saturday before Christmas, I had a call at 6:17am. I answered and asked for a phone call on a weekday between 8am and 4pm.
We could all save us half the time answering their questions if the parents had read the information I gave them beforehand.
Some of them are doing it on purpose – 9 messages sent with the same content in a row. I just decided not to write back (IDI, F, 11 years of teaching, public school, Łódź)

I'm terrified when I read on the forums that my colleagues receive 200 messages from parents on Librus (IDI, K, 0-5 years of teaching, private school, Lesser Poland Voivodeship)

SPOŁ ED

CENTRUM CYFROWE

Conflicting expectations

For some teachers, **ambiguous and often contradictory expectations that parents have** turn out to be problematic.

In some homes, **homework sent by teachers and online classes are treated as a relief to the parent**. They cherish the possibility of diverting the child's attention and time from issues at home to education, which can take place without the participation of a parent. These parents express their gratitude to teachers by phone and e-mail and encourage them to continue education in this form.

Others feel **overloaded, inadequately involved in matters related to education**, and express their resistance and disappointment.

The very same day I can answer a few calls from very satisfied and thankful parents, while other parents are angry with exactly the same issues. (F, 0-5 years of teaching, public school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)

In my class, I have very different parents, my relations with them have varied, so now these are even more tense. \Some parents are not going to get involved at all and they are annoyed that they have to. There are those who have always been involved so it's normal for them. I also meet parents whose shifting to working at home has changed their attitude and they started to look after their children more – they stay at home and they just get involved a lot more. They're also rather grateful and interested. Certainly, stressed out, but still friendly. (F, 0-5 years of teaching, public and private school, Pomeranian Voivodeship, IDI)

Alignment between school management and teachers

Although the problem of alignment between the management and the teachers seems not very serious at the moment, **it was certainly more visible at the initial stage of distance education. This has been confirmed through individual interviews**.

Teachers note that in the event of an urgent need to implement distance education a leader is required.

The role of the leader is not always taken over by the schoolmaster – sometimes it is the deputy schoolmasters or teachers who spontaneously assume this role - in a group or individually.

Teachers' experience shows that the lack of a leader in the first 2-3 weeks of lockdown resulted in long-lasting chaos and problems with distance education.

10% have a problem of alignment between the management and teachers

What I miss the most is cooperation with the classroom team. Lack of cooperation leads to overloading student mailboxes one day and complete lack of work another day (F, 11 years of teaching, public school, Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship)

SPOŁ ED

CENTRUM CYFROWE

Alignment between school management and teachers (quotations)

Exchanging experiences between teachers in my school - the management doesn't see such a need. They give permission to use paid training courses (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Lesser Poland Voivodeship)

Imposing rigid solutions by the management, complete lack of support – only requirements and orders. Monstrous bureaucracy, we must document and report everything we do every week. (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Mazovian Voivodeship)

The way the headmistress introduced rules was fantastic – the teachers can contact parents and students until 1pm, parents can contact teachers until 2pm, contacting is banned on weekends. Thus, we all have peace of mind, more time for ourselves and the family, with great attention to the most important matters. (IDI, F, over 11 years of teaching, more than one public school, Greater Poland Voivodeship)

Alignment between school management and teachers – good practices

Good practices introduced in schools include **respecting teachers' and parents' time,** as well as **transferring part of the decision-making about the shape of distance education to the teaching staff and parents**.

At 3:30pm we are supposed to take care of ourselves, finish work, the headmaster said so. I have a lot of support. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, social school, Masovian *Voivodeship*)

In our school, the management has always been inactive. However, deputy headmistresses are very sensible, they actually manage everything and listen to people's needs. They asked everyone for their opinion during the online teaching council and later we could add our comments in the survey. And then, guided by our answers, they created a lesson plan and operating principles. What's more, parents also completed the surveys and we also adapted to them. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, public and private school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)

Problems organising space and time at home

19% of respondents indicate difficulties in organizing space and time in their homes for conducting distance education as their key problem.

Having small children, the need to help children in their lessons and inadequate flat sizes generate for many teachers serious problems with working remotely - despite their readiness and willingness to do so.

The need to choose between looking after their children, working and a sense of responsibility for students is a source of stress and frustration.

I have children aged 5 and 2. My husband works remotely full time but he has to sit at the computer for eight hours. My day looks like that: I take care of children until 5pm, and then my husband takes his shift and I sit down to work until 11pm-12pm. We have practically no life outside of work and childcare.
And also, when I take care of my children, I am often in contact with students chatting and because of that I have the feeling that I neither take care of my children fully nor do I carry out the lessons fully. This is so hard. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, social school, Masovian Voivodeship)

Problems with using digital services

Despite the lack of experience with distance education, most of the respondents cope well with using various online services. **Only 9% of the respondents indicate this issue as their key problem, and 48% have no difficulty with services that they use.** They admit that learning new tools such as Office 365 or G Suite requires additional time, but they are able to overcome this obstacle.

In this context, **an extensive system of self-help among teachers** is extremely important – it is common practice is for younger teachers to help their less digitally competent colleagues.

Our friends who had their G Suite training last year record tutorials for others and explain everything, especially to the older, less competent. You can call them and they will help you, explain everything. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, public school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)

SPOŁ ED

CENTRUM CYFROWE

Problems with using digital services

Lack of digital skills among students and parents is a much bigger problem than teachers' own limitations. This is particularly noted by teachers in classes 1-3.

Respondents point out that children from older classes, although theoretically digitally native, are unable to receive e-mails or to navigate through e-learning platforms. They often have problems with such basic activities as writing in a text editor. In the teachers' opinion, this is the result of an inadequate computer science curriculum.

Additionally, in some cases parents limit children's access to digital technologies, for ideological reasons. Parents' digital competences are often not sufficient either.

Therefore, many teachers receive from students and parents questions about technical issues that go beyond the subject of teaching.

