



**DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND PHILOLOGY
"FAN S. NOLI" UNIVERSITY
KORÇË, ALBANIA**



**PROCEEDINGS OF
THE 1st INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
"LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES IN THE LIGHT
OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS"**

10 JUNE 2022

1st INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
***“LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES IN THE LIGHT OF
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS”***

focus on

***“E- LEARNING APPROACHES TO
LINGUISTIC ACQUISITION”***

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DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES
KORÇË, ALBANIA***

in cooperation with:

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"Linguistic perspectives in the light of social developments"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Esmeralda KROMIDHA

THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE APPLICATION OF ICT IN THE
FUNCTION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND TRAINING
OF FUTURE TEACHERS: THE CASE OF THE FACULTY OF FOREIGN
LANGUAGES11

Elona LIMAJ

TEACHERS' CHALLENGES OF STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING -
CASE STUDY OF ALBANIAN UNIVERSITY STAFF20

Dorela KAÇAUNI

A CASE STUDY ON STUDENTS' ANXIETY DURING ONLINE
LEARNING29

Edlira XEGA

Lorena ROBO

ENHANCING ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING THROUGH E-
LEARNING APPROACHES. A CASE STUDY WITH 2ND YEAR
ENGLISH STUDENTS.....38

Migena SEJDINI

DISTANCE LANGUAGE LEARNING AND THE ROLE OF THE
TEACHER IN THIS NEW LEARNING CONTEXT51

Eriola QAFZEZI

BEING VIRTUALLY (T)HERE: ENGAGING ONLINE LEARNERS TO
FOSTER COLLABORATION IN THE VIRTUAL
CLASSROOM.58

Alma KARASALIU

ADAPTING TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES IN POST COVID CLASSES:
A CASE STUDY WITH THE STUDENTS OF
MASTER'S DEGREE.....73

Lindita KAÇANI

ALBANIAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
ONLINE LEARNING82

| | |
|---|------------|
| Luminița TODEA Anamaria FĂLĂUȘ Ramona DEMARCSEK RECONSIDERING TECHNOLOGY USE IN THE PROCESS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FROM A POST-PANDEMIC PERSPECTIVE..... | 89 |
| Anamaria FĂLĂUȘ Luminița TODEA Ramona DEMARCSEK REIMAGINING TEACHING STRATEGIES IN A POST COVID-19 ERA. ARE MA STUDENTS PROPER CANDIDATES FOR THE E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT? (A CASE STUDY RESEARCH) | 102 |
| Ramona DEMARCSEK Luminița TODEA Anamaria FĂLĂUȘ IS THERE LONGEVITY TO ONLINE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION BEYOND THE SARS-COV-2 PANDEMIC?..... | 114 |
| Eleni GRIVA Christina KARAGIANNI GETTING TO KNOW OUR NEIGHBORS THROUGH THE FAIRYTALE: A DIGITAL STORYTELLING PROJECT TO PROMOTE INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING | 127 |
| Juliana ÇYFEKU ENHANCING DATA-DRIVEN LEARNING AND CORPUS-BASED TASKS INTO EFL CLASSROOM | 133 |
| Erta SPAHO-HERRI PROOFREADING AND CORRECTING STUDENTS' TRANSLATIONS DURING DISTANCE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION | 148 |
| Esmeralda STRORI ROLE OF AFFIXATIONS IN CREATION OF IT TERMS IN ALBANIAN LANGUAGE | 154 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Chrysanthi MARKOU Eleni GRIVA CREATING A DIGITAL SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM WITH WEB 2.0. TOOLS: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES | 162 |
| Spyridon BOURAS Eleni GRIVA TEACHER TRAINING IN MODERN ERA: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A DISTANCE TRAINING PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS IN BILINGUAL ENVIRONMENTS..... | 171 |
| Antonina BULYNA HUMANITARIANISM THROUGH INTERNATIONALIZATION OF TERTIARY EDUCATION | 179 |
| Elena KITANOVSKA RISTOSKA Natasha PETROVA – POPOVSKI QUALITY ASSURANCE OF E-LANGUAGE LEARNING: UKLO CASE..... | 186 |
| Albana HADRI Ilda ERKOÇI Rajmonda KËÇIRA CHALLENGES OF ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS ONLINE ASSESSMENT - A CASE STUDY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF SHKODER..... | 196 |
| Dalila KARAKAÇI Nivis DEDA LECTURERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS ONLINE ASSESSMENT: THE CASE OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, LUIGJ GURAKUQI UNIVERSITY OF SHKODER..... | 206 |
| Erinda PAPA Daniela STOICA Alda CICKO THE TURNING POINT: DIGITAL INNOVATION IN EDUCATION | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| AND TRAINING – FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS AND LEARNERS’ PERSPECTIVES ON THE ACCESS AND USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES | 217 |
|---|-----|

THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE APPLICATION OF ICT IN THE FUNCTION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND TRAINING OF FUTURE TEACHERS: THE CASE OF THE FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present the strategy of the Faculty of Foreign Languages in the framework of foreign language teaching through the use of new communication and information technologies.

At the beginning, we will make a presentation of teaching issues through digital platforms in the pandemic period. Next, we will focus on concrete measures taken in the framework of creating digital infrastructure and digital capabilities in the Faculty of Foreign Languages. We will continue to address the elements of quality assurance in the context of a different teaching approach. Finally, we will present proposals for virtual learning in the Albanian context.

Keywords: *Information and communication technologies, virtual, foreign language teaching*

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic caused chaos on Higher Education (HE) institutions in Albania and around the world. The Coronavirus pandemic hit Albania in full force in March 2020, impacting daily teaching routines in every educational level. On-campus activity was prohibited, and lecturers were instructed to provide "blended and online learning opportunities," as well as track and trace alternatives, social distancing, and strict cleanliness standards.

Students were obliged to stay in their hometowns with their families while preparing for online learning. Teachers/ professors had to "transfer" their classes online and had to alter their teaching styles according to their students' needs.

Despite the obstacles faced by both educators and learners, education systems and educators have been pushed to embrace "Emergency

Education," moving from traditional face-to-face learning pedagogies to distant virtual platforms. This forced distant teaching and learning, which Dhawan (2020) sees as preparing the way for digital learning, signifies a paradigm shift in how educators provide quality education.

Challenges

Challenges inherent in sudden, reactive rather than anticipated and planned e-learning responses to a global pandemic, include:

- accessibility,
- affordability,
- flexibility,
- learning pedagogy,
- unreliable internet connection,
- inability to afford online learning devices,
- sufficient physical workspace.

Petrie (2020) identified that the best practices for online home schooling are yet to be explored, and that many students learning at home had undergone psychological and emotional distress and were unable to engage in online learning productively.

- Reduced contact hours for students and a lack of consultation with professors when learning/understanding challenges led in decreased performance on year-end tests and internal assessment outcomes;
- Online student exams have been noted as requiring a lot of trial and error, with professors and students experiencing difficulties;
- Teaching material had to be modified accordingly;
- Teaching methods had to be altered;

Higher Education institutions have yet to implement effective plagiarism-checking procedures for tasks, exams and Master Thesis. What we noticed through the academic year and what is of crucial importance was that professors were not in their comfort zone. Some of them were reluctant to shift to online learning because of: lack of knowledge, lack of digital tools and burnout from the Pandemic. Nevertheless, the majority of professors and students spent many hours online, not only on live classes, but also checking homework, recording lectures, finding resources and building their own online classes.

During the 2018-2019 academic year *Google Classroom* was the platform used by the [University of Tirana](#) (UT), where 29.460 students study. Lectures were delivered via "Google Meet," and other features of the platform were used to provide students with access to written materials, presentations, books or articles, and assignments to download. During the 2019-2020 academic year the [University of Tirana](#) (UT) used Office 365, especially TEAMS.

To assist professors for any need they had regarding the new digital tools the University of Tirana offered online training for all the academic staff (full and part time Professors) on:

- How to open a class, how to upload/check/evaluate assignments
- How to schedule a class, manage channels and assign students in different Rooms
- How to add comments/ questions/tests in a video
- How to use the Whiteboard in TEAMS
- How to create a Form, Survey, Quiz/Poll/Test through Office Apps

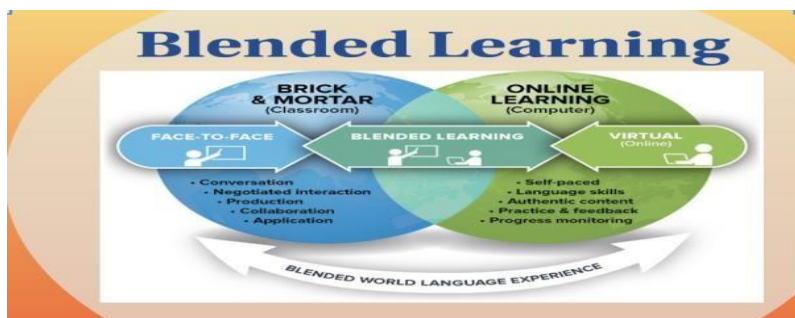
The academic year 2021-2022 started as a normal academic year. Classes were offered on the premises. So we were back to normal with some lessons learnt. TEAMS- serves as a backup platform where professors host their classes (teaching material, announce news, share resources).

The majority of our students learn at different paces. Some of them are slow and some of them are fast learners so teachers should modify their teaching style according to the leaning style of their students. In normal classes where technology or online platforms are not integrated students might miss important pieces of information from even though they are physically present. Some students might not show up in their daily classes due to sickness or they attend sport activities that they cannot miss so they have a gap of information that was given to their peers. There are teachers who do not provide floor for practice in the class due to their teaching style or lack of time or any other reason and in some occasions, they have to repeat the same information to various students. So blended learning is a very good alternative.

Why blended learning:

- it allows for more differentiation
- teachers get more 'face time' with students

- students learn at their own convenience/pace/time
- teachers can personalize instructions to reach all levels of students
- It's fun!



The flipped classroom inverts traditional teaching methods, delivering instruction online outside of class and moving 'homework' into the classroom.

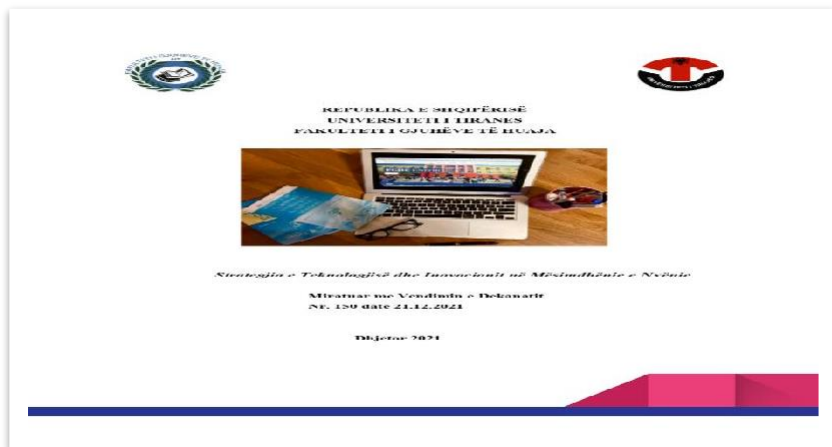


In Flipped Classrooms:

- The teacher's responsibility for learning has switched to the students;
- The focus of face-to-face time shifted from teachers to students;
- The emphasis in class shifted from lower-order to higher-order thinking.

Our strategy

- Faculty of Foreign Languages compiled its own **Strategy of Digitalization and Innovation for Teaching and Learning**

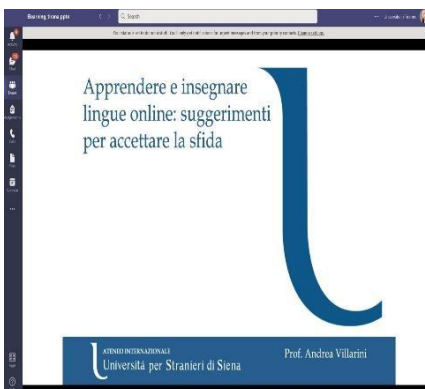
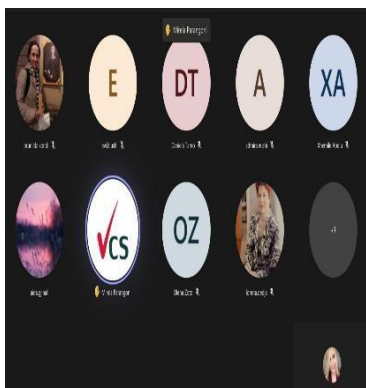


Trainings for academic staff and students

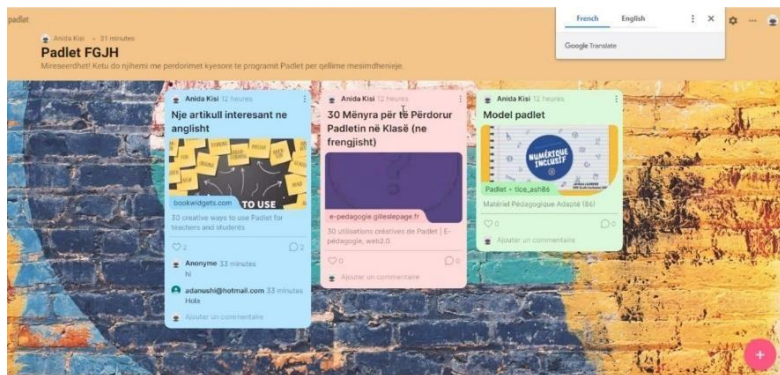
- Improving the quality of teaching and learning through continuous training for our academic staff and that of the students’.

2 weeks of trainings on ICT in teaching for Professors and students

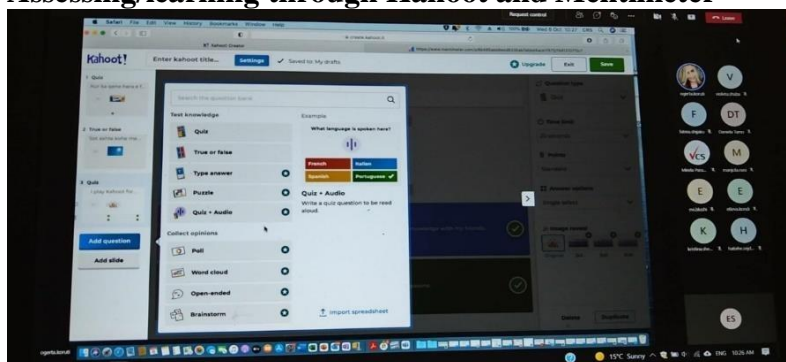
- How to teach/learn online
- **Office 365 vs Google Drive**



Interacting through Padlet, Framapad and Google Doc

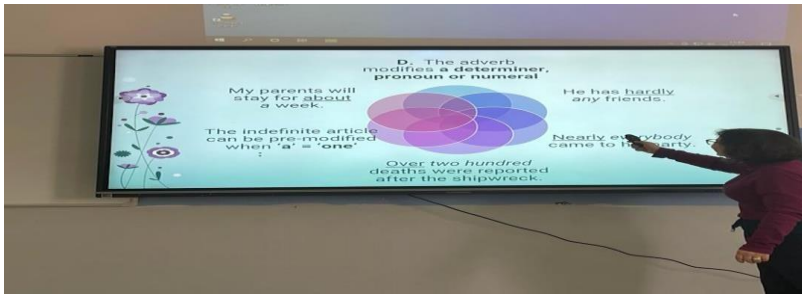


Integrating Edpuzzle, Canva for teaching/learning purposes Assessing/learning through Kahoot and Mentimeter



Steps toward success:

- Improve and expand academic support services in order to meet the needs of FGJH with:
 - Well equipped classes in terms of digital tools/equipment,
 - Translation Labs
 - **Research and ICT Labs**
 - **Training Centers**
 - Phonetics Lab
 - High tech Translation and Didactic Laboratories,



- Updating our libraries with contemporary books/e-books (**onsite and online: JSTOR - Digital Library; COBISS++ - Digital Library; U-library Digital Library**)

Trainings for students on....

