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OPERATION OF SPECIAL SCHOOLS FOR PUPILS IN GRADES 4–8 WITH MODERATE AND SEVERE INTELLECTUAL AND MULTIPLE DISABILITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN POLAND*

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has particularly affected pupils with intellectual and multiple disabilities. The operation of special schools, which are most often attended by such pupils, varied according to country, but most often these schools remained open. However, teaching pupils during the pandemic turned out to be a new and difficult challenge for teachers and staff.
Research Aim: The aim of the study was to characterise the operating of special schools for pupils with intellectual and multiple disabilities in Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Method: The research was conducted using a questionnaire survey sent to special schools and posted on the online portal "Special Education". Eighty-one teachers at special schools served as a sample in the study.
Results: The study showed that schools provided mainly regular or hybrid learning, with traditional learning more often in place with pupils in grades 4–6 and remote and hybrid – with pupils in grades 7–8. In the case of remote or hybrid forms, teachers used electronic communicators and platforms for online lessons. However, the learners lacked the ability to work independently and interact directly with the teacher and other pupils. The teachers, therefore, tried to compensate for this lack by using illustrative materials and making sure that their class understood everything.
Conclusions: Special schools have overcome a difficult challenge by using both traditional methods and implementing remote ones. Some instruments of remote learning can be used in the future to increase pupils' independence and their ability to use electronic devices.

Keywords: special school, pandemic, a pupil with an intellectual disability, a pupil with multiple disabilities.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly and suddenly changed many areas of social life, including school education. School children and adolescents were particularly vulnerable to its negative impact because of the closure of schools or a reduction in their functioning, the need to undertake remote or hybrid learning, and social distance (Poleszak and Pyżalski, 2020). Organisational changes were accompanied by many socio-emotional factors such as fear for their own health and that of their loved ones, concern about access to medical care and necessary support, as well as loosening social ties, distancing, isolation, limiting personal rights through a ban on free movement or the obligation to wear masks (Duszyński et al., 2020).

Those sensitive vulnerable to adverse changes in their environment are children and young people with disabilities who, on account of their intellectual and multiple disabilities, attend special schools. This is a group that requires special support from teachers and professionals due to the complexity of their needs, including health needs, and the subsequent need for the school to provide comprehensive and multi-specialist rehabilitation (Zaorska and Kosakowski 2002; Zaorska, 2013; Aishworiya and Kang, 2021).

This group is particularly exposed to the consequences of the pandemic because of a greater likelihood of health deterioration (Rosencrans et al., 2021) due to a reduced ability to provide adequate self-protection. These individuals require assistance from others in both accessing information and protecting themselves from becoming ill (UNICEF, 2020a; OECD, 2020c; Courtenay and Perera, 2020). As reported (OECD 2020c), this group was furthermore more exposed to difficulties in accessing necessary services.

The pandemic and the sanitary regime have had an adverse impact not only on physical health, but also on mental health, especially for individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism. This is because these individuals may become obsessed with information related to COVID-19, which would be understandable given that obsessive thinking and obsessive-compulsive disorder are common among individuals with autism (Meier et al., 2015). This can lead to excessive levels of anxiety and paranoid thinking, resulting in behavioural problems. Co-occurring obsessive-compulsive disorders can be compounded by the need for meticulous personal hygiene. These stimuli can lead to overwhelmingly high stress levels leading to mental illness. However, many behavioural and psychological interventions could not be implemented due to a significant reduction in direct access to specialised services, making it difficult to access the appropriate interventions (Courtenay and Perera, 2020). A study by Mete Yesil et al. (2022) showed that some children with special needs experienced a regression in development as a result of lack of access to specialised services.

It is important to investigate how special schools, the main provider of educational and therapeutic services, operated during this period of time. So far there have been few Polish research reports published on the education of pupils with intellectual and multiple disabilities under pandemic conditions (Kaługa, 2020; Zamkowska, 2021). The aim of the paper is, therefore, to present the results of research conducted among special school teachers in Poland on the operating of these schools. In the conclusion, some practical suggestions for post-pandemic education are provided.

ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN SELECTED COUNTRIES AND POLAND

As OECD (2020a; 2020d) reports show, during the pandemic, the organisational arrangements by schools for pupils with special educational needs varied from country to country. In some, such as Norway and Finland, these schools remained open (Lindblad et al., 2021). Similarly, schools were not closed in Sweden to ensure continuity of contact with teachers and educators for young children and disadvantaged pupils. In Portugal, some Learning Support Centres provided both direct and distance support. Schools have strengthened their cooperation with the Resource Centres for Inclusion to ensure the continuity of their specialist services for pupils with special educational needs.

In Turkey, some teachers conducted online lessons and shared worksheets with all pupils via WhatsApp groups. However, several issues of concern were also noted: pupils with special educational needs were not able to regularly follow lessons on TV, many of them did not participate in online classes, and their teachers did not give them feedback. Moreover, some pupils with special educational needs did not benefit from educational support, and there were difficulties in communication and cooperation between teachers, families and pupils. Children were unwilling and unable to adapt to distance education (Yazcayir and Gurgur, 2021). Specialists employed at Special Education and Rehabilitation Centres (SERC) worked in different ways: some followed a regular weekly schedule, others a shortened one, while for others most educational activities were suspended for a time or even no educational activities took place (Yakut, 2021).

In the UK, the government announced in March 2020 that educational facilities would have to be closed to most pupils. Exceptions included pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) who could continue to attend school. These are mostly learners who require individual support, personal care, and are unable to comply with social distancing and safety measures on their own.

Special education, therefore, was most often provided in a regular format, and sometimes in a hybrid or remote way. Both the regular and remote mode posed some

difficulties. According to Skipp et al. (2021), the main problem experienced during the first lockdown was a lack of staff. Many pupils required individualised support, which was difficult to provide due to staff shortages (illness in the family, staff coming from risk groups – e.g. the elderly, pregnant women; teachers having to provide care for their own child and having to stay at home). It was also difficult to maintain an appropriate distance between staff and pupils due to the need for care and therapy activities requiring close physical contact and the small size of therapy rooms.

According to the UN report (2020, pp. 7–8), "children with disabilities and special needs are especially hard to serve through distance programmes. The quality and accessibility of distance learning can be expected to vary greatly both across and within countries" When long- or short-term remote education is implemented, government and non-governmental organisations have provided pupils with access to digital educational resources.

In the United Kingdom, the government has pooled resources useful for working for pupils with special educational needs and their families. The National Autistic Society has developed and made available materials for both children and adults with multiple disabilities (OECD, 2020d). Various types of materials were used, both traditional (books, sheets and paper resources) and remote (educational websites or apps; online resources and online conversations between staff and pupils; videos produced by the teacher; school/college virtual learning environments; online "live" lessons) (Skipp et al., 2021, p. 32). Moreover, support staff and teachers pay the families visits at home.

School heads in the UK have found that for pupils with disabilities who are at risk of sensory overload while working at a monitor, non-digital solutions are preferable to their digital counterparts. The main goal of adapting the curriculum, teaching and support to the needs of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) pupils was to make them "tangible" rather than digital. This is because some pupils with complex sensory needs found it difficult to engage solely in screen work (Ofsted, 2021). Unfortunately, even though schools provided adequate digital or printed materials, parents or carers of children with SEND often felt that in the long term they would not be able to maintain the level of learning and specialist teaching that their child requires (Daniels et al., 2020).

Another factor adversely affecting the effectiveness of classes was the lack of direct contact with the teacher and therapist. Meguid et al. (2022) showed that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the abilities of children with Down's syndrome, even those who benefited from rehabilitation sessions. Their dependence on social interaction may have limited the benefits of virtual sessions. Their cognitive, motor and especially language skills were impaired despite the use of online sessions. The inability to provide adequate quality services and high stress levels among teachers were also pointed out by Steed et al. (2021), with better collaboration with families as a positive aspect of remote education.