I struggle with individual problems of the parents resulting from the lack of basic digital skills, such as using e-mail, attaching a file, etc. – and what's worse, the parents blame the teacher wholly for these problems in the messages they write to me. (F, over 11 years of teaching, private school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)

Some parents, due to ideological reasons, limit access for their children to use new technologies,which makes them now actually digitally backward compared to their peers. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, social school, Masovian Voivodeship)

The core curriculum of computer science is absurd. The kids can code with a turtle, but they can't set up an email address. (IDI, 0-5 years of teaching, private school, Lesser Poland Voivodeship)

The process is time consuming

Regardless of the size and type of school, stage and years of teaching, the teachers' biggest problem is the time they need to devote to preparing distance education teaching. The process is time-consuming mainly due to following factors:

- The need to learn how to use new services and apps;
- The need to adapt teaching methods to the specificity of distance education;
- Combining different methods of distance education;
- Being open to contact with students and parents through various communication tools;
- Balancing home life with remote work;

47% of teachers indicate the process is time consuming and it is their key problem, while for 41% it is problematic

Photo: Anskit, CC BY-SA 2.0

SPOŁ
ED

CENTRUM
CYFROWE

The process is time consuming (quotations)

I am at work from morning to night. I give feedback to students during the day until 5pm, but I keep working every day until late at night (preparing everything for the next day for students). Equipment will not help here (F, 6-10 years of teaching, public school, Lublin)

I am tired, I work until late night hours to prepare distance lessons, but the feedback from both the parents and the students from the first class makes me happy and calm. I'm sure that the lessons are interesting, instructive and fun, developing children's imagination and creativity. Children's joy when we're seeing each other and talking on ZOOM compensates for all the worries and fatigue. I also regularly conduct online meetings with the parents as a form of an online interview. We support each other, a lot of conversations, warm relations and a lot of understanding in this situation which is difficult and unusual for ALL. (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)

The biggest problem for me is the lack of a clear distinction between work and free time, which extends my work day to over 12 hours. (M, 6-10 years of teaching, public school, Silesian Voivodeship)

CENTRUM CYFROWE

6. Distance education methods used

Teachers in classes 1-3, n = 120, methods used as key and auxiliary

I send students links to online lessons / materials that I find on the internet 92,5% ▲

I send students information about pages to read and exercises to do (in study books, notebooks and textbooks they keep at home) 86,6% ▲

I conduct individual consultations with students 76,6% ▲

I use an online education tool, eg. Eduelo, Learning Apps/Enauczanie.com, Google Classroom 69%

I send students a document with tasks for individual days (a schedule of all assigned tasks) 62,5%

I conduct live lessons (eg. Zoom, Skype) 49%

I record video lessons 37.5 % ▼

▲ Top 3 methods   ▼ Least popular

6. Distance education methods used

Teachers in classes 1-8, n = 84, methods used as key and auxiliary

I send students links to online lessons / materials that I find on the internet 83% ▲

I send students information about pages to read and exercises to do (in study books, notebooks and textbooks they keep at home) 54,7% ▲

I conduct individual consultations with students 82%

I use an online education tool, eg. Eduelo, Learning Apps/Enauczanie.com, Google Classroom 73,8% ▲

I send students a document with tasks for individual days (a schedule of all assigned tasks) 54,7%

I conduct live lessons (eg. Zoom, Skype) 54,7%

I record video lessons 31% ▼

▲ Top 3 methods   ▼ Least popular

6. Distance education methods used

Teachers in classes 4-8, n = 447, methods used as key and auxiliary

I send students links to online lessons / materials that I find on the internet 89,7% ▲

I send students information about pages to read and exercises to do (in study books, notebooks and textbooks they keep at home) 82,3% ▲

I conduct individual consultations with students 83% ▲

I use an online education tool, eg. Eduelo, Learning Apps/Enauczanie.com, Google Classroom 68,2%

I send students a document with tasks for individual days (a schedule of all assigned tasks) 54,6%

I conduct live lessons (eg. Zoom, Skype) 62,6%

I record video lessons 26,2% ▼

▲ Top 3 methods   ▼ Least popular

Other methods used

19% of teachers (n = 689) in the open question indicated methods and tools used for conducting distance education other than those mentioned in the cafeteria.

All for students

The pandemic situation clearly shows that the job of a teacher in Poland is primarily a calling, not a profession. The respondents have repeatedly emphasised that it is not easy for them, but they try their best not to disappoint their students.

Regulations regarding the functioning of schools during the pandemic did not require teachers to conduct online lessons. **Despite this, as many as 27% of teachers (n = 984) indicate conducting such lessons as their main method of work, and additional 30% use it as a supplementary method.**

The vast majority of teachers use more than one method of distance education, despite the fact that this makes teaching more time-consuming for them. They are mainly motivated by the desire to facilitate and improve the learning process for children.

I opened all communication channels to facilitate contact for children and parents. I use everything to make it easier for them to embrace this new type of education. Online consultation via Skype with students, the online gradebook, e-mail, Messenger, I created a Padlet. I've designed instructions for everything and allowed multiple forms of contact. (IDI, F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Łódź)

7. Other issues

The described problems are not the only challenges faced by teachers conducting distance education.

Among the problems indicated in the survey (open question about problems other than those mentioned in the cafeteria) the most frequently mentioned issues included the following:

- Fear of failure to implement the core curriculum and consequences exerted from the regional educational authority;
- Bureaucracy (extensive reporting that consumes a lot of time);
- Lack of clear guidelines from the school management or the Ministry on distance teaching;
- Fear of online hate
- Fear of pay cuts and frustration with unpaid overtime;
- The problem with grading (Who is assessed? How to verify independent work?);
- Psychological problems - their own and students';

Photo: natlas, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

CENTRUM
CYFROWE

Specificity of classes 1-3

Teachers in grades 1-3 note that their specificity is clearly different from older classes because children are dependent on their parents for help:
- They need help in using the equipment and using different apps and tools during classes;
- They need help in doing and sending back their homework (printing, scanning, etc.);

According to many teachers, this widens the differences between children from families where parents have time to participate in the child's distance education, and children from families that lack this time.

Some teachers emphasise that the specificity of the core curriculum of grades 1-3 gives teachers greater flexibility in rescheduling the curricular material to the time after the pandemic.

My heart is bleeding because I know that some children just won't do anything. And they will have to deal with a horrible backlog, it pains me to think how much catching up they will need to do. (IDI, K, 0-5 years of teaching, private and public school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)

Children with special needs

In schools for students with special needs, teachers point out the **specific difficulties in children with certificates**. In their case, distance education means a **significant, time-consuming involvement of parents**. As a consequence, some of them do not participate in distance education at all, experience exclusion, and others participate to a very limited extent.

The participation of an assisting teacher in all lessons and direct cooperation with parents in decreasing the amount of work for these students was mentioned as good practice.