- **Latest tech apps and translation methods for Master Programs students of Translation and Interpretation**
- **Public speaking and digital tools**
- **21 century teaching skills**

Elements of quality assurance for online or blended learning

- The following characteristics of an online learning program must be considered:
 - (a) Teaching and Learning.
The Professor must show that the online or hybrid learning experience is effective in achieving the desired learning goals and program content. At the same time, professors must be able to explain why certain teaching and learning methods were chosen and how they relate to online delivery.
 - (b) Student Assessment.
When using technology to track student learning outcomes, the Professor must show that there is an appropriate balance of formative and summative assessment, that the assessment methods are sufficient to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes and

required standards, and that students' progress is tracked and timely feedback is provided.

- (c) The Student Support Service The faculty must guarantee that the electronic learning management platform is available, feasible, and reliable in order to give administrative, academic, and technical support to students at times and locations that are convenient for them.

- (d) Staffing and Staff Development.

Professors must demonstrate mastery of the electronic learning platform in order to build course content for online teaching, learning, and evaluation. The IT Staff or other back up staff will also need to be able to read learning analytics in order to measure the success of teaching, learning, and assessment activities. When it comes to individuals that lack the requisite abilities, the Faculty must show that they are provided opportunities to learn.

Elements to consider for the future

- In blended and online learning delivery, the teaching, learning, and assessment methodologies and delivery technologies should be specifically created for this setting.
- Rather than being driven by technology, blended and online learning technologies are learner-centered and subject-led.
- Assessments for blended and online learning will be identical to those used for on-campus delivery, with the goal of achieving parity of standards.
- Professors require a set of digital competencies relevant to their profession so the Faculty will ensure that staff engaged in teaching on a blended and/or online learning program are certified and supported appropriately. .
- The Faculty will ensure that professors have opportunity to improve their academic and technology-enhanced learning skills, as well as their digital competences.
- The Faculty will make certain that its teaching, learning, and assessment methods are accessible to students with disabilities;
- The Faculty will guarantee that its teaching, learning, and evaluation processes are student-centered, with a focus on

involving students in the learning process through face-to-face or online course delivery;

- And yet...
- Faculties may design and develop very successful online courses/programs but the Ministry of Education and Sport should recognize this diploma and alter the Law of Higher Education

**It doesn't matter if it is Face to Face, Blended or Virtual learning.
What matter are the PROFESSORS and the STUDENTS!**

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TEACHERS' CHALLENGES OF STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING - CASE STUDY OF ALBANIAN UNIVERSITY STAFF

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Abstract

Teachers faced a series of challenges during online teaching, which served as a lesson for the teaching methodology. Academic staff of Albanian University adapted all teaching methods accordingly to the needs of that period. In the light of those difficulties, the use of technology was the best solution and most teachers found tools and materials to help them achieve the maximum of results during teaching hours.

With the help of a questionnaire, this work shall shed light on the challenges of Albanian University staff during their daily teaching practice. The staff was asked about the teaching methods used during online teaching and currently. Questions in the questionnaire consist of type of technology, tools and materials used by staff during the lesson. The results of the questionnaire can provide a panorama about teaching methods and all the issues arising during their use.

Taking into account all the experience, this work shall try to make use of the findings so that necessary measures can be taken for improvement of technology in order to offer teachers all the necessary infrastructure to use in a classroom.

Key words: *teaching, staff, methods, technology*

Introduction

COVID-19 taught us lots of lessons especially in the field of education. During online teaching we noticed all the problems that came out during the teaching-learning process. In particular, lecturers face difficulties in implementing methods and they focus on the fact that what they teach students is more important than the strategy used and the most important is the thinking process and not the special methods used in class. Nevertheless, according to a NESET Analytical Report (2021) all educational levels in many countries suffered during Covid 19 situation.

Before the XX-th century, teaching was based mainly on three opportunities: teacher, textbook and blackboard. Books, letters, texts and pencils were the most useful tools used for communication and exchange of information. Use of personal computers in schools seemed like a distant dream a few years ago. In 2005, the number of computers in Albanian schools in the entire country consisted in total of about 920 computers., whereas at the end of 2012, this number was estimated at 24 125 and the ratio 0.13 computers per student in 2005, today is 4,65. (Strategy 2014) The same is valid also for internet expansion and its speed in national scale.

The questionnaire in this work helps actors understand the opinion and feedback of lecturers regarding their capacities and skills in selecting the proper teaching methods. It will also provide the necessary information to make a deep analysis to see the inter-connection between work experience, age groups and teaching methods of the teachers. The rapid development of modern society, as well as the boost of information, assisted also by numerous means of broadcast and communication have changed the teaching methods in comparison to the previous decades. Some years ago, the teacher was the only source of information, whereas today he is a leader and an organiser of the teaching and learning process, who leads students to independently search for information and assist them in solving complicated problems. But, despite all investments carried out so far, use of ICT¹ in Albanian school system is limited. The ratio student/computer is not sufficient.

Theoretical framework

Education is a public good and vital for any society, because an effective teaching is very essential. A healthy education system is a good requisite for the development of each nation. Education is provided by the state and in this respect authorities draft national policies and strategies. The 2014-2020 Strategy of Development of Pre-university Education² issued by Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, the current document used by all actors, aims to offer quality of

¹ Integration of information technology and communication (ICT) in class understands the use of computers and softwares in a productive way, exploitation of internet and use of computer networks for teaching and learning purposes.

² This is the current strategy used by Albanian institution, while the 2021-2026 National Educational Draft Strategy is being drafted by groups of interests.

teaching standards compared to EU countries, focusing on professional contemporary preparation and development of teachers and directors for a qualitative and all-inclusive learning. One of the numerous objectives of the inter sectorial strategy is digitalization of learning process and among recommendations is the creation of suitable environments for efficient learning through improvement of schools infrastructure and preparation of qualified teachers. According to Scrivener (2011) “the role of teachers is to enable learning to happen”, amid the time of global children, teachers in Albania are trying to use teaching methods to explain the material to students with the help of technology in order to make learning happen.

Definition of the term “methodology” in the *Dictionary of Albanian Language* is “the total of methods and tools used to explain something”, which is in full compliance with the understanding of the term ICT that is focused on management of all the information obtained via explanation. Technology in a classroom includes use of computers, printers, scanners, videos and DVD players, digital devices and smart boards. (Musai 2014, 158)

E-learning offers a lot of opportunities regarding place, space, time and rhythm. If in traditional teaching everything happens in schools, electronic learning may occur also outside the school territory. Even regarding time, if learning in a traditional teaching hour happens only at the scheduled time and space, electronic learning is possible 24/7 with opportunities of creating Teaching Rich Learning Environments (TRLE), which include the virtual world, computer simulations, sound registrations. (Mayer 2001, 70-72) These methods place students in real contexts and support the creation of society of knowledge. As a result, there is a boost in their motivation and they are more curious, successful and willing to learn. (Woofolk 2011, 3-10)

Teaching with the help of internet is costly, even-though during pandemics teachers made a rapid progress and the choice of teaching methods was a fundamental factor in this respect.

Methods

Albanian University, one of the largest universities in Tirana, is a key hub of education in Albania. The administration decided to carry out a questionnaire addressed to its staff. The lecturers were asked to fill a questionnaire on the methodology they have used in class during

teaching. The questionnaire, aims to create an idea on choice of teaching methods in general, and during online teaching in particular. There were 107 members of the staff who answered the research questions of this questionnaire, while answers were anonymous.

A coordination of the qualitative and quantitative analyses is provided to indicate the problematics while using their methods. The quantitative analysis aims to identify the choice of methods and the qualitative analysis aims to offer more detailed information about the use of technology and the respective problematic.

Sampling of participating lecturers in this study was characterised by four age groups, and most of participants were female teachers, respectively:

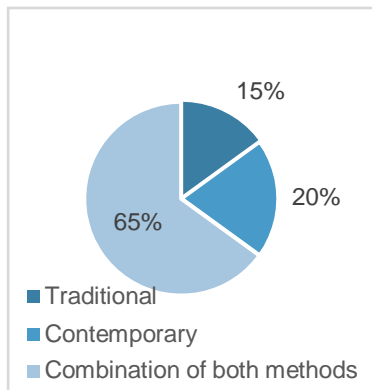
| Age group | 25-35 | 35-45 | 45-55 | 55-62 |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Percentage | 15 | 45 | 20 | 10 |

Table 1. Percentage of participation of the interviewed according to age group.

Results

Findings from the answers of interviewed teachers, who belong to various age groups and gender, offer us the opportunity to analyze several issues related to the teaching methodology.

During data processing phase, we used different assessment levels because the questions had various focuses. Regarding gender of the participants in the study, women represented the majority of the interviewers, while men consist of a smaller number.

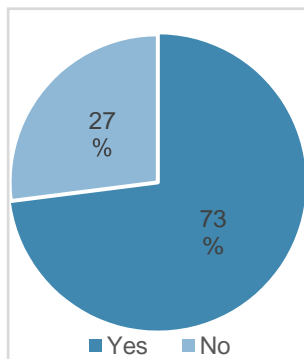


Question: What teaching method do you use during a teaching hour? Traditional or modern?

Picture 1. Percentage of use of methods

The questionnaire clearly showed that majority of the interviewees used a combination of traditional with modern teaching methods. Majority of the interviewers consider the combination of traditional and contemporary methods a good idea. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees, in the comments section of the questionnaire highlighted that some subjects can be taught well enough with the help of traditional methods. Some lecturers highlighted in their answers that due to specifics of their subject, the selection of the most suitable method was focused on the particularities of the lecture.

Question: Have you ever been trained on use of technology and contemporary methods in the teaching process?

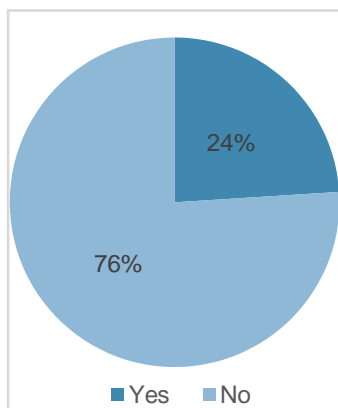


Picture 2 Percentage of answers regarding use of technology

Regarding this question, the majority of interviewees answered no, even though they belong to a relatively young age, who are familiar to use of technology in general. A big number of teachers claimed that they have never been trained on the use of technology and

contemporary methods and this is an indicator that highlights the reasons why ICT is not fully used in Albanian schools, i.e teachers do not have the necessary knowledge to use such tools.

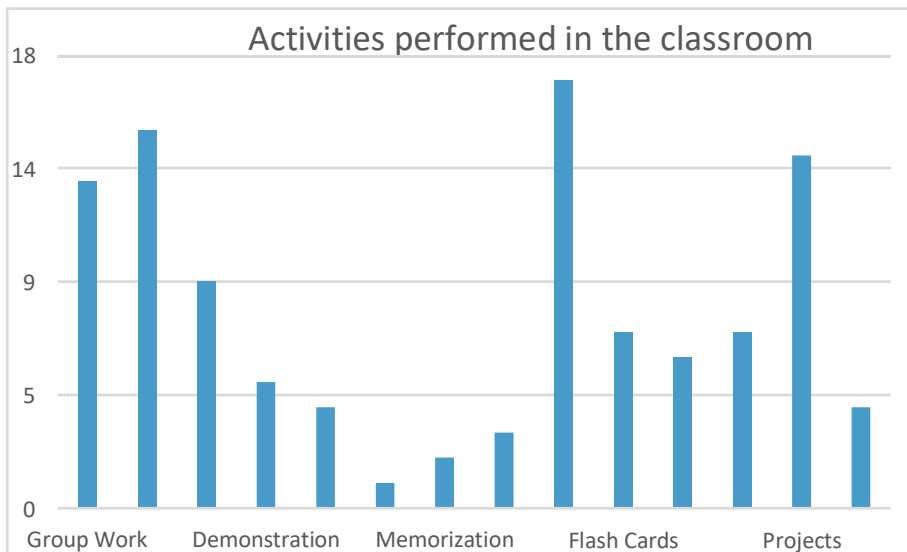
Question: *Do Albanian textbooks favor use of technology or modern teaching methods in all subjects?*



Picture 3. Textbooks and technology

Percentage of the interviewed lecturers who think that current textbooks do not favour use of technology is high. This shows that teachers in Albanian University use traditional methods because use of ICT is limited.

Question: *Which of the following activities do you perform in class. Choose more than one alternative.*



Picture 4. Type of activities held in class by teachers

In order to see in details what methods do AU staff members use, they were asked to choose among several activities held in a classroom. The fact that majority of them chose a number of activities that were not related to ICT also shows that use of contemporary teaching tools is limited. While the European Commission study report “2nd Survey of Schools: ICT in Education” (2019) mentions use of very advanced devices, such as video streaming or video conferencing with high-speed internet, Albanian schools are still using traditional or minimum of modern teaching methods.

Conclusions and recommendations

Modern methods are more expensive and cannot be applied in rural areas due to lack of infrastructure and motivation. Majority of the interviewed lecturers used a combination of traditional with modern teaching methods, due to the lack of infrastructure in most parts of territory of the Republic of Albania.

Key issues arising from this study can be summarized in the following conclusions:

- problems with school infrastructure do not favour use of modern methods
- textbooks do not favour use of modern methods
- lack of teaching tools oriented toward modern methods, i.e. teachers can not use modern methods when they lack tools that are necessary for the implementation
- teachers training are really necessary. They might be organised by competent authorities or even by the responsible IT staff of the institution.
- traditional methods are less costly and more suitable for all
- there is no convincing evidence that Albanian teachers could be more efficient in computer-based teacher

The problems raised during the analysis can lead us to the following recommendations:

- continuous training programs for teachers
- increase of pedagogical skills toward understanding of ICT for an efficient use of new technologies in education
- harmonisation of curricula to favour use of technology
- increase of budget for investments in school technology
- internet access, number of computers per student

Integration of ICT in the teaching process in Albanian schools is not at satisfactory levels, therefore, this study would contribute in development of this process in Albanian education system, while conclusions and recommendations of this study would be a point of reference for future policies. Therefore, with the support and understanding of heads of the institution, Albanian University is doing its best to offer the best teaching tools to its staff.

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A CASE STUDY ON STUDENTS' ANXIETY DURING ONLINE LEARNING

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Abstract

Due to the pandemic in 2020, online learning was presented to students as a new way of learning. The shift from onsite learning to online learning was accompanied by a lot of insecurities and anxieties. The aim of this study is to explore the factors creating anxiety among the students at "Fan S. Noli" university in Korca, Albania. Also, this paper focuses on exploring the effects of anxiety on students' performance and comparing the gender perception of students of distance learning about the effect they had on their performance. The participants of this study completed a questionnaire and the data is presented numerically and qualitatively. The results showed that factors like: material distribution, assignments, course tests, exams and discussions were found to create anxiety among the students. The overall values for all factors of anxiety were slightly higher in male students as compared to female students. It was noticed that anxiety had a considerable effect on online students' academic performance, as well. It is recommended that professors may support students in managing their academic anxiety through different techniques.

Key words: *factors of anxiety, effects of anxiety, students' performance, gender perception of students*

1. Introduction

Have you ever trembled before an exam or have you ever had sweaty palms before a job interview? These are anxious feelings that the body uses to prepare itself for an important event. On the other hand, we try to breathe or to stay calm once the event starts. So this kind of anxiety helps us to perform better as it makes alert for an activity that we are about to do.

Anxiety is a basic human emotion that consists of fear and uncertainty and usually it occurs when an individual believes that the event is a threat to self or self-esteem.