A study by Jeste et al. (2020, p. 827) in the US and another 28 countries indicate that the majority of respondents' children lost access to at least one therapy or education service as a result of the pandemic. Only slightly more than half "reported that their child received at least some continued services through tele-education". What enabled schools to cope with the pandemic crisis was primarily collaborative decision-making and good communication between school leaders and staff to keep pupils safe during educational activities (Kusumi et al., 2022).

In Poland, according to a report of the Supreme Chamber of Control on education in special schools, in spring 2020, remote learning was implemented in all schools. However, the schools were not prepared for this change and, unlike in the United Kingdom, did not receive adequate assistance. Problems with organising distance learning were confirmed by 24 (10%) surveyed districts. The most common problems that emerged included: 1) unpreparedness of schools for remote teaching due to a lack of appropriate equipment and staff and a lack of teachers' preparedness to work in virtual space, as it was the case in Turkey; 2) problems concerning parents and pupils – limited access to the Internet, inability to use computer programs, technical problems related to a lack of unified resources available at learners' homes, limitations of cognitive functions of children, parents' disabilities; 3) a lack of online teaching materials adapted to learners with intellectual disabilities (Departament Nauki, Oświaty i Dziedzictwa Narodowego, 2020).

The obligation of remote learning ceased to be effective in October 2020, when the Minister of Education and Science (OJ.1870, 2020; OJ.1960, 2020), required principals of special schools to decide for themselves on the mode of teaching in classes 4–8 of elementary and secondary schools, and from 18 January 2021 also in classes 1–3. Similarly to Sweden, Finland, and the UK, most schools in Poland, from that time on, provided in-school learning, adapting their teaching to the current health situation of students and their teachers.

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

The above-mentioned research shows that special schools have tended to operate as usual, providing safe educational and therapeutic conditions for pupils as far as possible and, if required, making use of remote learning. The purpose of the research presented in this paper is to analyse the operation of Polish special schools educating pupils with intellectual and multiple disabilities in accordance with regulations or restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following research problems were posed:

1. How was learning provided in special schools in the summer semester of 2020–2021?

2. What kind of support was available to pupils with intellectual and multiple disabilities during online classes?
3. What kind of materials supported remote learning?
4. What kinds of difficulties did teachers and pupils experience?
5. Did the grade level differentiate the learning and educational support as well as the difficulties experienced by teachers and pupils during the pandemic?

The comparison of results for classes 4–6 and 7–8, applied in the analysis, is justified by the fact that in the core curriculum (OJ. 356, 2017) for students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities apart from two educational stages (grades 1–3 and grades 4–8), in the guidelines for two key subjects, such as Polish language and mathematics, additional differentiation between classes 4–6 and 7–8 appears. This division may suggest that the learning process of pupils from these two age groups might also slightly differ when remote learning taken into account.

RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

A structured questionnaire survey addressed to teachers of special schools for pupils with intellectual and multiple disabilities was used in the study. The questionnaire consisted of six demographics questions (about age, gender, education, length of service and employment) and eleven closed-ended questions concerning forms of learning and delivery of rehabilitation classes, support available to pupils with disabilities and teachers during online classes, materials supporting remote learning, difficulties experienced by teachers and pupils during regular learning as well as benefits of remote learning that can be used in the future. In constructing the tool, some items concerning the adaptation of learning for students with disabilities during the pandemic as well asaccessible and missing elements for pupils with disabilities in remote learning, included in the study by Lewandowska (2020), were applied.

The study was carried out online in October 2021, using the Forms platform. The request to complete the questionnaire was sent to 53 special primary schools and special educational centres in Poland, as well as to a Portal for Teachers called "Special Education". Schools in the following voivodeships were surveyed: Masovia (11), Lesser Poland (5), Silesia (5), Greater Poland (4), Lower Silesia (4), Lublin voivodeship (4), Warmia-Masuria (4), West Pomerania (4), Łódź voivodeship (3), Pomerania (3), Kuyavia-Pomerania (1), Podlaskie voivodeship (1) and Subcarpathia (1). Eighty-one responses were received from respondents. The majority of the respondents (88.8%) were women. The most numerous age group were teachers over 50 years of age (N = 29 = 36.8%), aged 46–50 years (N = 20 = 24.7%) and 41–45 (N = 17 = 21%). These were mainly persons with long service experience,