Some teachers also indicated problems faced by **children who do not have official certificates of special needs, as as well as children with specific difficulties** (reduced intellectual capabilities, shyness, stuttering). At the same time, in the case of the latter, it turns out that distance education is beneficial and helps to fulfil the child's potential.

Parents cannot cope with the situation, particularly the parents of children with disability certificates. They need help as they can't do anything on their own (K, 6-10 years of teaching, public school, Mazovian Voivodeship).

Children with disability certificates (quotations)

There are differences in level between students and distance education certainly deepens them. But there are also situations when it makes it easier, for example, children who have problems with writing, with calligraphy now can send their assignments written on the computer, so they can gain something from the situation. (IDI, M, over 11 years of teaching, Greater Poland Voivodeship)

Distance education is certainly not easy for shy or aloof students. Conversations during an online lesson or even a chat are a great challenge for them. (IDI, F, 6-10 years of teaching, private school, Lesser Poland Voivodeship)

In my class, the most shy and aloof girl has opened a lot since the start of remote education. She gained some new energy and it is a surprise to me because I would not expect it. (IDI, F, over 11 years of teaching, more than one public school, Greater Poland Voivodeship)

Unfortunately, it all depends, but of course those who experience hardship in life everyday, now face even harder situation. We all know that it depends on the atmosphere in the house, what is going on there. (IDI, F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Podlaskie Voivodeship)

Psychological issues of teachers

Teachers experience tremendous tension associated with distance learning. The stress associated with the pandemic felt by everyone is superimposed by the stress resulting from their work, which in a pandemic situation some compare to PTSD.

They feel lonely, negatively assessed, exposed to extremely difficult conditions, and without any institutional support. **Some teachers experience resulting psychosomatic disorders**.

Those who find support in the group of teachers with whom they share similar difficulties declare in our survey a better mental state.

Individual cases of teachers from private schools covered by the school's pedagogical care show that such good practices are effective forms of support.

Photo: ryan melaugh, CC BY 2.0

Psychological issues in teachers (quotations)

We don't have time for our regular lives. We are on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I throw up and cry everyday, not sure if I meet this cosmos of requirements. The management has no idea what is going on at homes in children and teachers, how deeply poignant the situation is. (F, over 11 years of teaching, state-owned)

I lack mental and psychological support. I struggle with dilemmas, I cope with students' fears and grief and also my parents' fears. I can't deal with this. I can organise everything else, learn to overcome, but not this. (F, over 11 years of teaching, more than one public school)

We actually created a support group with the other two English teachers and we support each other not only technologically, but above all psychologically. Because we really can't do it. With little children at home, with such time pressure, with expectations, this is simply too much. (F, 0-5 years of teaching, social school, Masovian Voivodeship)

In our private school, every teacher is supervised by a psychologist once a week, so we are looked after. Of course, teachers in the public school are left alone. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, public and private school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)

SPOŁ ED

CENTRUM CYFROWE

Psychological issues of students

According to teachers, students are also subjected to enormous stress, as their lives are turned upside down.

Children feel lonely, they miss their friends and their daily routine. They often move too little during the day, which additionally negatively affects their mood.

Often, parents are not able to give them proper support. According to some teachers, schools are losing the opportunity for **distance learning to become an element of providing support to children in this difficult situation.**

Some teachers manage to **organise distance meetings, during which students talk to each other**, tell stories and even have fun. They emphasise that such activities have **a positive effect on the emotional state of children.**

These children often just suffer and need help. Unfortunately, often neither parents nor school can help or recognise such a need. (IDI, F, 0–5 years of teaching, public and private school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)

Psychological issues in students (quotations)

After the first month, children don't cope with isolation very well. They feel lonely, parents often have to work a lot from home, or the other way around – they have lost their jobs and therefore the situation at home is far from good so the lack of a change of perspective in the form of going to school is very difficult. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, public school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)

Sometimes children call me and cry. For example, one girl told me her mom has to go to work, so she sits home alone, so it's very hard for her. I agreed to call this girl on Wednesdays. In our recent call, she just cried for 20 minutes. (IDI, F, over 11 years of teaching, more than one public school, Greater Poland Voivodeship)

At school, our children suffer from depression, I know that they use the help of the school psychologist, who is available online for students, teachers and parents. But there are also children who just hate sitting in front of the computer for so many hours. And it also affects their mind. (F, 0-5 years, social school, Mazovian Voivodeship)

We shouldn't forget that many students have bad associations with school, especially the ones who had learning difficulties. And now suddenly these children must experience school at home, a space that should be stress-free. (M, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Greater Poland Voivodeship)

Core curriculum and empathy

Teachers point out that the **lack of empathy and flexibility manifested in putting the core curriculum first – instead of the mental health of children, parents and teachers – is a serious mistake.**

They predict far-reaching negative consequences of such approach – in the short term:
- psychological burden exerted on students,
- negative reactions from parents,
- deepening inequalities between children.

And in the longer term:
- further imbalancing their difficult relationships with parents,
- breach of trust in school as an institution,
- further damage to teachers' professional image.

*We should give up the mandatory implementation of the core curriculum, because **not all students (and teachers)** have equal opportunities and possibilities.* (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Podkarpackie Voivodeship)

Core curriculum and empathy (quotations)

Exemptions from the obligation to follow the core curriculum - this would give the opportunity to flexibly adapt to the needs of various students in this mentally aggravating situation (also for the teachers). Teachers experience a lack of support from the system and other teachers who fail to understand that the mandatory implementation of the core curriculum and grading children should not be a priority in teaching especially in this situation. There is a lack of empathy for the student, their possibilities and conditions in which they are forced to learn. (F, 0-5 years of teaching, private school, Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship)

I would expect support from the management and the government - understanding that students' productivity drops to 30% when learning online. Myself I don't expect from them as much as in the pre-epidemic times when they attended school. *It would be nice to hear "as much as you can do is enough, we don't expect that children cover as much material as usual and nor that they produce as much text" "The situation is unprecedented and we have to let go of certain requirements / expectations"* Preparing an online lesson takes much more time than usual, lessons tend to be shorter to allow more time for preparation. Looking at the screen (20+ children or documents) 8am-4pm is exhausting and taxing for the senses. My head hurts and my eyes hurt. Students certainly also exeperience similar effects. It would be good to have the management's support in finding a balance. (F, over 11 years of teaching, private school, Masovian Voivodeship)

Give the credit to your dad

Some parents, out of convenience, willingness to support their child or need to finish school activities early on a given day, do homework for their children or significantly "support" them,

Teachers, who know their students well and their abilities, are able to quickly identify which students have used the help of adults.