Students encounter difficulties while studying, and they face anxiety when taking tests or making important life decisions. The literature contains proof that there is a bad link between anxiety and academic performance, because there is a link between anxiety and the achievement of crucial cognitive and emotional results in online education. Researchers pointed out that the high levels of anxiety influence on the decrease of working memory, distraction, and reasoning in students (Aronen et al., 2005). Tobias in Ibrahim (1997) has assumed that anxiety plays significant role in student's learning and academic performance, moreover anxiety has been known to have both facilitating and debilitating effects on academic achievement. Researchers have also been looking at the correlation of anxiety and the effect of academic performance among school student. They found that high school students with higher level of anxiety have lower academic performance (McCraty, 2007) and greater anxiety would be associated with poorer academic achievement (Luigi et al., 2007).

Students with the higher level of anxiety have a reduced memory span; lose concentration, lack confidence, and have poor reasoning power. The elements that influence on this decrease can be described as anger and regret in students when feel anxiety in difficult situations related with their study. Generally, high level of anxiety was more closely associated with lower performance among low ability students (Sena et al., 2007).

2. Definition of anxiety

One of the psychophysiology challenges is anxiety (Callahan, 2001). Psychological, bodily, or environmental difficulties can be symptoms. There are many different types of anxiety, some of which include over thinking, fear, restlessness, and overly emotional reactions. Whilesome people seem calm when they are stressed, their brain is constantly thinking. The quality of life will be disrupted and this will get so severe. Anxiety has several different definitions according to experts. Definition of anxiety by Spielberger's (Ercan, 1995) is emotional state consisting of feeling, tension, apprehension, and its effects on the nervous system. These are differentiated in state and trait anxiety. State

anxiety is a transitory emotional state reflective of one's interpretation of a particular stressful situation at a particular period of time or at the feeling of that moment . Study anxiety is a distinct circumstance that relates to anxiety conditions that are encountered during the study process and may affect academic performance, according to a prior study on anxiety in students.

Anxiety can appear at any time and befalls humans out of necessity, cutting across all age groups. It is a part of normal human reactions to stressful situations. (Fenton et al., 2020)

To compensate for anxiety's negative effects on student learning, students experiencing anxiety require extra motivation and guidance from their teachers as well as their parents.

Anxiety blocks the normal thought processes. It favors a passive approach to material rather than interaction with it.

3. How anxiety affects students during online learning

3.1 Students' academic performance

Academic performance is a term used to describe the rating of a student following an examination. This is an important aspect of a student's life and is known to be influenced by various factors including anxiety and level of hard work/preparations done prior to the examination.

Researchers found that anxious individuals find it harder to avoid distractions and take more time to turn their attention from one task to the next than their less anxious peers. This makes learning, reading, remembering and writing difficult, by affecting academic performance. Since, the anxious individuals perform at a comparable level to the non-anxious ones with a greater cost in terms of effort or perhaps long term stress; it is believed that students with high anxiety as well as those with low anxiety will have lower academic performance. Therefore, those with moderate levels of anxiety will perform the best. Heather, maintained that if an individual's experience is negative, then anxiety level will be higher, leading to lower academic performance. Consequently, if an individual's experience is positive, then the anxiety level will be lower, leading to higher academic performance. From these investigations, it has been observed that high and low levels of anxiety is related to poor academic performance while a moderate level of anxiety is related to optimum academic performance.

Agboola and Evans (2015) conducted a research to explore the relationship between anxiety and academic achievement among international students in UK universities. The results of the study showed that anxiety was significantly associated with academic performance. Singh (2015) study focused to measure the impact of anxiety on academic achievement of under graduate students. The study was exploratory and descriptive in nature. It was found that low and moderate anxiety is positively correlated with academic achievement.

Shibli (2015) conducted a study to explore the effects of anxiety on achievement and performance of college students. The analysis of responses revealed no significant relationship with anxiety and achievement. Rehman (2016) research study focused on exploring the causes of anxiety among Indian higher education students. The researchers reviewed relevant academic anxiety literature and identified factors that led to serious academic anxiety.

4. The Case study

4.1 The aim of the study

The aim of the study is to:

- explore the factors creating anxiety among the students at “Fan S. Noli” University in Korca, Albania.
- explore the effects of anxiety on students’ performance.
- compare the gender perception of students of distance learning and the effects on their performance.

4.2 The instrument of the study

A questionnaire was distributed to students of the Faculty of Education and Philology via email.

There were 15 questions related to their personal information (male/female; gender; study programme, year of study) and the factors that created anxiety among students.

The Likert scale was used to measure how much students were affected by anxiety during online learning.

4.3 The participants of the study

125 students submitted their answers of the questionnaire.

5. Data analysis

After the questionnaire was submitted the data were analyzed in the Google forms, from which it resulted that 78% of the students were females, whereas 2% of them were males.

The majority of the students, 71,70%, were studying in the Bachelor, study programme 16.50% of them were studying in the Professional Master study programme, 1,60% of them were part of the Scientific Master study programme and 10.20% of the students were studying in the professional programme.

Most of the students, 49%, were in the 1st year, 34% of the students were in the 2nd year and only 17% of them were in the 3rd year.

Students were asked if *the technical aspects of completing the tests* have caused them anxiety during online learning.

The results showed that 38,6% of the students agreed, 17,3% of them strongly disagreed, 15,7% of the students strongly agreed, 15% of them neither agreed or disagreed and 13,4% of the students disagreed.

When students were asked about if *the material distribution* caused them anxiety during online learning, the results showed that the majority of them, 31.50%, disagreed, 29,9 of the students agreed, 22% of them neither disagreed or agreed, 11% of the students strongly disagreed and 5.50% of them strongly agreed.

The next question regarded *the ways of submitting assignments* if they have caused them anxiety during online learning. The data showed that 36,2% of the students agreed with this statement. 21,3% of them disagreed, 20,5 of the students neither agreed nor disagreed, 12,6% of them strongly disagreed and a minority of the students, 9,40% strongly agreed.

Students were asked if anxiety affected *their work with project* during online learning. A great number of students, 41,7% agreed with this statement. 21,3% of the students disagreed, 17,3% of them neither disagreed or agreed, 11,8% of the students strongly disagreed and 7,9% of them strongly agreed.

Another anxiety factor that students were asked about was *the ways of completing the answers in an exam*. The results showed that 44,9% of the students agreed with this statement, 25,3% of them strongly agreed, 14,2% of the students disagreed, 11,8% of the students strongly disagreed and 3,93% of them neither agreed or disagreed.

Students answered also if *discussions with professors or other students* caused them anxiety during online learning. The results indicated a lower percentage of anxiety as 36,2 of them disagreed with the statement. 22,8% of the students agreed, 17,3% of them neither disagreed or agreed, 15% of the students strongly disagreed and only 8,7% of them strongly agreed.

As far as their *lower results in tests* are concerned, anxiety is seen to have affected them. 36,6% of the students agreed with this statement. 22% of the students neither agreed or disagreed, 16,5% of them strongly agreed, 14,2% of the students disagreed and 8,7% of them strongly disagreed.

Anxiety is seen to have affected even their *results in students' final exams* during online learning. When students were asked about these results, a majority number of students (39,5%) answered that anxiety affected their results in the exams. 20,20% of the students agreed with this statement, 15,3% of them disagreed, 14,5% of the students neither agreed or disagreed and 10% of them strongly disagreed.

Students were asked if *anxiety has affected their motivation* to learn, during online learning. 39,2% of the students agreed with this statement 21,6% of them strongly agreed, 16% of the students neither agreed or disagreed, 12,8% of them disagreed and 10,4% of the students strongly disagreed.

The last question was if they would return to online learning again or not. The majority of students, 83%, answered that they did not prefer to go online.

Some of the reasons why students did not want to return to online learning are summarized below:

"Because online learning of some subjects is impossible."

"The academic achievements were higher before online learning."

"I did not want to return the difficulty of studying online."

"Because teaching in the auditorium is more effective."

"Because there are technical problems."

"Because I do not have the right concentration and motivation."

"Online learning is very stressful and causes anxiety."

"It was a very difficult period, and we had no previous experience."

“It was a period full of anxiety and stress, and the motivation was low which also affected the grades. For these reasons I would not like to go back to online learning.”

There were also some students who liked online learning and their reasons are as follow:

“Online teaching was very good.”

“A great number of the students come from the districts and online leaning reduces the expenses.”

“For me, online learning had a higher yield than that in the auditorium. The professors did their best to do their job, while the student could feel more comfortable at home.”

“Because it was a new experience. We must learn to adapt to the changes we may encounter.”

“What survives is not the strongest or most intelligent being, but the one that has the ability to adapt to change,” said Charles Darwin. I adapted to the changes and overcame all the challenges of online learning. Therefore this experience helped me to better understand the potentials of this method that I can use in the future (not only in times of emergency), but together with the traditional way.”

6. Conclusion

Students feel more anxiety in online learning approach because due to distance they are unable to discuss or share problems with the professors on daily basis. It is concluded that the majority of the students felt anxiety due to issues faced at the time of tests, exams and submitting the assignments. It was noticed a lack of interaction with the class fellows, lack of knowledge and understanding of paper patterns and exam questions. In material distribution, it wasn't noticed any anxiety. All these factors are cause of students' anxiety in distance learning and affect their academic performance.

7. Recommendations

- It is recommended to introduce counseling center/programs for students so that they may cope with examination anxiety, academic anxiety and management problems.

- As high level of anxiety is responsible for low academic performance, it is recommended that students may be provided with satisfactory feedback by professors.
- They may deal with students with positive behavior to overcome and reduce their level of anxiety.
- It is recommended a healthy relationship between the professors and students as this is helpful to minimize the anxiety factors.

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ENHANCING ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING THROUGH E- LEARNING APPROACHES. A CASE STUDY WITH 2ND YEAR ENGLISH STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study analyses the impact of E- learning approaches in the enhancement of English vocabulary acquisition by English students of the second year, Fan S. Noli, University. It is made a comparison of students' researches of the respective E- learning approaches they use in different subjects to reach a perfect vocabulary understanding. The students' works throw light on the use of on-line vocabulary activities and approaches which includes complex processes. This paper demonstrates how E- learning not only helps students to memorize new words, but also motivates them to practice foreign language vocabulary in the different subjects. The students worked in pairs and brought about successful E- learning techniques and approaches used for a better vocabulary acquisition. Online activities allow students to choose exercises with different levels of difficulty and therefore, adjust the material according to their needs. They also brought together various multimedia elements, essential for vocabulary learning. A questionnaire is conducted with them to see which vocabulary learning way they prefer to follow, and the extent they use e- approaches and vocabulary websites for a better language acquisition. E- Learning approaches are considered to be important tools that help extend education beyond the classroom and facilitates both interactive and individualized learning. We expect these activities and blended learning to enhance learning outcomes and improve the current practice resources for students and vocabulary improvement in different University subjects.

Key words: *E- learning approaches, vocabulary acquisition, English students, interactive learning*

I. Introduction

Online teaching - learning process gained priority in the situation we have been experiencing, which changed our life thoroughly. It has put into evidence the importance of the developed technological solutions. Online learning has revolutionized the scene of Academic education. It is considered as a great alternative to create freedom to the actors of teaching- learning process; teachers and students and an immediate need of presenting innovative ideas, on aspects of e-learning and linguistic acquisition and to present challenges faced and solutions. Technology has changed the world of classroom presentation forever.

Linguistic and cognitive language theories stress the importance of presenting learners with multiple opportunities to interact with authentic, contextualized, and linguistically challenging activities and materials in communicative and academic contexts (*Cummins, 1981; Kasper et al., 2000; Krashen, 1982*). Adding e-learning instructional components may provide more of those opportunities, and may also offer more flexible access to students (*Petty, Johnston, & Shafer, 2004*). The appeal of offering e-learning components is a tempting methodological response to the multitude of identified learning needs of students.

How to implement computer technologies into the students' subjects at university classes practically, and effectively has yet to be thoroughly explored. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of English students trying and using different E- learning approaches and components in order to improve English vocabulary learning. The study is undertaken in order to gain insight into the steps, techniques and decision-making processes that are necessary for implementing computer technologies in English vocabulary acquisition.

The use of e-approaches for education has become popular within the last decade (*Fewkes & McCabe, 2012; Fischer, 2013*) because they are instrumental in knowledge sharing and communication, due to their ease of use (*Pavlik & McIntosh, 2018*); thus, they may also facilitate vocabulary learning (*Schwartz et al., 2013*). The increasing use of technological devices has enabled English language teachers to apply different teaching methods and strategies in their classroom. This rapid improvement in technology has given teachers the opportunity to incorporate mobile devices into their teaching practices and help their

students to become more motivated and eager to learn. Specifically, the use of mobile tools has enabled educators to shift from traditional teaching methods and strategies to mobile-based learning, which results in better vocabulary gains, more effective reading comprehension and increased language achievement. (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012;)

II. Main concepts. Vocabulary learning

Vocabulary is one of the most important aspects in learning a language. There are many ways to explain meaning. And when teaching vocabulary, is a major part of the teacher's art. (Jeremy Harmer The practice of English teaching, fourth edition, Pearson Education Limited 2007, p.229). Students need to see words in context to see how they are used. The best way in introducing new words in class, offline situation, is to read texts or listen to audio tracks and see or hear those words in action. Traditional vocabulary teaching is presented in multiple ways: in visual techniques (flashcards, photographs, blackboard drawings, wall charts, mime and gesture), verbal techniques (illustrative situations, synonym and definition, contrasts and opposites, scales and examples), games and translation.

Vocabulary games are appropriate for use with collection of vocabulary items. It is also imperative to know that vocabulary learning is determined by the frequency of use and exposure to various situations, scenarios, forms, and contexts (Nation, 1990; Schmitt, 2000).

The growing trend of online learning shows an improvement in society thanks to the ways it progresses skills in every field, especially in education. The terms "asynchronous" and "synchronous" are widely used. (<https://online.osu.edu/>) Our students have experienced and attended both of these online learning; Google classroom and Google teams applications. Actually, they were engaged in both platforms. According to Oztok et al., (2012), synchronous and asynchronous communication tools should not be evaluated in isolation, but rather how they can supplement one another. (Baumgartner, Lee, Birden & Flowers, 2003; Walker, 2003).

E- approaches, different vocabulary websites and social media platforms, offer users different reasons for use, ranging from study, to work or pleasure. There is no general linguistic discourse, and the

learners' purpose for using them offer differing contexts. The differing contexts provided by them, allow learners to expand, confirm, experiment, and develop their vocabulary (Takac, 2008) to a more colloquial discourse. There are many online sites our students make use of such as: <https://langulife.com/>-. Students feel free to speak about real life topics and enriching vocabulary by relevant vocabulary included for every topic. They add new words to their vocabulary bank, sort the words based on category (noun, verb, adjective) and check their correct pronunciation, use new vocabulary in their speech, interact with other learners and native speakers, having fun. <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/>. Students may find different lessons, activities, webinars, vocabulary games, according to the respective linguistic levels, free materials and resources.

III. The study

IV.1. Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether online approaches have any significant effect on vocabulary achievement of 2nd year course English students, at Fan Noli University in different subjects, as well as e-learning approaches students use for a better vocabulary acquisition, based on their experience, practical work and examples they have submitted from the answers of the questionnaire. Another question raised is the way the students prefer and find more productive in vocabulary learning.

IV.2. Methodology

This research employed a qualitative methodology, in order to gain an in-depth insight into this problem and generate new ideas from students' points of views and their own experience in the way how they put in practice the e- learning approaches for a better vocabulary acquisition and to understand their concepts and opinions. The approach of this qualitative research is a Phenomenological research so the phenomena is investigated by describing and interpreting participants' lived experiences.

IV.3. Data analysis

IV.3. 1. The subjects involved in the study. A group of 20 students are chosen from the 2nd year English course, "Fan S.Noli" University.