i.e. over 20 years (N = 46 = 56.8%) and over 15 to 20 years (N = 19 = 23.5%). The vast majority had completed Master's degrees (N = 79 = 97.5%), only 2 – Bachelor's degrees (2.5%). All respondents were employed in special schools, one respondent also worked in a public school with integrated classes. Slightly more than half worked with pupils in grades 7–8 (43 = 55.1%), the rest (44.9%), with pupils in grades 4–6. All the respondents worked with pupils with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, 28 (34.6%) of them with pupils with multiple disabilities combined with intellectual disabilities and the rest with both groups of pupils (N = 38 = 46.9%).

STATISTICAL DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Due to the use of a nominal scale, the data was described by providing counts (N) and percentages (%), and when comparing data, Pearson's chi-square test and Cramer's V coefficient were used to examine the relationship between grade level and learning as well as educational support, the difficulties experienced by teachers and pupils during the pandemic. The rationale for using the chi-square statistic was that it can be used to test the significance for qualitative (categorised) variables. The requirement of randomisation of the sample was met. The Statistica package was used for the statistical analysis of the results.

RESULTS

According to the teachers surveyed, in the summer semester 2020–2021, the schools provided mainly hybrid (44.45%) and regular (35.80%) learning. This was due to the regulations, which allowed the principals of special primary schools to decide on the appropriate form of learning on an ongoing basis, on the assumption that it would be implemented primarily in a regular form, and if necessary, with the use of hybrid or remote learning. Responses to the question regarding learning provided are presented below.

Table 1.
Forms of learning

Form of delivery	Classes		Rehabilitation classes	
	N	%	*N*	%
Hybrid	36	44.45	28	34.57
Regular	29	35.80	41	50.62
Remote	16	19.75	38	46.91

Grade level (4–6 and 7–8) significantly differentiated the form of learning ($chi^2 = 18.29420$; df = 3; $p = .00038$). This was a positive association of moderate strength ($V = .4842944$). Regular learning was more often provided for pupils in grades 4–6, while remote and hybrid forms for pupils in grades 7–8.

Table 2.
Comparison of the form of learning in grades 4–6 and 7–8

Form of delivery	Grades 4–6		Grades 7–8		Grades 4–6		Grades 7–8	
	Classes				Rehabilitation classes			
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Regular	20	57.14	8	18.61	16	50.00	6	13.95
Remote	1	2.86	15	34.88	3	9.38	12	27.91
Hybrid	14	40.00	20	46.51	13	40.62	25	58.14
Total	35	100.00	43	100.00	32	100.00	43	100.00

Special schools, in additional to its educational activities, offer pupils rehabilitation classes as well. The respondents were, therefore, asked what form these classes took during the pandemic (Table 1). The respondents indicated more than one form of learning, which means that their provision varied depending on the situation. According to half of the respondents, rehabilitation classes were held mainly on site (50.62%), slightly fewer teachers indicated remote (46.91%) and hybrid (34.57%) learning. Grade level (4–6 and 7–8) significantly differentiated the form of learning ($chi^2 = 17.82022$; df = 8; $p = .02262$). This was a positive association of moderate strength ($V = .4874453$). The regular learning was more often provided to pupils in grades 4–6, while the remote and hybrid forms were offered pupils in grades 7 and 8.

Respondents were also asked what forms of support were available to learners with a disability during online classes. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Support available to a pupil with a disability during online classes

Forms of support	*N*	%
Sharing the screen while participants are doing specific tasks	29	35.80
Showing the content of the activity in graphic, text form	48	59.26
Having participants speak one at a time	31	38.27
Making sure the pupil understands everything	46	56.79
Cameras were switched on	37	45.68

The lack of direct contact with the teacher was compensated for by providing educational support. Teachers most often used illustrative forms of communication – text supplemented with graphics (59.26%) and made sure their learners understood everything (56.79%). Grade level (4–6 and 7–8) did not differentiate the forms of support offered to pupils in focus ($chi^2 = 31.85206$; df = 34; $p = .57330$).