Teachers do not feel comfortable giving grades for work that has not been done by students on their own. They often do not know how, without causing negative emotions, to inform parents that children should do their homework independently.
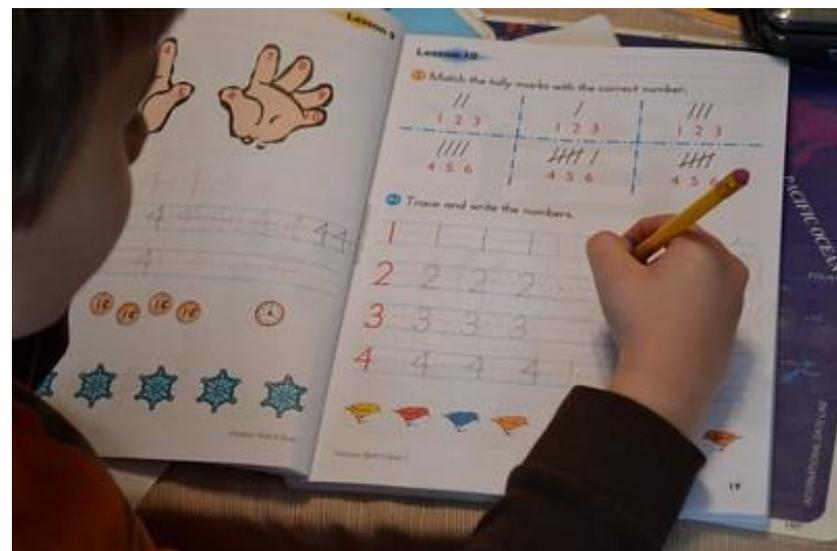
To tell the truth, I don't know who to assess. A student, the whole family, a parent? I know what the possibilities of a given student are and I see when the work is not done by them alone. But I have no way of verifying it. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, public school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)

SPOŁ ED

CENTRUM CYFROWE

Fear of hate speech

Teachers in grades 4-8 are afraid of hate speech and fear for their image. They are aware that students are able to record remote lessons, even when this is prohibited by school rules.

Many respondents state directly that they teach lessons only in a form they deem safe – that is, they only send lists of tasks and links to additional materials.

This is not due to the reluctance to conduct distance education or the lack of appropriate competences, but to the real fear of "becoming the laughing stock of the internet."

Fear of legal consequences generates additional problems. Teachers fear conducting classes using "unofficial" tools, such as Messenger or Whatsapp. Even if they are useful for the educational process.

Screenshots from hateful online videos. Source: YouTube
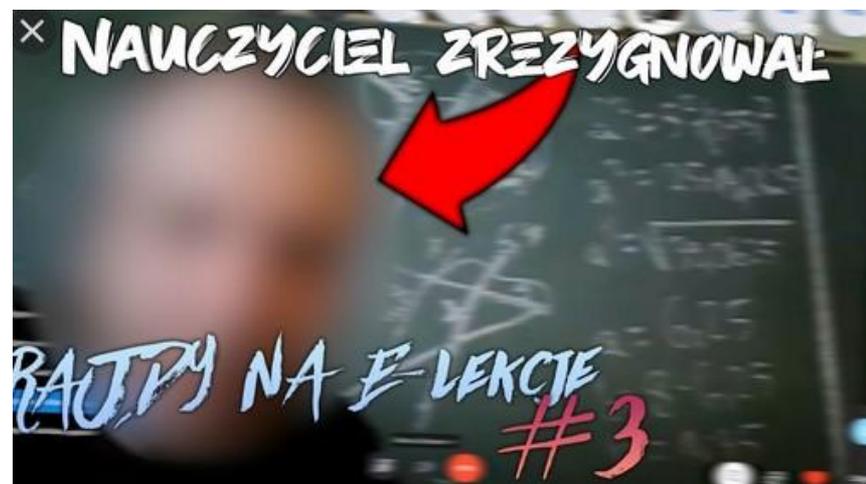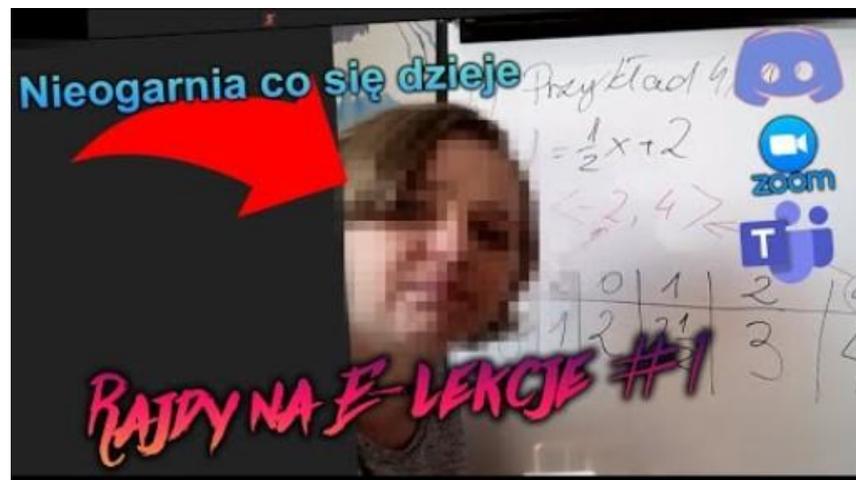
Fearing of hate speech and legal responsibility (quotations)

I don't like the legal status of online lessons. We haven't had such cases, but I know about such situations. Breaking into online lessons and playing porn movies, showing ugly pictures, using abusive nicknames. The teacher is responsible for each lesson, for such issues and why should they? I try to avoid such situations – I have a waiting room, I allow cameras there, then the cameras are turned off. I close the room after everybody has logged in. But then a student may disconnect, freeze, and when this happens, they can no longer return to the room. (IDI, F, over 11 years of experience, public school, Łódź)

Many teachers have directly refused to conduct online lessons for fear of hate and public image. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, public school, Pomeranian Voivodeship)

We did a brainstorming session and Google tools won the vote. First of all, it's a free tool and they offer a package for schools. Also, the rules of the GDPR apply to us. It's a safe tool. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, private school, Lesser Poland)

I also think that among teachers there are fears of students recording the image of a teacher or lesson and uploading into the internet. You know what happens next... The wave of hate speech is hard to stop ... (F, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Podkarpackie Voivodeship)

Unified platform vs. chaos

In some schools, the management provided teachers with free choice of methods and tools for implementing distance education. This situation generates chaos - students get lost in the multitude of platforms and communication tools, while teachers are unsure if the options they choose are the best.