Students were given to prepare a research on e-learning techniques which increase vocabulary acquisition. In this student-centered task, they are required to prepare the research in pairs. Besides this, a questionnaire is handed out to observe the extend the students use online learning, different vocabulary websites, e- approaches for vocabulary acquisition, as well as to see the usefulness of technology in vocabulary learning and the comparison with traditional one. They delivered their works by providing mere examples for a good vocabulary acquisition. They presented online games, activities and they replied on the questions of the questionnaire, by pointing out their points of views.

IV. 3.2. Ideas presented in the students' researches about vocabulary e- approaches

The topics of their research consist on: Approaches of learning vocabulary; how to learn vocabulary virtually, vocabulary activities through e- learning, effects of e- learning on enhancing English vocabulary etc.

Based on their researches on vocabulary e-learning methods students are of the opinion that;

- Online modules are often more affordable, because they don't have to deal with additional costs like travel expenses, training facilities, or printing materials. They also believe that they lead to personalized learning as they learn at their most convenient time;
- Through vocabulary e- learning approaches students meet their learning style or needs, improve the efficiency and effectiveness. They as well improve user-accessibility and time flexibility to engage them in the learning process.

In their research they display many digital vocabulary activities for virtual learning they use and they really help them in vocabulary enhancement, such as creating Google slideshows, creating quiz let sets, alpha boxes, which provide students with an organizer, featuring each letter of the alphabet, so that they self-select words and fill in the definitions based on any text they read. Besides digital activities, they use websites as well, for learning English Vocabulary online such as Grammarly, Thesaurus, British Council websites, Cambridge online dictionary.

Some students' research presented many e- learning methods that help them a lot in vocabulary enhancement, by mentioning even many benefits, compared to traditional vocabulary learning students have presented ways of learning through YouTube, e-book method, movie method, videogame method.

According to them, YouTube can improve students' vocabulary mastery and listening skills are a combination of both visual context with spoken language and develop their ability to enjoy and understand English lessons.

Student A: *"YouTube provides an attractive and interesting learning environment, and it motivates us to learn faster and better, with different authentic materials, such as movie clips, cartoons, podcasts, speeches, stories, tips, health, music etc. We are exposed to the actual language of real people"*

They agree that learning English vocabulary with YouTube is as good or even better than learning using books, because the action is explained clearer, and learning pronunciation is way better when using YouTube rather than using a dictionary.

Student B: *"E- books, also are a good way to enjoy reading, experience stories and learn information apps for reading online illustrations, animations and games Music can help us understand characters and plot developments. I acquire vocabulary better by using them"*

Students use many Apps for reading online and for improving their English vocabulary: Some of them have learned many words, slangs used by English teenagers, many adjectives, adverbs, phrases, from the app called Wattpad a website where people from all around the world can write stories of their own free. They use Webtoon as well, another vocabulary app where they can read many stories which are also shown with designs just like comic books. There they learn many words in English but also understand their meanings by the graphics which are shown in order to pick it up quickly

Video Games is another e- approach which help students improve Linguistic Skills and Cognitive Development.

Student C: *"Learning games, even video games, are effective in helping me compensate for learning gaps in traditional studies in class. All skills Are integrated and I feel free to practice the language and further develop their linguistic and cognitive abilities in the process, by*

removing the fear of making mistakes so common in traditional classroom settings”.

In context learning by providing both context and constant feedback, video games allow students to actually use the knowledge they gain in classrooms to learn English faster. Video games help them remove stress, increase social engagement, and even help students have fun while learning English.

Other useful vocabulary apps students use are Busuu, Memrise and Word Reference. -

Student D: *“E- learning has undoubtedly helped me for all these years to improve my English skills. What really has helped me more to improve my English skills are: Watching movies through Netflix by using English subtitles has helped me to enhance English vocabulary and improve my English listening skills. One way that helped me improve my English grammar was by watching different tutorial videos made by native English-American speakers and listening various songs on English in YouTube as well. Speaking with my American friends via Skype, Viber, WhatsApp has helped me to improve my speaking English skills and broaden my vocabulary.”*

They agreed that different vocabulary E- techniques, mentioned and used by them facilitated learning; helped them retain new knowledge; and increased their understanding of the content.

Throughout their researches, it is observed that students are becoming more and more interested on e- learning approaches, even in vocabulary acquisition and its improvement as well.

Even though my students find very interesting e- learning approaches, they have just started using them for vocabulary learning. Maybe it's only the beginning, as far as online learning has just entered in our lives. Actually, they are based more on vocabulary class learning, even though in classes there is a tendency, especially in text analysis subject of e- learning approaches, besides texts and lectures for vocabulary improvement. This is expressed in a high percentage of our students who strongly support the idea that traditional learning and e- learning can help one another by sharing benefits to make the learning system better.

Internet is a great help even for classes. Teachers may find the right materials and vocabulary apps and bring to class or lead students to make a good use of them, There are many meaningful and interesting

vocabulary activities to make classes more lively [://www.weareteachers.com/vocabulary-activities/](http://www.weareteachers.com/vocabulary-activities/). Through use of *online approach*, students can have more online instructional materials, which improve their motivation and desire to learn on their own. However, even though the use of e- approaches for learning vocabulary, may be a good way for motivating our students, not all of them have the stimulus for using them. Talking in general, not only for high level students and those who are inclined and are predisposed to learn, but others need to have the initiative from the teachers to use them at home as supplementary materials. So again, we come to the crucial role of the teacher.

IV.3.3. Discussion of the findings

Questionnaire analysis

The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions. Based on the students' reply, from 20 interviewed students, 75% of them believe that traditional learning and e- learning can help one another by sharing benefits to make the learning system better. Based on the results presented these e- techniques showed a much stronger increase in the use of technology

41,6% of the interviewed students prefer traditional vocabulary learning, such as visual and verbal techniques, games, translation. They support their idea because through traditional learning, students cultivate personal skills, it is more effective, they may learn more, interaction is very helpful. 33,3% prefer e- learning vocabulary, because they believe that it saves money, reduce transportation cost, it is funnier than learning vocabulary in a traditional way. And 25% prefer a blended learning, because it is more effective, it adds more fun to traditional techniques and helps with concentration.

- Related to the extent that vocabulary online learning is well memorized, well used in daily conversations and is better than traditional vocabulary learning, 58% of the interviewed are of the opinion that the above mentioned are to the extent of 80%. 33 % of the students believed that vocabulary e- learning is better memorized and better used in daily conversation to the extent of 60%, compared to a percentage of 8,3% that support the idea of 20%.

- The use of online sites such as learnenglish.britishcouncil.org, or languelife.com are 60% used by 50% of the students, 80% by 16,6% of the students, 40% by 16,6% of the students and 20% by 16.6%.
- The use of technology is considered useful in a mass of 80% by 41,6% of the students, 100% by 25% of the students and 60% by 33% of the interviewers.
- Concerning the usefulness of joining social media groups in improving English vocabulary, 50% of the students believe that it is useful to the extent of 80%, 25% of them think that it is useful to the extent of 40% and 25% believe it is useful in the mass of 100%.
- Listening to English audios on the internet and watching English videos and movies is very useful in improving English vocabulary for 91,6% of the interviewed students and maybe useful for 8,3% of them.
- 50% of the interviewed students chat with English native speakers via social media platforms to improve English and for 50% of them do not see chatting as a way to improve English vocabulary. 33% of them participate in English forums to improve English vocabulary and 66.6% do not.
- A percentage of 33% of the students are of the opinion that, vocabulary in classroom is better learned than vocabulary through e-learning approaches. 33% think maybe and 33% do not agree with this fact.
- Students expressed their view on different e- approaches and in percentage how much each of them help for a better vocabulary acquisition. More concretely; You tube helps and is used 100% by 41,6% of the students, 33,3% by 80% of them and 40% by 35% of them. E- books help 80% by 33,3% of the students, 60% by 33,3% , and 33.3% by 80% of the students. Movie websites help 100% by 58% of the interviewed students, 80% by 33,3% and 60% by 8,3% of the students for vocabulary acquisition. Video Games help and are used in a mass of 80% by 25% of the students, 40% by 33,3% of them, 60% by 25% of the students and 20% by 16,6% of the interviewers. Googleslide shows help in a mass of 80%, 25% of the students, 60%, 33,3% of the students, 100% ,16,6% of the students and they help 40% a percentage of 25% of the interviewers. Online dictionaries help in a mass of 80%, 50% of the students, 60% only 25% of them and 40%, 25% of the students. Quizlet set help 80% a percentage of 25% of the

students, 60%, 25% , 40% the same percentage, 25% and help 100% only 16,6% of them.

- 50% of the interviewed students are convinced that learning English vocabulary online by using different resources, is more interesting than learning in class with usual books. Whereas the other half of the interviewers think that it may be interesting.

- 66,6% of the students were able to learn vocabulary better when presented in multiple ways, traditionally, compared to 33,3% that think maybe it was learnt better.

- 41,6% of the students are of the opinion that the usage of mobile apps, to testing vocabulary is more fun and less stressful, compared to 50% that think maybe it is and 8,3% that believe it is not.

- The interviewed students have a tendency to use vocabulary websites which help them to enhance and improve vocabulary skills. More concretely;

Easy notecards is used in a mass of 40%, by 33,3% of the interviewed students, and it is not known by 66.6% of them. Dictionary websites are widely used by the students.80% of them use in a mass of 41,6%, 60% of them use in a mass of 25% and 40% in a mass of 25%. Word Nik vocabulary website is known and used in a mass of 20% by 33,3% of the students; the rest are not familiar with it. Even *Reverse dictionaries* is used by 33,3% of the interviewed students to the extent of 40%, and not known by 66,6% of them. Students are not familiar with Ludwig, Visuwords.com, vocabulary websites. Whereas Word sift is used 20% by only 35% of the interviewed students. Word hippo is used in the mass of 60% by 33,3% of the students. Free rice as well, is used 60% by 33,3% of the students. 66,6% are not familiar with it.Vocabulary.com is used 60% by 58% of the students and 41,6% are not familiar with it. So from the answers there is not a very high percentage of using some of these websites. However, students show a high interest and are eager to explore them more thoroughly

Students express freely their opinion on vocabulary acquisition in classes, compared to online vocabulary acquisition:

- Vocabulary acquisition in classes is based mostly on textbooks and hard to use in everyday conversation, and are more likely to be forgotten, compared to online vocabulary acquisition which through videos, through their repeated usage are fixed better.

- In classes, there is no dictionary use, online vocabulary offers many websites for a better acquisition.
- In classes are rarely defined words and phrases to the degree that online dictionary offers. In classes lacks the vocabulary explanation provided by images and photos, thing this provided perfectly by online vocabulary websites and approaches and help students express themselves more.

So, they highly recommend to combine vocabulary teaching in classes with e- learning methods, based on visual content, movies, YouTube content, quizzes so that to acquire better vocabulary concepts and create more fun and students become more motivated.

Based on the results presented, these e- techniques showed a much stronger increase of their desire to learn vocabulary. Research has also suggested that e- learning vocabulary approaches are more engaging and motivating than traditional vocabulary learning as they promote greater learner self-confidence and increase students' autonomy.

To summarize, vocabulary E- learning approaches and websites as well, encourage social and active learning and support social connectivity" (p. 156), and a "dynamic structure that changed the rules of the game" (p. 159) by turning technology into an environment that can support authentic language acquisition online. Bozkurt and Ataizi (2015)

V. Conclusions

The results of this study show that E-learning is increasingly being embraced by the traditional academic institutions, educational organizations and newly established online organizations for teaching English and other subjects in universities. E-learning platform is an effective platform for teaching English language. They study shows that students opinions are that they learn better vocabulary via e- learning and that all English language courses should be taught through a combination of the e-learning mode and the traditional one.

Students consider e-learning platform as appropriate and better means for acquiring vocabulary, developing the four English language skill and grammar. and as a better mode of enhancing performance in English than the traditional classroom modes. The findings show that e- learning improves students' vocabulary skills. It helped them to be more active in starting communication, they gain more confidence and

autonomy. Most useful approaches in improving English vocabulary are watching English videos and movies, Listening to English audios, reading English content on the internet, (e- books, documents, the use of e- dictionaries, using social media, joining social media groups listening to English audios and using online vocabulary applications and websites. participation on English forums.

By using internet, students are able to choose their own methods, learning materials and depth of study, self-monitoring and cooperation. In our university and in all universities all over the world online learning has been the best second option in teaching – learning process. Blended learning is becoming a trend, because it boosts students' efficiency, it builds engagement and improves collaboration.

The main findings of this study revealed a significant point in learning outcomes for e-learning students, indicating that it may be a helpful learning method for higher education and these learning styles could help students stay engaged. Each student's learning style is unique, and they prefer to use different types of online materials and activities. Furthermore, students' preferences have an impact on the effectiveness of learning.

E-learning allows students to learn individually, which improves their learning and knowledge of course content, such as increasing their knowledge of learning skills course topics beyond what they can learn in classroom.

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DISTANCE LANGUAGE LEARNING AND THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN THIS NEW LEARNING CONTEXT

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Abstract

For more than a year humanity all over the world, felt the weight of the Covidian pandemic touching every aspect of its life experiencing an absurd period of isolation and distancing. In these conditions arose the need to use virtual technology to enable virtual work and virtual learning. Although the way of teaching and learning was in a phase of transformation, due to the galloping development of technology and the introduction of digital tools in the learning process, distance learning was a completely new reality. The focus of this study is redimensioning of the teacher's role in this new teaching reality. Besides the challenges of this new learning context, there will be analysed the possibilities offered by distance learning and the use of digital technology tools to guarantee the methodological-didactic principles of a good foreign language teaching, such as developing student-centered learning, activating and promoting student autonomy and motivation and conveying elements of interculturality.

Key words: *distance learning, the role of the teacher, foreign language learning, methodological-didactic principles, student motivation, student autonomy, student-centered learning, digital technology in foreign language learning, interculturality*

Neuner and Hunfeld, while analyzing the main methods, with long-term impact on the history of foreign language teaching and learning, emphasize that “... *in an epoch the interaction of different factors is needed - socio-political, institutional, scientific, didactic, etc. - so that a new conception of foreign language teaching can emerge. / ... in einer Epoche unterschiedliche Faktoren zusammenwirken müssen – gesellschaftlich-politische, institutionelle, fachwissenschaftliche, lerntheoretische usw. - , damit eine neue Konzeption des*

fremdsprachlichen Unterrichts entstehen kann. (Neuner/Hunfeld 1993: 83)

The huge development of technology in general and that of information technology in particular could not be left out of the focus of foreign language learning. Various technological devices started being used in foreign language teaching and learning in the '30s / '40s of the twentieth century with the development of audiolingual and audiovisual methods and were primarily intended to help achieve learning objectives quickly and confidently. The use of the computer and especially the internet as a source of information in the age of digitalization is associated with many changes, which affect and dictate the way we expand our knowledge and how we learn. Not only the easy access to information, fast communication and the real time connection between users in different places, but also the main communicative purpose of learning a foreign language and its practical use made the so-called new or digital tools/media (Frederking / Krommer / Maiwald 2018: 237) find an even easier use in learning a foreign language by re-dimensioning and further developing the acquisition of a foreign language to meet the new needs of society in the digital age. In this context, in addition to the traditional foreign language teaching (in-person learning or classroom learning), which takes place in a common environment where students and teachers are physically present, new forms were developed such as E-Learning or Blended Learning (integrated learning or hybrid learning).

E-Learning³(online learning) means learning through the use of electronic devices, starting from the computer, tablet and smartphone and any other electronic device, which enables the connection to the Internet. It is often seen as a summarizing concept for every activity that was carried out during the learning process with the inclusion or use of digital tools (Rösler 2012: 118)

Blended Learning means combining online learning or virtual learning with traditional learning or in-person learning.