Classes in the special schools were not only taught in the classroom, but also online. Therefore, teachers were asked to indicate the materials they used while working remotely. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Materials supporting remote learning

Materials	*N*	%
Use of an educational platform	13	16.05
Online meetings (instant messengers and platforms)	47	58.02
Videos produced by the teacher	11	13.58
Using e-books	19	23.45
Providing worksheets for pupils to complete on their own	52	64.20
Providing guidelines for pupil work	54	66.67
Uploaded videos and other educational materials	40	49.38
Sending scope and pages of the textbook for independent revision	6	7.4

Teachers, when asked about materials used, indicated mainly those requiring independent work of the pupil assisted by his/her parents (providing guidelines for pupil work – 66.67% and providing worksheets for pupils to complete on their own – 64.20%). Providing materials for semi-independent work might be related to the pupils' grade. The teachers under consideration worked with pupils of older primary school classes (grades 4–6 and 7–8), who had previously been introduced to the worksheets during their on-site lessons.

In addition to the traditional materials, new technologies were introduced. More than half (58.02%) of the respondents used electronic communicators and online meeting platforms when providing remote or hybrid learning. Grade level (4–6 and 7–8) did not differentiate the type of materials offered to pupils ($chi^2 = 46.13388$; df = 49; $p = .59003$).

In contact with the parents of learners, e-mail messages ($N = 57 = 70.37\%$), telephone contact (N = 72 = 88.88%), and the educational platform – electronic diary ($N = 42 = 51.85\%$) were the most often applied. Some teachers sent parents short instructional videos ($N = 22 = 27.16\%$) and links to Internet resources ($N = 26 = 32.10\%$), and two of the respondents (2.47%) created blogs and channels on YouTube. Teachers activated students to present their outcomes in the form of videos, photos, and presentations (not published on the Internet) ($N = 23 = 28.40\%$).

Various communication tools were applied, depending on what was available, such as Zoom, Messenger or Ms Teams – a Microsoft Office platform tool.

Under pandemic conditions, the in-school learning had to be subject to the regulations imposed by the sanitary regime. The respondents were, therefore, asked to indicate the difficulties experienced by the teachers during the implementation of regular learning. The answers are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.
Difficulties experienced by teachers and pupils during regular learning

Teachers	*N*	%	Pupils	*N*	%
Unpredictability (not knowing how many pupils would come to class)	32	39.50	Lack of access to computer hardware	34	41.97
Group merging	20	24.69	Missing independent work skills	61	75.31
Lack of teachers, supply teaching	31	38.27	Missing ongoing contact with the teacher when working on assignments	63	77.77
Conducting hybrid classes	20	24.69	Missing direct contact with peers	57	70.37
Concern about contact with a potential disease carrier	35	43.21			
The need to change the course of lessons on an ongoing basis	31	38.27			

Respondents indicated various difficulties both of a health nature (concern about contact with a potential disease carrier – 43.21%) and of an organisational nature, mainly the unpredictability of class composition – 39.5%, staff shortages and the associated frequent replacements / supply teaching – 38.27% and the need to make ongoing changes to the course of lessons – 38.27%. Grade level (4–6 and 7–8) did not differentiate the type of difficulties experienced by teachers (chi^2 = 33.19250; df = 39; p = .73132).

The respondents were also asked what elements were missing for pupils with a disability in remote learning. According to the respondents, the pupils most often lacked a direct relationship with others, ongoing contact with the teacher when working on assignments (77.77%) and direct contact with peers (70.37%), but also the ability to work independently, which might be a direct result of their developmental delay (75.31%). Grade level (4–6 and 7–8) did not differentiate between the elements that pupils were lacking (chi^2 = 28.07037; df = 25; p = .30462).