Many teachers directly expressed the need for the Ministry of Education to create a single platform for distance education shared by all schools. If that is impossible, a top-down decision regarding the choice of services and tools would be a second option.

In schools, where management unified use of services and tools, both students and teachers adapted to the new reality faster. The self-help system between teachers also works more efficiently.

There are no clear guidelines in the regulation. No guidance from the authorities. The headmaster doesn't try to establish anything with the teachers either. In theat my school. The result is that some teachers overburden children with tasks, while some others do nothing, and as we all know we will get the same salaries. (F, over 11 years of t *end, everyone works as they please* eaching, public school, Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship)

There is no option for everyone to do it their own way. The decision was made to choose one mode of work for the good of the students to avoid chaos. Otherwise, for kids it would be impossible to understand. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, private school, Lesser Poland Voivodeship)

8. What happens after the pandemic?

Despite the multitude of difficulties, many teachers see the benefits of distance education. They note that familiarising themselves with such an educational method will be helpful in the future to work with absent students and students requiring individual consultation or individual curriculum.

The current educational formula can also work well for extracurricular clubs as it offers students better participation possibilities.

Many teachers also appreciate the meeting formula with other online teachers and mutual learning. They understand the point in familiarising themselves with e-learning tools and further improving their competences in this area.

After these two weeks of G Suite trial, I created a survey, an evaluation, myself. And of the 50 students, almost everyone wrote that it's great that they sit in pajamas and can learn stuff from home in an interesting way. I guess some form of distance education will stay with us after the whole thing is over. (IDI, F, 0-5 years of teaching, private school, Lesser Poland Voivodeship)

The lessons for teachers should take place once a month, which unfortunately is not the case. Sadly, when you come to a peer lesson, you just peek and criticize, not share the learning experience.

This situation changes a lot. We have to start learning from each other. Maybe this will translate into better cooperation. (IDI, M, over 11 years of teaching, Greater Poland Voivodeship)

CENTRUM
CYFROWE

Results of distance education

23% of teachers do not see the need to repeat the material covered with students in the distance education period. It can be assumed then that this group covers the curriculum smoothly, students appear in class, work independently and send back their homework.

17% of teachers believe that the material will have to be repeated in large part, and 30% do not have an opinion. This means that they cannot verify the teaching process. They cannot exclude the possibility that the effects of their work will be mediocre.

Some teachers say openly that schools should be suspended and the school year should be rescheduled.

At present, the state should focus 100% on protecting its citizens, the school year should end, and the authorities should begin rewriting a new core curriculum for distance education and the next school year. (IDI, M, over 11 years of teaching, public school, Greater Poland)

Results of distance education

Do you think that after returning to school students should cover the material from the distance education period again?
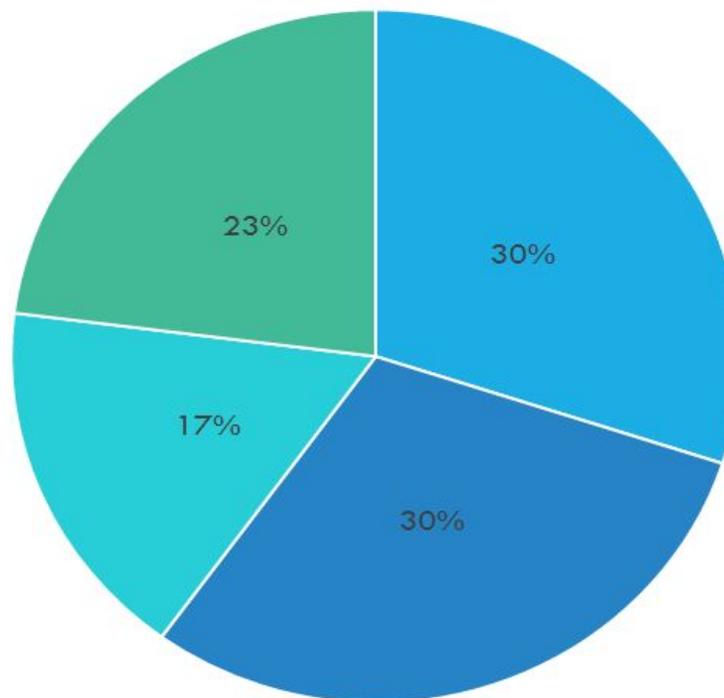
- Yes, in a limited extent
- I cannot say
- Yes, in a significant extent
- There is no need

CENTRUM CYFROWE

1. Methodology

- The survey was carried out from Apr 1 to Apr 17, 2020

- The research process was based on methodological triangulation:

STAGE 1 ☐ QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH (online survey with open questions)

STAGE 2 ☐ ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE MATERIAL (ANSWERS TO OPEN QUESTIONS *), IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS TO PROBE IN THE NEXT STUDY

STAGE 3☐ QUALITATIVE RESEARCH (individual in-depth interviews - IDI)

* The quotations in this report come from individual in-depth interviews and from answers to open-ended questions in the survey

2. Research sample

QUANTITATIVE STUDY

- Representative nationwide sample
- Teachers in primary schools (grades 1–8): public schools , social schools and private schools
- **n = 984 ***

QUALITATIVE STUDY *

- Targeted selection of the sample based on the problems identified in the process of analysing the quantitative material
- Respondents varied in terms of place of residence, size and type of school, class range 1–3, 4–8 and 1–8 and years of teaching.
- **10 IDI** (about 1.5 hours)

* Due to our research schedule, questions about the methods and services used broken down by the teaching stage, was analyzed at n = 689.

