



LEARNING ENGLISH AND SPANISH IN TIMES OF COVID-19 IN A SLAVIC-SPEAKING COUNTRY.

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Abstract

The following report is a glimpse at certain strategies which are currently used during the juncture caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) COVID-19. Owing to the COVID-19 outbreak many schools, including universities, high school as well as language schools have to face many difficulties and seek for novel policies to keep their lessons coming. 4idiomas S.R.O is a language school based on the Czech Republic, a Slavic-speaking country which its population is prone to learn foreign languages on account of the worldwide use of English and Spanish in contrast to the comparatively lower number of Czech speakers. This contribution shall deepen into the plans that were implemented to face such a demanding challenge, such as skype, meet, whereby along with sharing documents, homeworks and other kind of assignments. The findings of this implementations suggest that despite the reluctance and rejection that many students showed during the first, they began accepting and even liking the online lessons, in that extent, that there are students who hitherto rather have online lessons than face-to-face ones.

Keywords:

COVID-19, 4Idiomas S.R.O, online lessons, changes.

Introduction

4Idiomas S.R.O is a language school based on Zlín, Czech Republic. According to Czech standards, Zlín is a regional capital and a middle size city, whose population is ca., 150,000 including surrounding towns. The region itself has 3,963 Km² with a population of 582,555. Czech language is a Slavic language spoken by over ten million people worldwide [1]. Comparatively speaking, Czech is spoken by few people if it is juxtaposed with another widespread languages, such as, English, Spanish or Portuguese [2]; therefore, Czech nationals are prone to learn other so-called more useful languages, and they are actually good at. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Since it was first identified in December 2019, there have been more than 29 million cases across the globe with more than 924,000 deaths [3]. The virus is spread primarily via small droplets from coughing, sneezing, and talking. As a consequence of its high transmissions, many school and businesses have to figure out strategies to continue their activities and deal with the problem. As far as the Czech Republic is concerned, the first cases of coronavirus infection were reported on 1 March. Since then, the number of patients has been growing steadily, reaching its peak on March 27. According to Johns Hopkins Coronavirus resource centre, on 14 September 2020, the Czech Republic reported 36,188 confirmed cases, 456 deaths and more than 966 thousand tests have been performed. As its central Europe counterparts, Czechia is facing a worse second wave after avoiding worst of first; nonetheless, the official data suggests the second wave is showing to be

milder than the first as a result of a sharp increase in testing, more know-how and more intensive care units (ICU). The government also insists most of the new cases are among healthy young people [4, 5]. The following work is a succinct and schematic explanation of how 4Idiomas S.R.O has been dealing with this impactful challenge.

4Idiomas S.R.O

Czech language possesses a wide spectrum of pronunciations, declinations are rules, that many locals consider their mother tongue very difficult to learn. This predicament is not bad at all, since they have plenty of tools to study and speak other languages without facing big troubles. Furthermore, Czech language is "useful" only in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and thus it is a kind of motivation to fluently speak other languages.

4Idiomas S.R.O is a language school which offers individual and group lessons. The portfolio is English, Spanish, German and Italian. Spanish holds the biggest offer, since the language school market has been focused on English and German. The school found the gap in the market, and currently is having broad sort of clients, from kids who have Spanish as a subject in their primary school to Businesspeople who currently have contracts as well as commercial interest in Latin America or Spain. The school comprises all ages, all levels. Spanish has the highest number of clients, followed by English and in a minor extent German and Italian.

Covid-19 and teaching languages.

As it is foreseen, COVID-19 spreads quickly and is highly infective, and social distancing has been required all around the world. The virus is spread primarily via small droplets from coughing, sneezing, and talking. The droplets are usually not airborne; however, those standing in close proximity may inhale them and become infected. People may also become infected by touching a contaminated surface and then touching their face. Given these overwhelming circumstances, the question that arises is, how does a language school deal with it?

Methodology

4Idiomas S.R.O endeavoured four policies and some of them are still going on:

1. Social distancing: Pursuant to Czech law, individual lessons were allowed during the first wave of the pandemic by a common agreement between the clients and the teachers.
2. Internet platforms: As everybody knows, there are many applications and programs to carry out online lessons; nevertheless, it does not mean all students are able to use them because of age, technical difficulties, lack of knowledge and lacking interest.
3. Sharing materials efficiently: Sending emails with materials and home-works is not enough, since some people do not check their email every day, and thus it was necessary to implement an effective way to share our information.
4. YouTube Videos: The teachers were making videos after finishing each lesson, which highlights the main topic given in the online class.

Results and analysis

When all upbreak began many of the clients, especially the ones over 50 years old were afraid of having their classes; likewise, younger clients were not interested to keep studying, and indeed it was parents' concern. Owing to this particular juncture, the school designed a plan in order to make the transition as smoothest as possible. Although it seems pretty normal, not everybody has a Skype. As for other platforms, not everybody knows how to use meet or zoom. This was a very important detail for the Schools as well as the amount of people who can be online at once.

On account of the reasons above-mentioned exposed, the school decided to use whereby because it is a simple video meetings program with no app or installs required, and has the same meeting link every time. The teacher only needed to send the link and the student has the freedom to work from anywhere. This tool avoids having the problem of clients who neither have Gmail nor Outlook. The other programs were used by previous and common agreements between the parts.

Sharing information plays a pivotal role in a school, hence the school did not only rely upon sending emails, there were folders on the school website available any moment, share screen was used and a particular electronic folder was created by any different class. YouTube videos were made having lessons' highlights.

At the beginning of the (SARS-CoV-2) COVID-19 pandemic in the Czech Republic, which corresponds to the month of March, almost 80% of the students were reluctant to the online lessons, but in April more people became interested, in fact by the second week of April 70% of the clients were making their lessons online by using whereby, skype and zoom.

Up to date students definitely rather have face-to-face lessons; however approximately 20% of the clients remain and prefer having their lessons online despite the openings and easing lockdowns in the Czech Republic.

Conclusions

This contribution delved into the incorporation of new strategies in order to make 4Idiomas teaching languages lessons comfortable, likeable and efficient. It was observed throughout this experience that the online lessons unwillingness progressively changed in such an extent that there are students who changed their minds and prefer online lessons rather than face-to-face ones. The approaches were indeed an efficient tool to counteract the health, economic, and academic concern that a strict lockdown brings up.

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