“In Blended Learning, the German language is taught individually or in groups, in class or outside of class, with or without a computer, at the same time or at different times, with many or even a few different tools. / Beim Blended Learning wird entweder individuell oder gemeinsam in der Lerngruppe, im Unterricht oder außerhalb des

³ <https://www.e-learning-plattformen.de/was-ist-e-learning-definition/>, 01.06.2022

Unterrichts, mit dem Computer oder ohne, gleichzeitig oder zeitversetzt, mit vielen verschiedenen oder eher wenigen Medien Deutsch gelernt.” (Rösler/Würffel 2017:145)

Kranz/Lüking (2005:1, in: Rösler 2012) in their definition emphasize the right combination to maintain a balanced ratio of traditional learning (in-person learning), independent learning and different stages and forms of learning in virtual environments.

Rösler (2013: 118) is right when he says that this form of teaching has not been unfamiliar to traditional teaching. Since the development and use in foreign languages of teaching concepts such as autonomy of the student, team work in addition to individual work, active learning, etc., teachers have paid attention to combining different methods, giving assignments and exercises and defining different social forms for their solution, when planning the lesson. Thus students work in groups when they have to prepare different assignments, such as preparing an interview for a certain topic using certain linguistic expressions, but also individually when they have to do homework. Students use the Internet as a source of information for various projects, as well as communicate by email with their teacher or with each other on learning issues.

Blended Learning operates on the basis of different didactic scenarios, which come together by the combination of in-person learning with online learning and can be distinguished based on the weight that each of these phases holds in the hybrid learning.

Distance learning is another form of learning, which over the years and with the use of digital media in teaching and learning has gained another dimension. Thus before the ‘90s of the twentieth century distance learning was conceived as individual and independent learning, based on teaching materials distributed by teachers, who then organized occasional meetings in shared physical facilities to discuss teaching issues and topics. The Internet and online learning platforms made possible the further development of this way of learning by further facilitating communication between the teacher and the student as well as the communication between students.

The pandemic caused by Covid 19 in 2019 found teaching in these exact conditions. Forced by the rapid spread of a previously unknown virus, the governments of almost all countries of the world decided to close educational institutions and take measures of physical distancing.

This happened in Albania as well, creating a completely new and unprecedented situation. Within a very short time the computer and the internet became the most necessary means of communication and not only that. Online work, online learning and the virtual world itself took on another meaning and importance.

From March to June 2020 the lesson took place only online. In September 2020, hybrid learning, Blended Learning, a mix of online and auditorium learning was applied for the first time in pre-university education institutions. Being in an unexpected situation, the teachers faced great challenges, the overcoming of which required calmness, courage and creativity. Perhaps less difficult was the preparation and management of online learning by foreign language teachers, due to the specifics and the inclusion of technology for a long time already in the foreign language learning process.

The teacher and his role in virtual learning

In the process of teaching a foreign language, not only the role of the student has undergone constant changes, but also that of the teacher. In the communicative method of learning a foreign language, among other things, a new dimension is taken by the role of the teacher, who is no longer seen only as a person who conveys knowledge but more as someone who advises and helps during the learning process. (Neuner/Hunfeld 1993: 105). According to Rogers (Rogers 1969 in Rösler 2012: 15), the ten traits that characterize the teacher in his new role (facilitator) stands out, the man who, among other things, motivates and pays attention to the spirit of group cooperation. Schar/Legutke (2012: 39) see the work of the teacher full of paradoxes, which he must know how to handle skillfully. Thus the teacher is required to follow a certain program, but he must also take into account the interests and desires of the students.

One of the main tasks of the teacher is the planning, realization and evaluation of the lesson based on the methodological-didactic principles of foreign language teaching. The teacher is also seen as *“the key factor in motivation and learning success / der wichtigste Faktor für Motivation und Erfolg beim Lernen.”* (Funk/Kuhn/Skiba/Spaniel-Weise. Wicke 2017: 76).

The use of technology in teaching requires high preparation and competence. This need became even more apparent during online learning.

However, does virtual learning create opportunities to guarantee the principles of a good student-centered learning?

One of these principles is the **efficient use of the lesson**, which means the real time used to achieve the learning objectives. This time can be maximized if appropriate exercises spark interest and curiosity to develop individually after class. Therefore, the teacher is required to know well each of the students he works with. They need to know their behavior, which exercises motivate them to work well outside of class. Experience has shown that students of different ages show a special interest in interactive exercises. Every current method of learning German offers on its website a section for online exercises, easily accessible and usable. Of course it is the teacher's job to make this information known to his students as well as to demonstrate their functioning, as well as to make sure that the students really do these exercises which he assigns to them as independent work by giving a feedback, as this promotes and motivates the **autonomy of the student**. The lesson should be **well structured**, with well-formulated objectives and clear to students. In a well-structured lesson the position and role of students and teachers is clear. Of particular importance in this case are the established rules known and accepted by all, the observance of which helps to develop the lesson according to the already made plan. The more familiar the student and teacher are with the platform used for online learning, the easier it will be to follow the curriculum, and the more the lost time with technical explanations will be minimized. It is therefore recommended that online learning be developed on platforms and programs familiar to students, so as not to create confusion.

Lesson management is another important task of the teacher, which influences the creation of a motivating atmosphere. The teacher, through various tasks, contributes in creating a collaborative climate between students. Performing group assignments helps not only to foster a spirit of cooperation among students, support and learning from each other, but also to develop positive criticism through correcting the written assignments together and establishing a relationship of trust with each other as well as between students and teachers. In this case

the role of the teacher in dividing the groups and assigning tasks is of particular importance for creating this spirit of cooperation and motivation.

Every student should have the opportunity to be **assisted individually** for any difficulties or shortcomings he has. Identifying these shortcomings and working with targeted exercises and tasks specially prepared to fill these gaps is another feature of a good lesson. Digital tools enable teachers to provide this assistance to students who need it. Observing the learning activity of each of the students becomes a little more difficult during online learning, especially when they work in groups divided into virtual classrooms. Dividing them into virtual classes makes it impossible to constantly monitor and observe, so the teacher must find other ways to quickly understand the difficulties or shortcomings of his students.

The **use of various methods**, in accordance with the learning objectives is another important element, which affects the realization of a successful learning. Often the teacher uses real objects during lessons to bring a piece from the culture and life, of the country whose language is intended to be learned, to the class. Online learning does not offer this opportunity, so the teacher shall find other ways. Showing photos or short videos could be a solution, which will spark students' interest and curiosity about the topic. Depending on the learning objectives, it is good that different competencies are exercised and reinforced through different methods, which should be chosen in accordance with the age, interest and learning skills of the class.

I think that what the teacher lacks the most during the development of online learning is the **Feedback** he receives from the body language of his students, making his intervention not immediate. Observing group work, jointly performed tasks, or individual tasks helps the teacher to objectively assess the achievements and progress of each of the students, then develops strategies to help them with their shortcomings, and to support or motivate them to exercise and further develop their skills and habits.

As can be understood from all the issues listed above, I think that the tasks and activity of the teacher do not depend much on the place where the teaching takes place, in a physical environment, online or hybrid, but on the set objectives, the selected teaching materials as well as the activities and tasks assigned to the students.

I remain of the opinion that, conducting a good hybrid or online learning, in addition to a good preparation based on the methodological-didactic principles mentioned above, the competence and professional skills of the teacher as the person who transmits knowledge and accompanies in the learning process, it also requires very good knowledge and technical conditions. Therefore, especially for teachers in our country, their continuous training on issues and topics related to technology and its use in foreign language teaching is of a great importance, as many of them found themselves unprepared to organize, plan and develop online teaching.

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BEING VIRTUALLY (T)HERE: ENGAGING ONLINE LEARNERS TO FOSTER COLLABORATION IN THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

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Abstract: Change is the only constant in our lives. Paradoxically, even though we might not welcome change, we tend to adapt to it by changing our attitude and perceptions in the process. Provided we act intelligently, change is finally going to be met with rewards. The aim of this paper is to show how teachers can adapt to rapid current changes in an era of e-teaching and e-learning, by engaging learners to successfully adjust to a virtual environment and welcome novel challenges along the way. The paper will start with some general considerations that explain teaching and learning approaches from constructivism up to experiential learning. In the second part of the article several games and activities will be introduced with the primary aim of fostering interaction and collaboration of e-learners. Examples of games and activities will be from diverse backgrounds and they will be illustrated with reference to elements such as task, objective, author, method and instructions. All activities can easily be tailored for e-learners from a distinct background and level of study. Activities that facilitate an effective learning through the approach of engaging the online learner will be grouped with reference to skills' check, online ice-breakers and reflective activities. The paper will be completed with some conclusions and suggestions about the teaching and learning process, beyond the confines and limitations of the physical classroom.

Key words: *virtual, learning, teaching, e-activities, online*

Introduction

The rapid growth of online learning is now common experience even for our country. Academic support can currently be provided to learners far from the university campus, while students have the possibility to contact each other in a multitude of ways, at times, even more collaboratively than being in the physical classroom. However, online teaching and learning in our country is still in its infancy and

both teachers and learners will still need to experiment with some designs that are found to be profitable within the virtual classroom, as witnessed in other countries which have had more experience in the realm of e-teaching and e-learning. Teaching online can be both rewarding and threatening at the same time. It is essential that teachers acknowledge the necessity for personal engagement and take care that the first experiences of working with the technology “fit” with the instructor’s experience and beliefs about the learning process [and] build the instructor’s self-confidence by starting with a successful experience¹. We can truly profit from the experience of others in online teaching and learning.

1. From constructivism to experiential learning

The following overview is presented here in an abridged form based on the article *Understanding student learning* in *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*.² It represents succinctly the main theories on human beings’ learning styles according to different schools of thought. We begin our discussion with constructivist theories which generally tend to explain how human beings learn. The notion of constructivism relates to continuous building and adjusting of previous structures, or schemata, as new experience, actions and knowledge are assimilated and accommodated. **Constructivism** stems in part from the work done by Kant over 200 years ago, who thought that *experience leads to the formation of general conceptions or constructs that are models of reality*. Unless schemata are amended, learning will not occur. Learning (in whatever domains) involves a process of individual transformation. Thus, people actively construct their knowledge.³ Piaget (1950) and Bruner (1960, 1966) are two of the 20th century’s most prominent constructivists. For example, Bruner’s ideas relating to inducting students into the modes of thinking in individual disciplines and his notion of revisiting knowledge at ever-higher levels of understanding, leading to the idea of a spiral curriculum, have been very influential. In the discipline of history, for instance, Bruner is often cited as the inspiration for changing the focus of history teaching in schools which shifted the balance from

¹Collis & Moonen (2001: 56).

² H. Fry, S. Ketteridge and S. Marshall (2003: 9-25).

³ Biggs and Moore, 1993.

regurgitation of factual information to understanding. Some of the ways in which this was done were to encourage learners to understand how the past is reconstructed and understood, for example by learning how to empathize and to work from primary sources. Most of the current ideas about student learning, including **experiential learning**, the use of **reflection**, etc., are based on constructivism.

Constructivism tells us that we learn by fitting new understanding and knowledge into old understanding and knowledge, with extending and supplanting. *As lecturers we need to be aware that we are rarely if ever 'writing on a blank slate'; without changes or additions to pre-existing knowledge and understanding, no learning will have occurred.*

*Lecturers should be considering also how to bring about change or transformation to the pre-existing knowledge of their learner.*⁴⁴

Additions to knowledge, in the sense of accumulated 'fact', may sometimes be possible without substantial transformation, but any learning of a higher order, involving understanding or creativity, for example, can usually only happen when the underlying schemata are themselves changed to incorporate new understanding. Such change will itself be likely to facilitate retention of facts for the longer term.

Rationalism (or idealism) is an alternative school of learning theory based on the idea of a biological plan being in existence that unfolds in very determined directions. Chomsky was a foremost member of this pole. **Associationism**, a third school of thought, centers on the idea of forming associations between stimuli and responses. Pavlov and Skinner belong to this pole. Further details of such theories may be found in Richardson (1985). Lave and Wenger (1991) are associated with a social theory of learning called **situated learning**. Situated learning focuses on understanding knowledge and learning in context, and emphasizes that the learner engages with others to develop or create collective understanding as part of a community of practice. Their view of learning is thus relational, and rejects, or at least downplays, the importance of the continuous reformation and transformation of the schemata of individuals. Supporters of situated learning view learning as a social practice and consider *new knowledge can be generated from practice*.

We also need to throw some light on theories of **adult learning**. It is still open to debate how and whether the learning of adults is truly

⁴ Mezirow, 1991

distinct from the learning of others.⁵ There are, however, propositions concerning the learning of adults which have had much influence on higher education, if only to cause teachers in that sector to reexamine their premises and adjust some of their views. Adult learning theories are thought by some to be increasingly relevant, as non-traditional participants (whether considered by age, mode of study or ethnic, economic or educational background) increase as a proportion of traditional students. Malcolm Knowles is associated with the use of the term **andragogy** (despite its much earlier terms *aetiology*) to refer to this area. His most quoted definition of andragogy is as the '*art and science of helping adults learn*'.⁶ One of the complications of the area is that he has changed his definition over time. From his work spanning more than 30 years, andragogy is considered to have five principles:

1. As a person matures, they become more self-directed.
2. Adults have accumulated experiences that can be a rich resource for learning.
3. Adults become ready to learn when they experience a need to know something.
4. Adults tend to be less subject-centered than children; they are increasingly problem-centered.
5. For adults the most potent motivators are internal.

There is a lack of empirical evidence to support these views. Despite many critiques of andragogy and the problems of its definition,⁷ it has had considerable influence. Many 'types' of learning that are much used and discussed in higher education, including experiential learning, student **autonomy** in learning and **self-directed learning**, belong in the tradition of adult education. It is self-evident that experience gained through life, education and work plays a central role in the process of learning and this perspective on learning is called '**experiential learning**' or '**learning by doing**'. Probably the most popular theory of learning from experience can be attributed to Kolb (1984), who developed ideas from other models of experiential

⁵ See Bright, 1989.

⁶ Knowles, 1984.

⁷ See Davenport, 1993.

learning.⁸ The Kolb model frequently appears in the literature, often modified to accommodate particular types of learning (or training) experiences and using alternative or simplified terminology. Experiential learning is based on the notion that understanding is not a fixed or unchangeable element of thought but is formed and re-formed through ‘experience’. It is also a continuous process, often represented as cyclical, and, being based on experience, implies that we all bring to learning situations our own ideas and beliefs at different levels of elaboration. The cyclical model of learning that has become known as the ‘Kolb Learning Cycle’ requires four kinds of abilities/undertaking if learning is to be successful. Learning requires concrete experience (CE); reflective observation (RO); abstract conceptualization (AC); active experimentation (AE).

But what do these terms mean? First, learners are involved fully and freely in new experiences (CE). Second, they must make/have the time and space to be able to reflect (RO) on their experience from different perspectives. It is this element in the cycle that will be strongly influenced by *feedback* from others. Third, learners must be able to form and re-form, process their ideas, take ownership of them and integrate their new ideas into sound, logical theories (AC). This moves towards the fourth point (AE), using understanding to make decisions and problem solve, test implications in new situations, all of which generate material for the starting point for the next round, the concrete experience again. Thus, the experiential cycle does not simply involve doing, but also *reflecting, processing, thinking and furthering understanding*. By extension, this cyclical process has a part to play in even the most abstract and theoretical disciplines where the academic is concerned to help the learner acquire the ‘tools of the trade’ or the modes of thinking central to the discipline, such as in philosophy or literary criticism. Several researchers have considered the difficulties inherent in developing reflective practice.⁹ The development of reflection as part of learning is a key aspect of lifelong learning.

⁸ An appreciation of experiential learning is necessary to underpin many of the different types of teaching activity including work-based learning and placement learning, teaching laboratory and practical work, action learning, role play and many types of small group teaching.

⁹ See Boud and Walker, 1998.