# 3. Sample distribution in quantitative research

GENDER
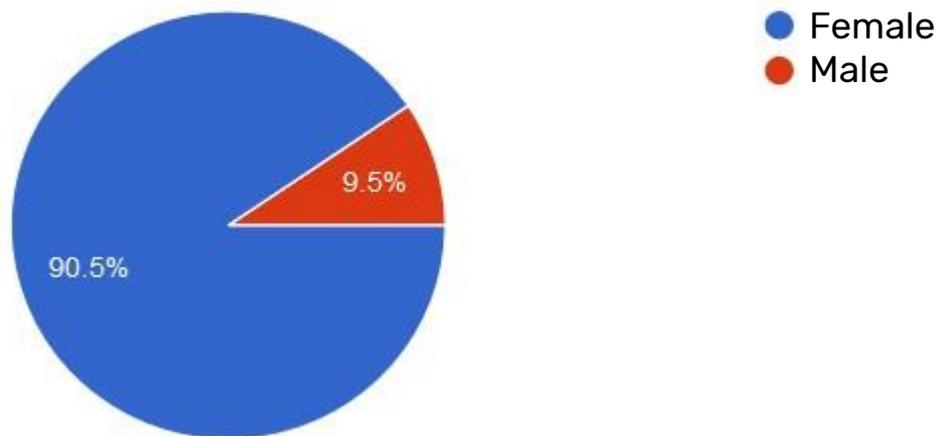
Female
Male

90.5%

9.5%

SPOŁ ED

CENTRUM CYFROWE

3. Sample distribution in quantitative research

AGE

- Under 30 yo
- 30-40 yo
- 45-60 yo
- Over 60 yo

41.2%

8.5%

49%
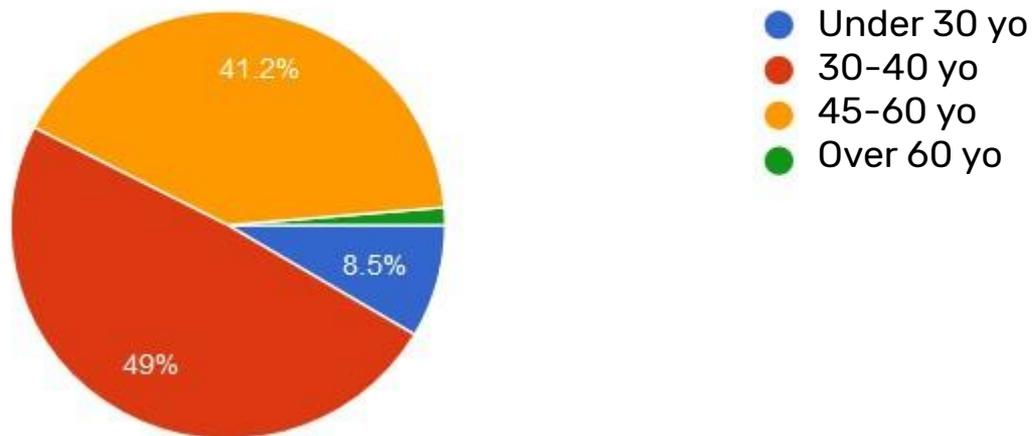
3. Sample distribution in quantitative research

YEARS WORKED

- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- Over 11 years

72.9%
13.4%
13.7%
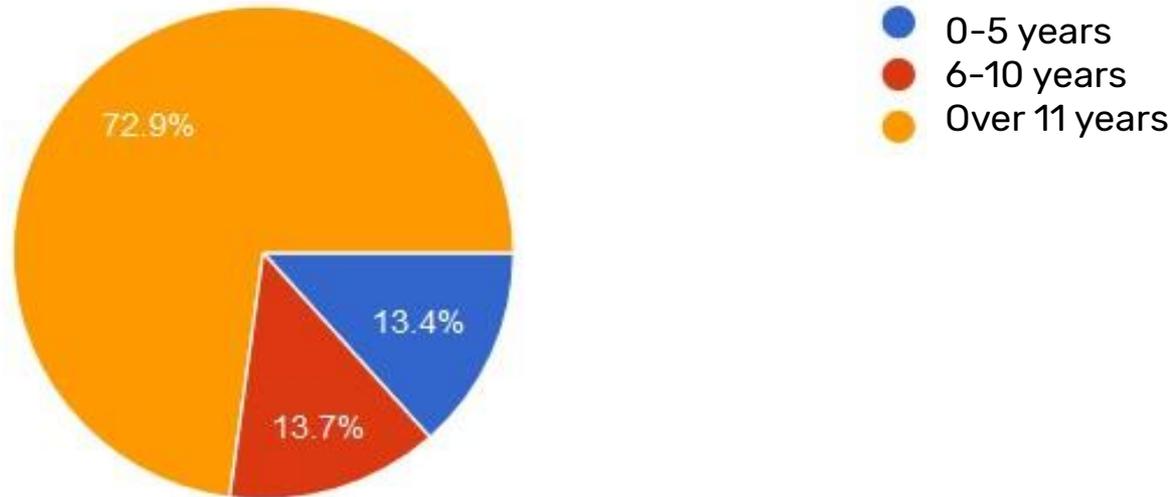
3. Sample distribution in quantitative research

PLACE OF RESIDENCE
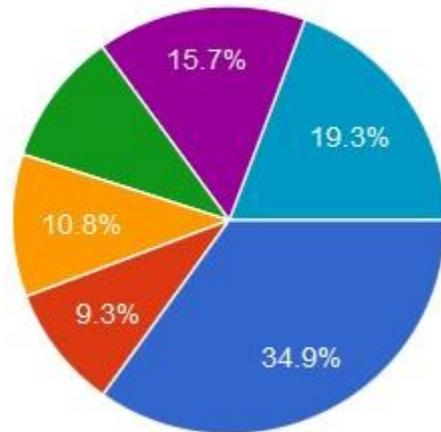
- Town, under 10,000 inhabitants
- Town, 11,000 and 20,000 inhabitants
- Town, 21,000 and 50,000 inhabitants
- Town, 51,000 and 100,000 Inhabitants
- City between 101,000 and 500,000 inhabitants
- City over 500,000 inhabitants

Pie chart values: 34.9%, 9.3%, 10.8%, 15.7%, 19.3%

3. Sample distribution in quantitative research

REGION
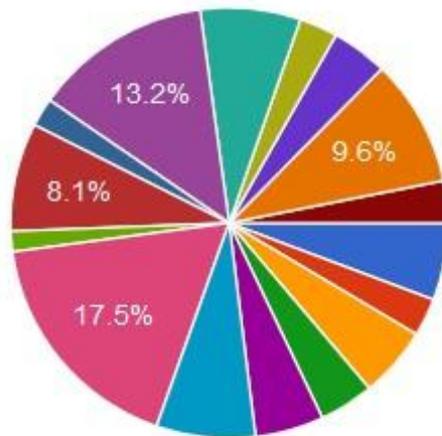
Pie chart legend:
- Lower Silesian
- Kujawy-Pom.
- Lubelskie
- Lubusz
- Łódź
- Lesser Poland
- Masovian
- Opole
- Podkarpackie
- Podlaskie
- Pomeranian
- Silesian
- Świętokrzyskie
- Warmian-Masurian
- Greater Poland
- West Pomeranian