The support provided by the school was not sufficient. Only 7 respondents (8.64%) indicated the availability of technical assistance and 11 (13.58%) – the assistance of the school counsellor in terms of cooperation with parents. In some schools (e.g. the school in Silesia), there was a possibility to use portable school

equipment at home. Some schools provided teachers with instructional materials, e.g."Distance Learning: A Guide for Schools" (the school in the Lublin voivodeship); "How to Use the TEAMS Application" (the school in Lesser Poland), and "Guide to Distance Learning" (the school in Masovia).

The study shows that teachers preferred direct contact with students and parents rather than a distant one. Only some declared to continue online meetings via communicators and platforms (N = 20 = 24.70%) or send videos and other educational materials to their pupils (N = 10 = 12.34%) after remote learning ends.

DISCUSSION

The research was conducted on a group of Polish teachers at special schools for pupils with intellectual and multiple disabilities and concerned the operation of these schools in the summer of 2020–21, i.e. during the pandemic. As shown in the study, educational classes mainly took place in hybrid (44.45%) and regular (35.80%) learning forms, while rehabilitation classes were held mainly on-site (50.62%) and less frequently in remote (46.91%) and hybrid (34.57%) forms, which was consistent with the legal regulations at a given time. Grade level (4–6 and 7–8) significantly differentiated the form of both educational (p = .02262) and rehabilitation (p = .02262) classes. Some concern may be raised by the use of primarily in-school classes for pupils with a higher risk of disease and lower ability to understand the situation and protect themselves from infection. The argument justifying this situation to some extent is the small class size and sometimes even the individual mode of instruction as well as the requirement to maintain a sanitary regime. However, this requirement was sometimes difficult to fulfil because of the frequent need to remain with children in direct, sometimes physical, contact and the difficulty of pupils with intellectual disabilities in understanding this requirement.

According to the presented research, regular learning was more often provided for pupils in grades 4–6, and remote and hybrid learning to pupils in grades 7 and 8. Older pupils may have more experience in working with worksheets, which were most often used during the pandemic. Moreover, parents were sent instructions for how to work with their children, which may have increased the level of collaboration between the family and the school (Steed et al., 2021).

While providing remote or hybrid learning, teachers used electronic communicators and online meetings platforms, indicating that pupils with disabilities were able to master IT skills. In contact with parents and the learners, e-mail messages (N = 57 = 70.37%), electronic diary (N = 42 = 51.85%) were most often applied, accompanied by Zoom, Messenger or MS Teams, depending on what was available. Although the teachers are aware of the benefits of this kind of training,

they preferred direct contact with students and parents rather than a distant one in the post-pandemic period. Only about 25% of them declared to continue using IT communicators after remote learning ends. This is in line with what the other authors found. According to Daniels et al. (2020) and Meguid et al. (2022), direct contact between pupils and their teachers, is fundamental to the educational and therapeutic process and its outcomes, and could not be efficiently replaced by remote learning. This is because pupils more often require stimulation, arousal of their intrinsic motivation by the teacher as well as a variety of prompts, the use of visual, polysensory materials necessary for direct cognition. Therefore, the teachers under discussion, similarly to those surveyed by Ofsted (2021), sought to compensate for the lack of direct contact with their pupils by providing illustrative materials and making sure they understood all instructions correctly.

CONCLUSIONS

Working with pupils with intellectual and multiple disabilities under pandemic conditions was a significant challenge for special school teachers. On the one hand, they now need to deal with the negative consequences of pandemic, but on the other, can draw from new experiences. Adverse effects include the lack of direct contact between pupils and their teachers and peers, which may have had a negative impact on their cognitive and emotional/social development. Therefore, "A framework to Guide an Education Response to the COVID-19" (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020) identifies the support of education of pupils with special needs as one of the important objectives. As its authors note, it is particularly important to counteract their social (UNICEF, 2020b) and school exclusion (Daniels et al., 2020). According to Skipp et al. (2021), in order to address educational and developmental losses, schools need to be supported to focus on the mental, physical and emotional needs of their pupils.