One of the greatest misconceptions on the part of many students entering higher education is their belief that a subject consists only of large amounts of factual knowledge and, to become the expert, all one need do is add new knowledge to one's existing store. It is the responsibility of the lecturer to challenge and change such conceptions and to ensure that their teaching, the curricula they design, and the assessments they set, do not echo this perspective. Biggs (1999) is one of the foremost proponents of the view that approaches to learning can be modified by the teaching and learning context, and are themselves learnt. He has also developed a taxonomy (SOLO) for classifying levels of understanding that can be applied across all disciplines. **SOLO** stands for **Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome**. The taxonomy is based on the study of learning outcomes from a variety of academic content areas and the principle that as students learn, the outcomes of their learning pass through similar stages of increased complexity.¹⁰ The changes are in the amount of detail and the quality of learning. *Quantitative changes occur first, and then the learning changes qualitatively*. The taxonomy may be used to describe the increasingly complexity of learning tasks as academic complexity increases. As such it can be used as a framework for classifying learning objectives and student achievement. Like Bloom's taxonomy, with which it can be aligned, it is concerned primarily with the cognitive domain. The SOLO taxonomy is a hierarchical classification in which each level is the foundation for the next.

The learning theories that have been outlined so far aim to explain the shift from constructivist to situational and experiential learning, and, finally, to lifelong learning. Our aim is to show that the virtual space can and should lead to such learning. With this aim in mind, we present certain activities that engage e-learners towards better understanding and active involvement in virtual collaboration and extension of the traditional classroom space.

2. Facilitating online learning through engaging the online learners

The involvement of the online learner is crucial for successful online teaching and learning. If online learning is reduced to lecture explanation (a digital correspondence course), most probably students

¹⁰ Biggs and Collis, 1982; Biggs, 1999.

will drop out or become more isolated and lose interest. *Engaged learning is a collaborative learning process in which the teacher and student are partners in constructing knowledge and answering essential questions.* This strategic approach includes setting goals, establishing timelines, and creating and assessing authentic products.¹¹ Engaged learning stimulates learners towards *active participation in learning situations and a process of knowledge-gain which results from being a member of an online community.* Some important contributions in the last three decades have acknowledged the importance of engaged learning in online settings,¹² with the view that instructors can provide assistance to e-learners and shift learners' traditional role *from passive knowledge absorbers towards active knowledge generators (for themselves and others).* Successful online learning entails shift of responsibility and power from instructors on learners, thus, a shift of roles from traditional learning and more input gained from e-learners. A key factor alongside online teaching and learning is motivation, which leads towards engagement of online learners, thus, to success on the long run. Motivation and engagement go hand in hand with one another; if there is interaction, there is motivation, and that means effective teaching and learning in online courses.¹³ Some key elements that characterize engaged learning in an online environment, as stated by Conrad & Donaldson, are:

- Students establishing their own learning goals,
- Students working together in groups,
- Exploring appropriate resources to answer meaningful questions,
- Tasks that are multidisciplinary and authentic, with connections to the real world,
- Assessment that is ongoing and performance-based,

¹¹ R. M. Conrad, J. A. Donaldson (2004: 8)

¹² See Bonk & King, 1998; Mantyla, 1999; Palloff & Pratt, 1999, 2001; Collison, Elbaum, Haavind, & Tinker, 2000; Meyer, 2002; Salmon, 2002.

¹³ The view that learner interaction is the key to an effective online course is supported, among others, by leaders in the field of online education such as Draves (2000), Palloff and Pratt (1999, 2001), Kearsley (2000), and Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek (2000).

- Products that are shared with an audience beyond the classroom so students are able to add value outside of the learning environment,¹⁴
- Interaction is the essence of the course.¹⁵

2.1 Phases of engagement in online environments

We are referring to the *phases of engagement* as presented in Conrad & Donaldson,¹⁶ in order to provide a model of management for different levels of online communication and different roles for instructors and learners. As it can be observed, the framework starts with introductory community-building exercises that build trust and team spirit, while it goes on with additional stages of engagement as learners gain more confidence and engagement. There are four phases, starting with the first phase (duration: first to second week), with learners in the role of newcomers and instructors as social negotiators. Instructors provide activities that are interactive and that help learners get to know one another. Instructors express expectations for engagement in the course, provides orientation to the course, and keeps learners on track. Some examples of activities in this phase are: *icebreakers, individual introductions, discussions concerning community issues such as Netiquette rules in a virtual lounge*. In the second phase (duration third to fourth week) learners are cooperators, whereas instructors structural engineers. Instructors form dyads of learners and provides activities that require critical thinking, reflection, and sharing of ideas, through activities such as *peer reviews and activity critiques*. The third phase (fifth to sixth week) continues with learners as collaborators and instructors as facilitators. Instructors provide activities that require small groups to collaborate, solve problems, reflect on experiences. Such activities may be *content discussions, role playing, debates and jigsaws*. Phase four takes more time (seventh to sixteenth week) with learners as initiators or partners and instructors as community members or challengers. Activities are now are learner-designed or learner-led. Discussions begin to go not only where the instructor intends but also where the learners direct them to go. Some examples of activities include *group presentations*

¹⁴ Johnson, 1998.

¹⁵ R. M. Conrad, J. A. Donaldson (2004: 8-10).

¹⁶ R. M. Conrad & J. A. Donaldson (2004: 11).

and projects and learner-facilitated discussions. The authors suggest that instructors of an online course have to ensure that all participants possess the necessary skills related to the communication tools to be used throughout the course. They suggest completing a skill' survey in order to find out about skills such as previous participation in other online courses; use of e-mail and drop box; attachment to e-mails; participation in discussion boards, group area, chat room, threaded discussion; use of Boolean logic while searching on the internet; participation in online collaborations such as team projects or presentations; use of management software; and previous online courses. After the skills' survey has been completed, there are several games and activities that serve as skills' check activities and online ice-breakers mentioned by the authors in *Engaging the Online Learner*, some of which are outlined below.¹⁷

2.2 Skills' check activities for engaging online learners

Some activities suggested by the authors to check learners' skills and engage online learners are:

- *Drag and Drop* (to help learners determine what might be helpful in a physical environment when learning online);¹⁸
- *Library Search* (to help students lean online library searching);¹⁹
- *I can find that* (to provide students with practice in using Boolean search techniques);²⁰
- *Scavenger Hunt* (to increase students' ability to navigate on the internet);²¹

¹⁷ A complete list of skills' check activities and online ice-breakers can be found in *Engaging the Online Learner* by R. M. Conrad, J. A. Donaldson (2004: 41-45).

¹⁸ By William Draves, President, Learning Resources Network (LERN), draves@lern.org, method: asynchronous.

¹⁹ By Kathleen R. Crane, MSN, RN, BC, Assistant Professor/Clinical, School of Nursing, The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, crane@uthscsa.edu, method: asynchronous.

²⁰ By J. Ana Donaldson, Ed.D., University of Northern Iowa, ana.donaldson@uni.edu, method: asynchronous.

²¹ By Sarah Lelgarde Swart, Instructional Design Studio Director of Instructional Technology, University of Detroit-Mercy, swartsa@udmercy.edu, method: asynchronous.

- *Syllabus Quiz* (to provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate their understanding of the course's orientation documents).²²

2.3 Online ice-breakers for engaging online learners

Conrad and Donaldson explain that ice-breakers are not only essential in the humanization process since they *humanize the technology-mediated learning*, but point out that ice-breakers should be planned and not left to chance, they should be fun, creative and expressive. Below we have mentioned some examples of ice-breakers, together with a checklist that tests the effectiveness of the online ice-breaker activities used.²³

Some online ice-breakers suggested by the authors to engage online learners are:

- *Bingo* (to provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate their understanding of the course's orientation);²⁴
- *Lost in Space* (to allow students to get acquainted with their classmates' shared interests, backgrounds, and abilities in a nonthreatening atmosphere);²⁵
- *Name that movie* (to describe a learner's life in an innovative way);²⁶

²² By Martha Kendall, Instructional Technologies, Monroe Community College, Rochester, NY, mkendall@monroecc.edu; method: asynchronous.

²³ A complete list of skills' check activities and online ice-breakers can be found in *Engaging the Online Learner* by R. M. Conrad, J. A. Donaldson (2004: 47-59).

²⁴ By Jerry Linnins, Manager, Learning Operations, Bechtel Corporation, San Francisco, grlinnin@bechtel.com, method: asynchronous.

²⁵ By Jerry Linnins, Manager, Learning Operations, Bechtel Corporation, San Francisco, grlinnin@bechtel.com, and Rita-Marie Conrad, Ph.D., Florida State University, rconrad@attglobal.net; method: synchronous.

²⁶ By Doug Palm, Assistant Director of Resource Development, United Way of Dane County, doug@uwdc.org; Bruce Jawer, Program Manager, IBM, jawer@us.ibm.com; Wendy MacColl, Director of Instructional Design, University of Arkansas Walton College of Business, wmaccoll@walton.uark.edu; Dan Reigel, Information Systems Consultant, Marshfield Clinic, reigel.dan@marshfieldclinic.org; Melissa Kubly, Sr. Training Specialist, WPS Health Insurance, wps.mkubly@wpsic.com; method: asynchronous.

- *One Word* (to introduce a student's interests and self-perception to classmates in an innovative way);²⁷
- *Portrait* (to introduce students' interests and self-perceptions to classmates in a fun and entertaining way);²⁸
- *Room with a View* (to find commonalities with others in the learning community);²⁹
- *Why are we together* (to provide an informal way for participants to learn about one another's interests and reasons for enrolling in the course);³⁰

The following questions suggest some elements to consider when evaluating the design of online ice-breakers.

1. Is the activity fun and nonthreatening?
2. Is it person-focused, not content-focused?
3. Does it require learners to read one another's entries?
4. Does it require the learner to find something in common with at least 10 percent of the learning community?
5. Does it require a person to be imaginative or express genuine emotions or openness?
6. Are learners required to respond to one another?

Instructors can refer to these elements when they design a new game or activity as an ice-breaker, or when they use one of the models provided

²⁷ By Rita-Marie Conrad, Ph.D., Florida State University, rconrad@attglobal.net and J. Ana Donaldson, Ed.D., University of Northern Iowa, ana.donaldson@uni.edu; method: asynchronous or synchronous.

²⁸ By J. Ana Donaldson, Ed.D., University of Northern Iowa, ana.donaldson@uni.edu; method: asynchronous.

²⁹ By Joan Vandervelde, University of Northern Iowa, Director, Online Professional Development, vanderveldej@uni.edu; Chris Vadnais; Air Force Broadcasting Service, vadnais@host6.net; Simone Sandler, Senior Lecturer, Bar Ilan University, ssandler@mail.biu.ac.il; Charles Christison, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Instructional Designer, chrischa@uwplatt.edu; Mike Levenhagen, Oshkosh Truck Corporation, Continuous Improvement Trainer, mlevenhagen@oshtruck.com; Dennis O'Connor, Instructor, University of Northern Iowa, dennis.oconnor@uni.edu; method: asynchronous.

³⁰ By Rita-Marie Conrad, Ph.D., Florida State University, rconrad@attglobal.net; method: asynchronous or synchronous.

and evaluate its purpose and effectiveness of use in the online classroom.

3. Reflective activities for engaging online learners

Reflection is one of the major components of an engaged learning educational approach. It provides insight on the behalf of both instructors and learners for the teaching and learning experience, respectively. A reflective activity should require from students to provide a synthesis of the learning experience, accompanied by feelings of fun, encouragement, and imagination, far from threatening feelings. Time and timing are important for contemplation and synthesis to take place. The following questions could serve as a checklist for effective reflective activities:

1. Does the activity ask for a synthesis of the learning experience?
2. Does it require the learner to share his or her experiences?
3. Does it require the learner to provide helpful feedback that will be useful to the instructor in future course development?
4. Does it allow for honest and open responses?
5. Does it require a person to be imaginative or to express genuine emotions or openness?
6. Is the activity insightful and nonthreatening?
7. Will the activity be completed over several days or weeks in the course?

Some reflective activities as illustrated by R. M. Conrad, J. A. Donaldson³¹ are outlined below:

- *Aha!* (to provide an innovative way for students to share their thoughts and experiences);³²
- *Bumper Sticker* (to provide an innovative way for students to share their thoughts and experiences in the course);³³

³¹ A complete list of these helpful activities can be found in R. M. Conrad, J. A. Donaldson (2004: 75-83).

³² By Rita-Marie Conrad, Ph.D., Florida State University, rconrad@attglobal.net, method: asynchronous.

³³ By Sharon Smaldino, Northern Illinois University, Sharon.smaldino@niu.edu; method: asynchronous.

- *Critical Insight* (to get students to read actively in the textbook and provide an opportunity for them to explore an area of interest in more depth);³⁴
- *More Words to Lead by* (to provide an opportunity for students to take a break from the rigors of the course);³⁵
- *Picture* (to provide feedback from students to the instructor and other classmates on their class experience).³⁶

3. Conclusions and suggestions

Teaching and learning online is no longer a thing of the future, it is already happening in a world where work, study and fun are one, supported by networking and technology. Experiential learning is becoming part of learner's experience and it will be part of a natural setting to facilitate learners and teachers in their online courses. The best way to use the recommended activities is to simply use them. The more the learners and instructors use them, the more they are part of students' experiential learning. There are no limitations about the activities, they can only get improved if there is good will on the behalf of all participants in the online environment. The more there is space left to imagination, the more engagement and rewards. Teaching online should no longer be seen as a threat, but as a useful opportunity that allows for creativity and collaboration simultaneously. Several ways have been suggested in order to attract different types of learners and to engage them to the fullest. These patterns should be part of the instructors' personal engagement as well, since they also need to let go of the traditional patterns they themselves have been taught and benefit from suggestions and opportunities that have been found beneficial. We can bring the learners from here to there and vice-versa, surprisingly, the deictic expressions do not lose their meaning, they just become irrelevant, but more powerful.

³⁴ By Susan Davis Allen, MS, RD, Facilitator, Center for Learning Innovation, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College, sallen@southwest.tec.wi.us; method: asynchronous.

³⁵ By Mary I. Dereshiwsky, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Educational Leadership and Research, Center for Excellence in Education, Northern Arizona University, statcatmd@earthlink.net; method: asynchronous.

³⁶ By J. Ana Donaldson, Ed.D., University of Northern Iowa, ana.donaldson@uni.edu; method: asynchronous.

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New Jersey.

ADAPTING TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES IN POST COVID CLASSES: A CASE STUDY WITH THE STUDENTS OF MASTER'S DEGREE

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Abstract

The necessity to rely on online teaching platforms brought forward the fact that teachers need to be prepared to implement their knowledge in any given teaching circumstances. What is more, online teaching is widely considered to be interesting by students who highly appreciate dealing with graphics, and joining virtual collaboration through shared applications or features of teaching platforms. The goal of this paper is to study the ability of the second-year students of the “English Language Teacher” Master’s Degree to implement translation activities in their teaching classes and adapt them to be used not only in virtual classes but even in combined ones. The study is carried out based on the students’ performance as pre-teachers, on the willingness of their students/pupils to participate in their classes and on their acquired new knowledge. The mandatory six weeks period of practice that is accomplished by the students has served as an opportunity as well as a time limit for the development of this study. In conclusion, the paper highlights the fact that dedication and training help ‘pre-service teachers’, (but not only) provide their students with more interesting and profitable classes, motivating the latter to willingly participate and contribute to their learning experiences.

Key words: *adaptation, translation activities, teaching platforms, virtual classroom*

Introduction

The necessity to master the use of online teaching platforms in order to cater to students’ academic and personal needs made it possible for some unexpected advantages beside the disadvantages, which have somehow been ‘handled’ accordingly. Students seemed to adapt more easily to the new way of being taught and most of them seemed to be intrigued by the challenge of explaining all the functions and features offered by the platforms used for teaching.