Values shown: 13.2%, 9.6%, 8.1%, 17.5%

3. Sample distribution in quantitative research

HOW MANY SCHOOLS DO YOU TEACH AT?
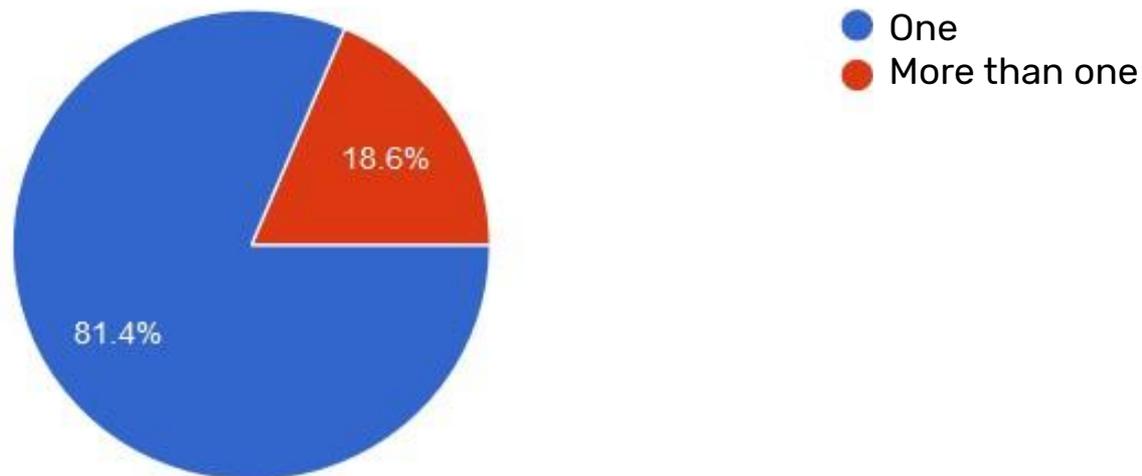
● One
● More than one

18.6%

81.4%

3. Sample distribution in quantitative research

SCHOOL TYPE
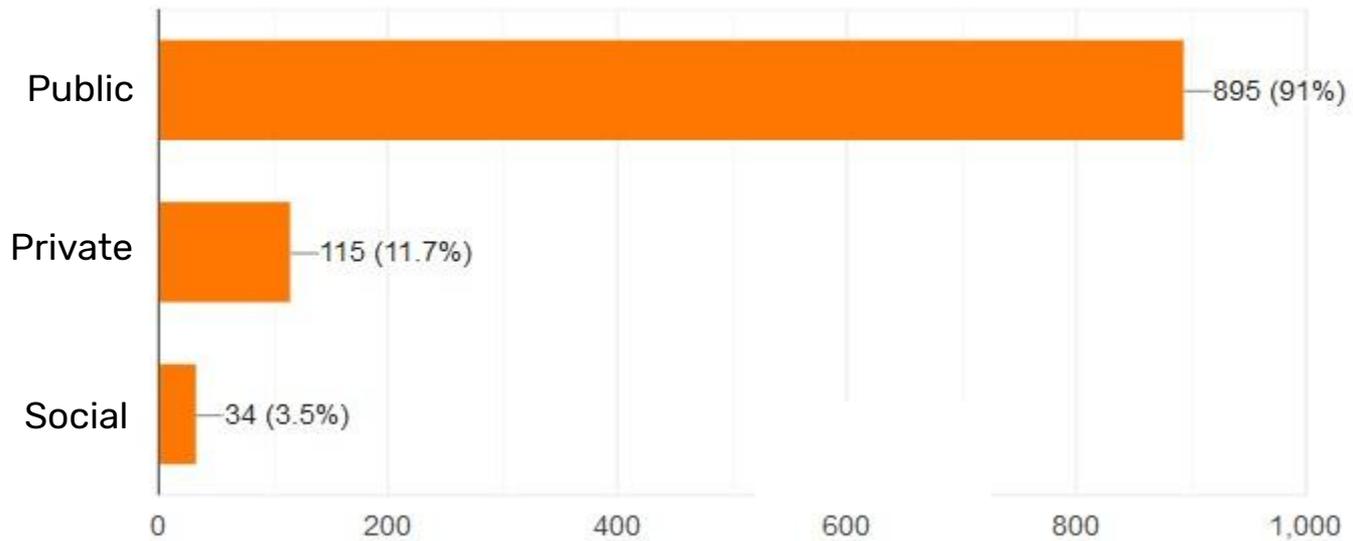
Public: 895 (91%)
Private: 115 (11.7%)
Social: 34 (3.5%)