On the other hand, the experience of education during the pandemic can be used in a positive way, for example, to support the development of pupils' independence and digital competences. Indeed, effective out-of-school learning during a pandemic provides an opportunity to develop autonomy, self-directed learning, executive functioning, self-control, and the ability to learn online (OECD, 2020b). This includes providing specialised school placements for more pupils with disabilities (Skipp et al., 2021), but also equipping pupils' families with access to information technology, resources, and support so that they can fully support them at home.

Thanks to remote teaching, teachers have acquired new competences. Rice's (2022) study shows that as they became more proficient, they began to feel more comfortable teaching remotely. During this time, teachers have significantly improved their use of technology and awareness of its potential in educating pupils

with disabilities. However, teachers did not like communicating via videoconferencing, therefore, the use of these technologies after returning to schools was not continued. Thus, it is uncertain whether the benefits of teaching remotely will be fully utilised, or the up-coming months will be spent just catching up on missed learning and therapy.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The study had several limitations. The first was the limited number of respondents, due to the fact that special schools worked mainly onsite. Some special school teachers, responding to e-mail correspondence, stated that they worked exclusively or primarily on-site, so they would not complete the survey questionnaire, because their operation was the same as before. Secondly, the survey did not cover the entire pandemic period, but only the summer semester of 2020–21. This period was considered to be the most representative, as the schools had already had several months of experience in using remote learning methods and could, in accordance with the restrictions in place at a given time, use different modes of work. It would be advisable, therefore, to carry out the study again in the post-pandemic period in order to determine whether the acquired skills have become permanently embedded in work with learners with intellectual and multiple disabilities and whether the pupils have caught up with the learning and therapy that they missed during COVID-19.

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FUNKCJONOWANIE SZKÓŁ SPECJALNYCH DLA UCZNIÓW KLAS 4–8 Z NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCIĄ INTELEKTUALNĄ W STOPNIU UMIARKOWANYM I ZNACZNYM ORAZ WIELORAKĄ W CZASIE PANDEMII COVID-19 W POLSCE

Wprowadzenie: Pandemia COVID-19 szczególnie dotknęła uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną i wieloraką. Funkcjonowanie szkół specjalnych, do których przeważnie uczęszczają, było inaczej zorganizowane w różnych krajach, ale najczęściej szkoły te pozostawały otwarte. Jednak kształcenie uczniów w nowej sytuacji okazało się dla nich nowym i trudnym wyzwaniem.

Cel badań: Celem badań była charakterystyka funkcjonowania szkół specjalnych dla uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną i niepełnosprawnością wieloraką w Polsce w czasie pandemii COVID-19.
Metoda badań: Badanie zostało przeprowadzone za pomocą ankiety rozesłanej do szkół specjalnych i zamieszczonej na portalu internetowym Pedagogika specjalna. W badaniu wzięło udział 81 nauczycieli szkół specjalnych.
Wyniki: Badanie wykazało, że szkoły realizowały głównie nauczanie regularne lub hybrydowe, przy czym nauczanie regularne częściej odbywało się w pracy z uczniami klas 4–6, a zdalne i hybrydowe – z uczniami klas 7–8. W przypadku form zdalnych lub hybrydowych nauczyciele wykorzystywali komunikatory elektroniczne i platformy do spotkań *online*. Uczniom brakowało jednak możliwości samodzielnej pracy i bezpośredniej interakcji z nauczycielem i innymi uczniami. Nauczyciele starali się więc zrekompensować ten brak, wykorzystując materiały ilustracyjne i upewniając się, że uczniowie wszystko rozumieją.
Wnioski: Szkoły specjalne pokonały trudne wyzwanie, stosując zarówno metody tradycyjne, jak i wdrażając metody zdalne. Niektóre instrumenty zdalnego nauczania mogą być wykorzystane w przyszłości w celu zwiększenia samodzielności uczniów, możliwości korzystania przez nich z urządzeń elektronicznych.

Słowa kluczowe: szkoła specjalna, pandemia, uczeń z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną, uczeń z niepełnosprawnością wieloraką.