There were even cases when students who were previously reluctant to participate in onsite classes showed high interest in exploring and

collaborating via the teaching ‘walls’ and in promoting their work on the relevant windows of intelligence. This is mainly a result of the digital technology being rooted in students’ (as well as in almost all peoples’) everyday life practices.

Nevertheless, the implementation of translation activities in the process of foreign language acquisition, requires the teacher’s effort in modifying them according to their students’ needs; linguistic knowledge; cultural awareness; lesson’s goals; assessment tools; and most importantly school and classroom’s capacities. What is more, due to the necessity for translation activities to be perceived as attractive by students; to have a communicative focus; to integrate one or more knowledge levels; as well as to promote real life practice, teachers are often challenged to put additional pressure to their current workload. Taking into consideration the fact that in our schools, teachers do not have the privilege of being assisted by another one during their classes and the amount of the homework assignment, information reports, planning sheets and lots more other paperwork they are expected to deal with in a single working day, it is understandable to expect some reluctance when it comes to disturbing the ‘daily load’. In such cases, it is observed that they opt either for translation free classes or for own language use ones two practices they are used to which don’t need extra preparation. In this aspect, it is worth taking some time convincing them that the ‘extra work’ which they might fear of will later help their students achieve better results leading to a less stressful class. As far as pre-service teachers are concerned, it is much more beneficial to raise their awareness before their practice as the entire process will become easier.

Methodology

The article aims to promote the incorporation of translation activities in all types of classes (on site, virtual and combined ones). It focuses on pre-service teachers’ capacities to modify the lesson hour in order to accommodate them appropriately and on the success rate as pertained by them. The analysis of the details is carried out based on the pre-teachers’ report presented at the end of their period of practice. Comparing and contrasting the translation activities has led to a better understanding of the present situation in today’s classrooms, to the identification of the activities considered as easier to be introduced and

to the specification of the ones considered as more appropriate for virtual or combined classes.

Translation and Foreign Language Learning

Translation is nowadays regaining its importance in the field of education and is considerably being used by teachers and learners in the process of foreign language acquisition. Acknowledging the fact that translation is not the old equivalent for Grammar Translation Method as well as its great contribution in bridging cultural gaps has brought about researchers' motivation to create and adapt translation activities which, once practiced adequately, can greatly contribute to foreign language acquisition. In this aspect, it is worth mentioning the fact that the focus of these activities and the strategies through which they are applied are very important.

Colina and Albrecht (2021) highlight the fact that in order to be successful, all the translation activities should be based on an objective focus, active knowledge and real communicative results. These not only help learners find practical use of what they acquire during classes, but also pertain to the uses of the foreign language out of the classes, especially to what learners encounter during their continuous presence in the virtual world. Consequently, the entire process becomes more beneficial and objective leading to practical and active knowledge.

Out of the many benefits of incorporating translation as a tool in the process of foreign language acquisition (and that of second language acquisition) is the fact that it highly contributes to learners' linguistic knowledge and cultural awareness, improving, thus, their interpersonal communication. (Colina & Laffer, 2017) In order to achieve the later, researchers advise a thorough investigation of the appropriate overall educational conditions, making, thus, the entire stages adequate and successful.

They contribute to the improvement of various students' skills (Davies, 2004) as they don't operate only on a single front (Colina and Albrecht, 2021). Colina and Albrecht (2021) list literacy, critical thinking, long-term memory, organizing and deciding skills, translanguaging, negotiation of meaning and heritage language learning as some of them, pointing out the idea that a successful language classroom includes students' ability to move comfortably from their own language to the foreign one.

Richard Kern (2000, 2006) is of the opinion that in transformed practice, learners use their knowledge in real contexts by means of extra activities. Together with the entire stages necessary for the successful implementation of these activities in today's classes (whether they are on site, virtual or combined ones) comes the need for them to be objectively assessed and to be made topics of open classroom discussions. These will definitely lead to actively acquired knowledge built through personal experiences, which is known to last for long in students' memory and to become part of their active language capacity. The last stages could be carried out virtually, in order to save time in the classroom and to make students feel more confident and freer to express their own ideas, hesitations and doubts.

Findings

The article was based on the reports presented by thirty pre-service teachers graduating from the "Teacher of English Language" study program who introduced translation activities to 112 students from secondary/high schools. They carried out their mandatory six weeks of practice in the high schools and some of the secondary schools in Korçë and in Pogradec. In order to reach objective conclusions and to be fair to them, the pre-service teachers were asked to refer to the set of translation activities suggested by Maria González Davies (2004). In the rest of the paper, we discuss about the activities prevailing in their practice.

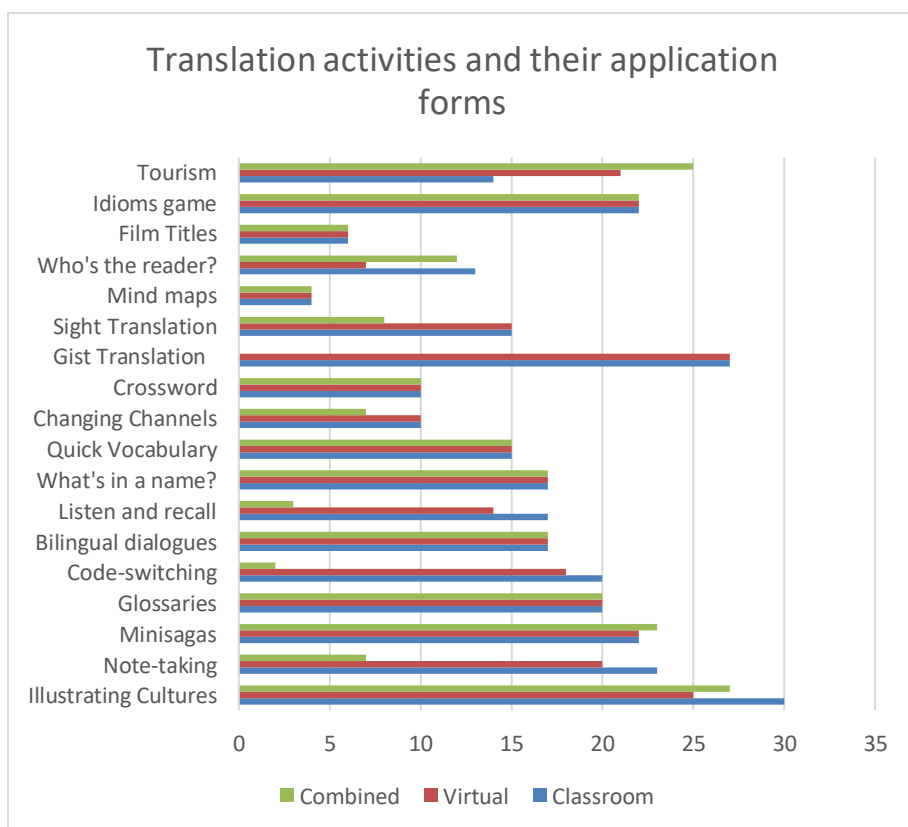
Translation activities

Below is a list of the translation activities integrated by the pre-service teachers in the teaching process during their active practice. They were asked to clarify the nature of the activity and specify whether they employed each of them only in the classroom, virtually, or in both of them.

As seen on the chart below, the most preferred activity is "illustrating cultures" which has been used by all of them. "Gist" translation, "tourism", "idioms games", "mini sagas", and "note-taking" are also among the most incorporated ones having been used by the majority of the pre-teachers. The least employed one is "mind maps" being chosen as a teaching tool by only 4 of them.

It is worth mentioning the fact that most of the translation activities are considered by them as appropriate and applicable in all forms of

classes. This makes them more easily applicable in the cases when students are unable to attend classes, when the teacher needs to save time in the classroom, when more detailed work is necessary, etc. In two cases, combined classes are seen as the most appropriate vehicle of incorporating translation activities. The case of “tourism” and that of “mini sagas” are examples of such practice. It is possible that the pre-service teachers have seen the necessity to allow their students more time and individual space to work on them in order to have better results.

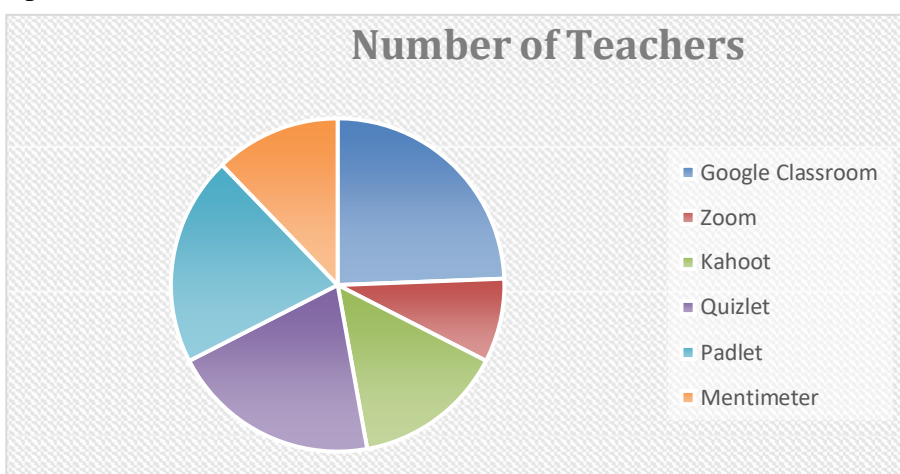


Even though combined classes are seen as acceptable vehicles for the incorporation of translation activities during the lesson, the data on the chart show that “gist translation” is an activity which should be carried out either in the classroom or online, leaving out the possibility to apply it in the combined ones. There are cases when the interruption of an activity might lead to students’ discouragement and later, neglect to

accomplish the task on time, or correctly. “Gist translation” is an activity which is organized within a group of students, with various actions following one another so it should be finished within a session whether it is in the classroom or in teaching platforms. In this aspect, it should be noted that group translation motivates students to interact and collaborate with each other. It also encourages deepening of linguistic and cultural knowledge necessary to achieve natural communication skills by making use of appropriate equivalents in a foreign language and vice versa.

Teaching platforms used to incorporate translation activities

Pre-service teachers were allowed to employ any teaching platform that they felt comfortable with to accomplish their tasks. While the above chart illustrates how effective was each of activity in each of three teaching practices, the one below reflects the teaching platforms they operated with.

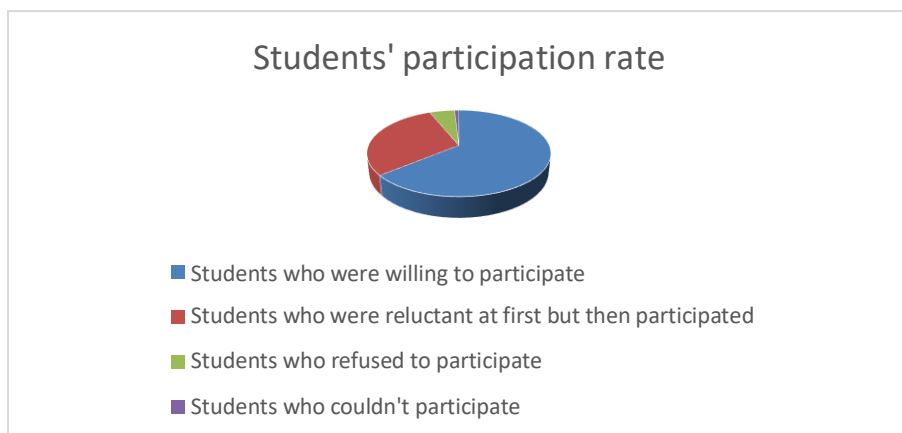


As presented on the chart, ‘Google Classroom’ seems to have been used by the majority of the pre-service teachers, followed closely by ‘Quizlet and Padlet’. It is a bit shocking to see that ‘Kahoot’, a game-based learning platform available for use since the year 2013 is not seen as very useful by them, but it may be due to the effort required to adapt the suggested translation activities. ‘Zoom’ is the least used platform

mainly due to the ‘time restrictions’ and is not being very flexible in creating classes and operating within them.

Students’ participation

There are two types of analyses under this aspect: the first one relates to the success rate of the translation incorporated on site and the second one represents students’ participation rate in virtual platforms.



As seen from the chart above, students were very cooperative in carrying out translation tasks during the classes. About 73 of them showed dedication and completed the activities as expected, while 34 were hesitant at first but then participated successfully. There were 4 students who refused to participate in some of the activities and 1 failed to accomplish successfully all of them. Being based on the above results the incorporation of such activities can be considered as necessary in order to motivate learners to try something ‘different’, to explore their knowledge capacities and to raise awareness towards the benefits of combining the classroom knowledge with what students encounter in their everyday life, especially in the virtual world.

Another point worth mentioned in this context is another element highlighted by the analysis of the reports: the pre-service teachers had difficulty assessing what their students’ current active knowledge was. Consequently, the translation activities offered to them, in a few cases, have been beyond their capabilities and in some cases below them. These phenomena might be the result of the limited time frame within which the practice was carried out (as it might have restricted the stages

in which the pre-service teachers carried out their work). Another reason might have been their focus: if the activities have been selected and organized by taking into consideration what students are expected to be able to do at that level instead of their current knowledge and skills, then they may have not succeeded in fully contributing to their students' linguistic and cultural awareness. As Kern suggests, there is an entire process of determining the appropriate path/means required in order to incorporate translation as a successful transformed practice. (Kern, 2000)

Conclusion

It was once again observed that translation activities are more successfully incorporated in today's class varieties. They highly contribute to students' analytical capabilities, linguistic perceptions and cultural awareness. As with any other successful practice, dedication and willingness are two key elements through which they can be adapted in all levels of education as they yield long lasting results in learners' academic performance.

It is worth noting, however, that translation activities are difficult to be integrated in the process of foreign language acquisition on a daily basis. In-service teachers are reluctant to integrate translation activities in their everyday classroom practices in order to avoid the 'extra' work necessary to determine the appropriate stage in which various examples of these activities can be implemented, the type of the activity to be used, combining previously acquired knowledge with the new one.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned findings, we would like to stress the fact that this study is limited in many ways, there is always space for further investigation on the translation activities, teaching platforms, types of teaching, levels of knowledge, etc. However, motivating pre-teachers not to completely or partly abstain from the teaching platforms as well as from the integration of translation activities seemed interesting, hoping that the practice might prove beneficial even for younger/older learners.

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ALBANIAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE LEARNING

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Abstract

During the last academic year, 2020-2021, Albanian students experienced 100 percent online classes. This paper focuses on students' perceptions of the advantages and difficulties that they experienced in an online learning environment. The data were collected using students' reflection essays regarding their experience in online learning; such an essay was asked to be written as part of their summative assessment. They were asked to think about their online courses, individuals (students, teachers), the quality of their learning experience and mental health, their motivation, and technology used in the Albanian context.

The study was limited to “Fan S. Noli” University students of two master's degree courses: “English Language” and “Modern Telecommunication Systems and Internet Technologies”.

Being aware of their learners' perceptions concerning advantages and challenges in an online learning environment may help teachers in choosing the right teaching options that would pose fewer difficulties and problems to their learners.

Keywords: *Albanian students, advantages and disadvantages of online learning, learning experiences.*

Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic situation has caused global disruption, affecting every aspect of human life. To ensure the continuity of education for students of all educational levels, face-to-face classes have been moved online. The same happened in Albania. During the academic year, 2020-2021, Albanian students experienced 100 percent online classes using “Microsoft Teams” as the main teaching and learning platform. The sudden transition from face-to-face to online learning has posed numerous challenges for students, teachers, administrators and education leaders.