3. Sample distribution in quantitative research

SCHOOL SIZE

School size	Count (Percentage)
Under 50 students	29 (2.9%)
51-150 students	214 (21.7%)
151-500 students	480 (48.8%)
Over 500 students	285 (29%)
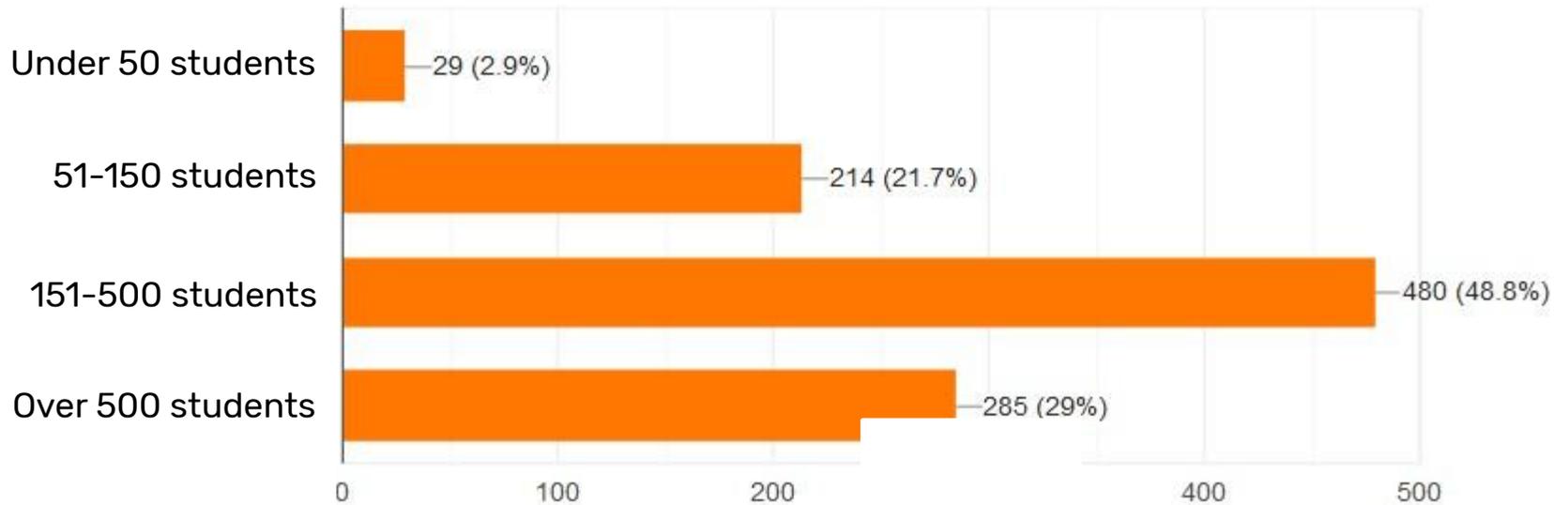
# 3. Sample distribution in quantitative research

CLASS TYPE TAUGHT
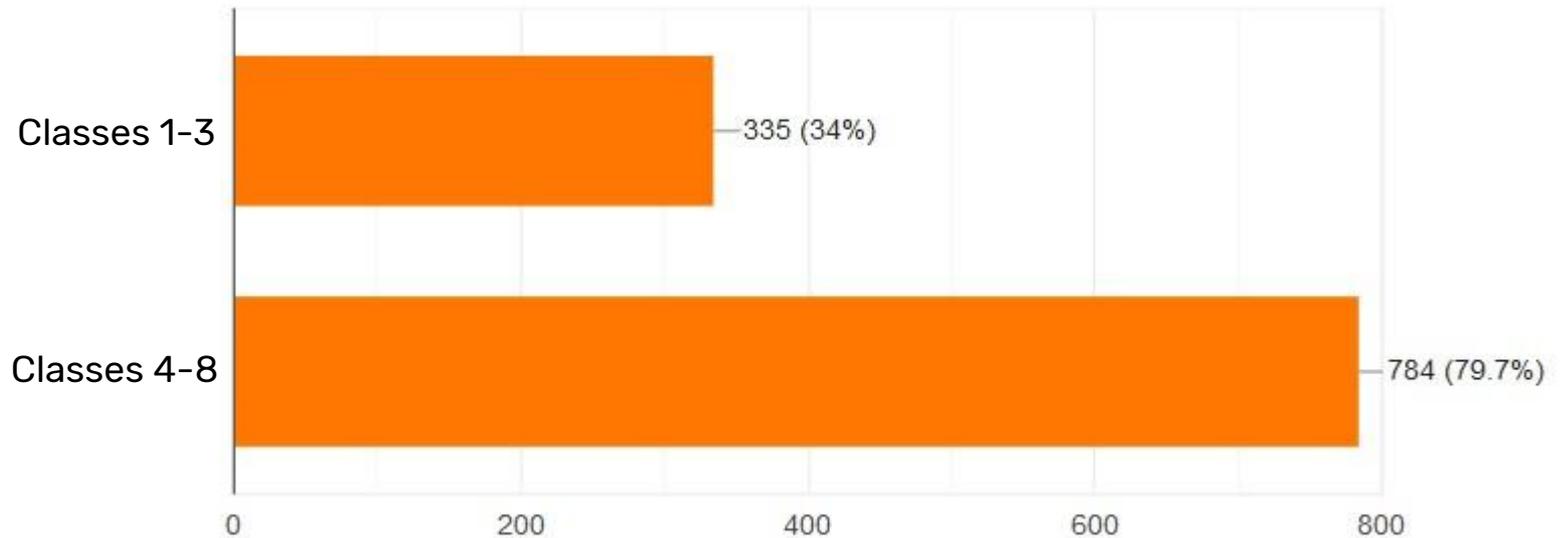
Research implementation and report preparation:
Anna Buchner
Marta Majchrzak
Maria Wierzbicka

All icons are from the Noun Project, available under Creative Commons Zero.
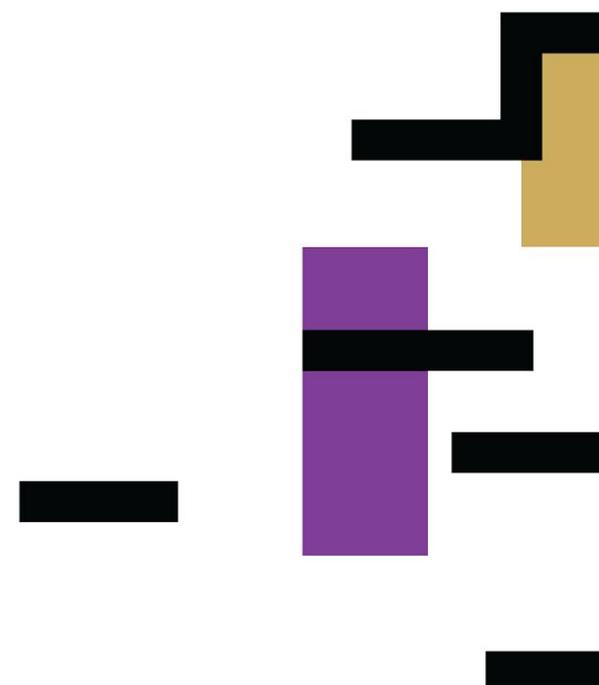
Research manager

Magdalena Biernat
mbiernat@centrumcyfrowe.pl

CENTRUM
CYFROWE

Supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

WILLIAM + FLORA
Hewlett Foundation

Partners

CEO
CENTRUM EDUKACJI
OBYWATELSKIEJ

SZKOŁA
Z KLASĄ
FUNDACJA