Advantages and disadvantages of taking a 100 % online language course

Referring to literature (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007; Dudeney 2007, Lewis 2009), taking a completely online language course has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it enables teachers and students to: be involved in the teaching and learning process at their own pace and time, keep the teaching and learning content very up-to-date due to the variety of internet resources, keep a wealth of additional materials for individualized work resulting in individualized tutor feedback, have access to courses they might be unable to attend, have time to prepare responses as well as have their travel costs reduced and time saved. On the other hand, online language courses may: undergo problems related to technical issues and access, cause social isolation to both teachers and students, and have unrealistic expectations from online teaching and learning processes since, among other reasons, some skills (such as speaking) are more difficult to practice online and a high degree of self-motivation is needed to stand in front of a computer for a long time; as a result, drop-out rates tend to be higher online than face-to-face. This paper focuses on students' perceptions of the advantages and difficulties that they experienced in an online learning environment.

Being aware of their learners' perceptions concerning advantages and challenges in an online learning environment may help teachers in choosing the right teaching options that would pose fewer difficulties and problems to their learners.

The study

The methodology

The data was taken from students' reflection essays regarding their experience in online learning; such an essay was part of their summative assessment. Their sentences containing the target perceptions were extracted and corrected grammatically (when necessary). This study was limited to “Fan S. Noli” University students of two master's degree courses: “English Language” and “Modern Telecommunication Systems and Internet Technologies”.

The results

Reading students' essays, their sentences related to the advantages and disadvantages of online learning (vs. classroom-based one) are written in italics and categorized as follow:

Advantages:

- Study at one's own pace, time & (comfortable) place:
No more waking up early and attending classes or an irritating classmate.
Now you can take whichever course at peace and at your convenience.
Due to its convenience and flexibility, the resources are available from anywhere and at any time.
Because of their family financial problems, they can work and follow the lessons (at the same time).
A great possibility for students who don't have time to attend classes physically because of their work.
A student can go to Greece, where his parents live and work, and at the same time follow the course regularly.
There are better conditions in our house than in the university auditoriums, especially in winter when temperatures are really low.
Online classes offer flexibility & comfort: A learner can study any time that he wants, being comfortable wearing even pajamas.
- (Travel) costs reduced & time saved:
Online learning eliminates the costs of student's transportation, meals.
All the course materials are available online.
I stayed home, so I saved money for the rent and time for housework.
We don't have to spend money to print the materials.
- Have access to course materials; additional materials; up-to-date learning materials; better retention:
They are well-organized in folders and files.
We can download, save the learning materials and hear again and again / any time we want.
The video and audio materials used make the learning process more fun and easily retained.
Fast and easy sharing of resources using apps we find suitable (Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber).
Teams platform provides a record option of discussions.

It made several activities easier and more accessible than before.

Teachers attach videos, images or recordings which were not accessible previously in class.

We accessed more learning resources online than when studying in class.

- Improved computer skills:
It has helped the students on using the technological applications and devices.
I enjoyed e-learning; I became an “expert” of certain learning platforms.
- Better (self)motivation, emotion management, less stressful:
Online classes were not monotonous, because of using such a variety of ‘tools’.
Presenting my projects via Microsoft Teams was more convenient than presenting them in the class.
We weren’t stressed about what to say, how to say it, forgetting anything, how being dressed up.
- Develop proper time management skills
- More opportunities to communicate with a professor (via Teams, email, live chat, social media)
- Improved team communication and collaboration:
More chances to communicate with one another, having the feeling of being more communicative, comprehensive and collaborative.
- Faster Tutor feedback
...what is more important, having fast feedback for your work.

Disadvantages

- May feel more isolated, less motivated:
I felt socially isolated at times due to lack of real people around while learning, and sometimes it caused me stress.
Studying alone, only with the computer as your companion can be terrifying.
The online environment steals our motivation and desire to work or study independently.
There is little opportunity to make social connections.

- health hazards as spending so many hours staring at a screen: eye problems, having bad posture:
After attending lectures and seminars on our phone or computers, we needed to prepare homework and study for the next day. So we were exposed for many hours per day in front of our devices. It causes us mental and physical tiredness.
Inability to focus on screens / lack of concentration
- Problems of technical issues & access:
Modern computer programs (Microsoft Teams): falls short in terms of its compatibility with the older versions of the operating systems (that PCs have) and their Random Access Memory (RAM); are beyond students' reach (those who come from families with financial challenges)
Having a computer not equipped with a camera
No internet connection in small villages
An inconsistent internet connection, low internet speed for students or teachers, led to interruption of teaching and learning process.
Sometimes, teachers don't even have the necessary resources and tools to conduct online classes
Mobile devices such as i-Pads block the flash videos from being played in their browsers.
In the bad weather conditions, we missed the lesson because of the lack of electricity & internet
Problems with Platform Teams: microphone blocking caused missing the chance to answer, sometimes teacher's impression that the student didn't know or didn't want to answer; downloading and submitting assignments
- Unrealistic expectations:
You get knowledge only on a theoretical basis and when it comes to putting in use whatever you have learnt, it may be a little different
- Some skills are more difficult to practice online. E-Learning is insufficient when it comes to the testing of spoken and written skills:
...practical subjects, that cannot be done on your own, you need the teachers' help and being in a classroom.
- The authenticity of student's work is also a problem.

- Financial challenges
In the long run e-learning is usually a cheaper option but still it might prove to be too expensive for some students: buying new equipment like computers, phones, tablets, internet connection.
- Being distracted
*Following the lessons at home, there are cases when we are distracted or even interrupted by our family members.
... easily distracted by social media or other sites.*
- Time management skills needed:
Online courses usually have deadlines for assignments, tests, projects.
- The feedback can take more time than in a face-to-face class.

Conclusions

Studying online is seen by researchers and Albanian students, as a coin with two sides, having advantages and disadvantages.

Reading their reflection essays regarding their experience in online learning, it is noted that the extent of advantages and challenges varied from one student to another as a consequence of the interaction of several factors: their socioeconomic condition, the online learning resources available to them, their home learning environment, access to quality Internet service, their mental and emotional well-being, their student personality and responsibility, their interaction with their teachers and peers. Also, it is important to emphasize the finding (from this study) that the students experienced the least challenge on technological literacy and competency, considering the previous study on this issue (Kacani, Pema & Saraci, 2017)

This information is believed to be necessary for effective policymaking, decision-making, and future implementation of online learning. But, since this study is limited to students of only two master's degree courses, to obtain a wider view of students' reflection regarding their experience in online learning, it is recommended to be carried out to both students of other courses of a master's degree and bachelor's degrees.

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RECONSIDERING TECHNOLOGY USE IN THE PROCESS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FROM A POST- PANDEMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The closure of schools generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the social distancing that followed have led to substantial changes with profound consequences in education. This critical global incident forced most teachers to use digital technologies in order to facilitate their students' learning. According to researchers, the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the curriculum would contribute to an effective acquisition of 21st-century competencies such as autonomy, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Moreover, ICT tools can promote collaboration and interactivity enabling learners to develop their self-learning practice of a foreign language. The main purpose of our article is to discuss specific aspects related to digital technology use in an English language teaching setting from a post-pandemic perspective. In order to mitigate possible negative impacts, educational institutions should leverage past knowledge of online learning as something that can be more varied than just a way to deliver information. Engaging teachers and students in the development and use of education technology might influence how successfully digital resources assist the process of meaningful teaching and learning of a foreign language.

Key words: *English language teaching, digital technologies, online learning, ICT*

Online learning emerged as an ultimate solution to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic when everything went online in an instant and as a result teachers embraced technology with open arms. Institutions that fail in their action of integrating technology “will be unable to meet the needs of knowledge-based societies and as a result will not survive the change in paradigm of education” (O’Neill, Singh, and O’Donoghue, 2004: 320).

According to the literature in the field (Sheingold and Hadley, 1990) the use of information and communication technology (ICT) tools in schools and universities started during the 1980s and stirred the enthusiasm of teachers and educational policy makers alike. Technology was considered then as a revolutionary pedagogical tool for the future. It was credited for improving student achievement on standardized tests providing new opportunities for effective communication between teachers and students in ways that had not been possible before. E-learning and the Internet have brought additional benefits to the learning context as they enable the integration of virtually unlimited multimedia learning materials from external sources into the curriculum and make them available to students at any location in the world (distance education) where there is a computer, mobile phone or tablet device with Internet access (Alsunbul, 2002). According to Al- Mahrooqi and Trudi (2014: 2) “the application of computer technologies in language instruction provides a student-centred learning environment. It enables course administrators and teachers to vary lesson presentation styles to motivate students of varying interests, provides learning opportunities outside the classroom (hence increasing learner interaction with the language), and is perceived to cater more for individual differences.” However, in order to achieve a successful ICT integration in any foreign language teaching context, certain conditions have to be met, such as the presence of a solid infrastructure created by availability of computers, fast Internet connection, secure platforms and e-learning professionals implied by expertise and continued teacher training (Pirani, 2004). As far as research shows, technology use in language instruction is appealing to students as they are digital natives; thus, it diminishes teacher-centredness and student language learning anxiety because

students are given the chance to practise their communicative competences effectively without being embarrassed of making mistakes which would reduce their “affective filter” (McLaughlin, 1990). Technology integration in the classroom is also somehow related to subject areas. In other words, certain subject areas tend to integrate technology in teaching more than others. In their study, Howard et al. (2014) state that there is a strong correlation between subject areas they examined (English, mathematics, and science) and technology integration. Specifically, the researchers found science to have the highest frequency of integration followed by English while mathematics had the lowest frequency of ICT integration. English teachers reported greater integration of ICT in their teaching as they valued the importance of technology in enhancing students’ learning.

Therefore, “rapid evolution of communication technologies has changed language pedagogy and language use, enabling new forms of discourse, new forms of authorship, and new ways to create and participate in communities” (Kern 2006: 183). With the support of technology, students are more likely to use language for “ongoing identity formation and personally meaningful communication in the service of goals that extend beyond ‘practice’ or ‘learning’ in the restrictive senses associated with institutional settings” (Thorne 2006: 14). Both the onsite and online learning approaches imply committed teachers who design curriculum, use effective teaching strategies, encourage, and support students throughout their learning journey, and evaluate them as well as motivated and active students who are willing to attend classes, study course content, complete tasks and submit assignments regularly. According to Brown and Adler (2008: 16) the integration of digital materials in blended learning contexts can increase student engagement because “knowledge becomes socially constructed through conversations and interactions between students and educators during cooperative learning opportunities.”

When due to the pandemic context, the teaching and learning process moved online that turned into an amazing learning opportunity for both teachers and students by enhancing participants’ technological abilities and by sharing a strong bond in order to overcome obstacles and challenges. Having access to the internet implies access to valuable authentic materials and opportunities for practice; therefore, the use of technology for teaching purposes does not only facilitate acquisition

and practice of a foreign language; it also provides new ways of assessing communicative competencies. Teachers and learners are no longer isolated from the target language or culture and can “participate in the socially mediated practices of [the target language] community” (Kirsch, 2008: 46). The application of a wide range of digital resources in language instruction facilitates a student-centred learning environment enhancing student engagement, it increases learners’ interaction with the language as well as it provides learning opportunities outside the classroom. In terms of advantages, the use of new technologies in the classroom plays a crucial role in preparing students for their personal and professional lives; it encourages students to learn actively and cooperatively, it supports various learning styles; it provides individual development and motivation and fosters teacher-student interaction (Chamorro and Rey, 2013).

Lack of an adequate and reliable technological infrastructure such as availability of Internet connectivity, effective e-learning systems, ICT devices and other challenges prevented online teaching and learning in most Romania secondary schools from achieving their aims completely during the pandemic. Furthermore, socially disadvantaged students had limited access to engage in the e-learning process at first; thus, technology was not always the answer to respond to meet the requirements of the national curriculum or the students’ needs. Consequently, teachers needed to focus on using different online platforms and tools in the online classroom for a better teaching and learning experience, take charge of selecting appropriate online resources for their students’ level and interests; develop both content knowledge and teaching practice.

The Romanian National Curriculum for compulsory education focuses on the eight domains of key-competences concerning lifelong learning, promoted by the European Framework- communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; cultural awareness and expression. The 2011 Romanian Education Act established that starting with the 2012-2013 school year, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) subject became for the very first time a part of the Romanian National Curriculum. The Romanian National Curriculum for teaching

English as a foreign language includes suggestions for developing activities that enable watching YouTube videos in English in order to provide proper contexts for decoding oral or written messages being exposed to authentic language; reading and writing emails; reading web pages for specific information; searching the Internet for designing projects about famous people or places, filling in charts or fact files after watching videos, documentaries etc.

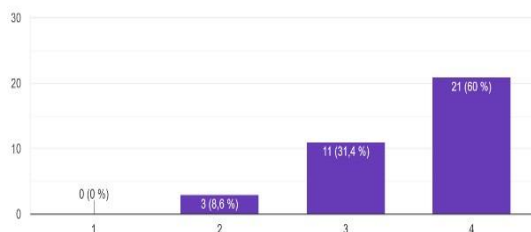
The main purpose of our investigation *Opinions and Attitudes on Technology Integration* is to gain first-hand knowledge to research into whether technology use during the English lesson in a secondary school helps to improve students' foreign language acquisition as well as to get a better understanding of English teachers' technology related skills by asking their opinions on technology use in the classroom from a post- pandemic perspective. Participants had to reflect upon their digital skills and their use of online resources in education in the context of their own professional development. The target group consisted of 35 secondary school teachers from Maramures county, Romania, who teach English as a foreign language. The answers were delivered individually by filling in a google form/doc. The first part of the questionnaire highlights the teachers' level of agreement with five statements connected to their opinions on technology use in teaching and learning English at the secondary school level:

1. Technology improved my ability to teach English during the coronavirus pandemic.
2. Using technology during the coronavirus pandemic has influenced my post- pandemic teaching approach.
3. My students are more knowledgeable than I am when it comes to technology.
4. Online learning has become a great way to supplement traditional classroom learning.
5. There is too much technological change coming too fast without enough support for teachers.

The statements use a four-point Likert scale from 4 strongly agree, 3 agree, 2 disagree to 1 strongly disagree. The results show that the majority of English teachers perceive themselves as computer proficient, being comfortable with using technology as 91.4 % of them rate their computer skills as effective. Their answers are rather positive since they suggest that in the post-pandemic context English teachers

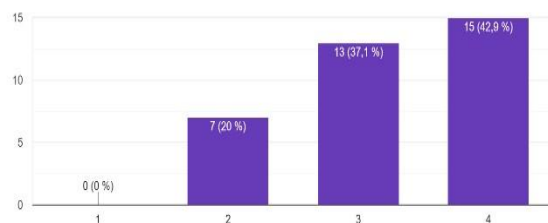
are more likely to design lessons that integrate technology than before confidently and appropriately. The next section illustrates the teachers' answers to our questionnaire.

1. Technology improved my ability to teach English during the coronavirus pandemic.
35 de răspunsuri



As shown in Figure 1, the majority of the respondents, 32 out of 35 teachers, more than 90% of them, perceive that their teaching skills are successfully supported by the usage of technology.

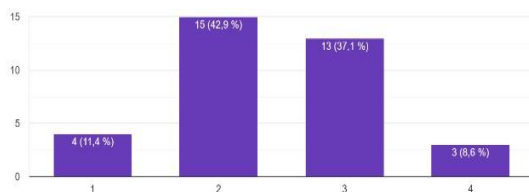
2. Using technology during the coronavirus pandemic has influenced my post-pandemic teaching approach.
35 de răspunsuri



As seen in Figure 2, more than two thirds of the interviewed teachers acknowledge a drastic change in their teaching style before and after the pandemic due to the relevant and effective

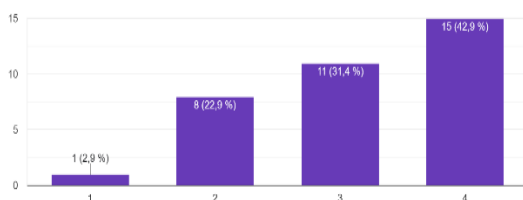
implementation of technology in the English lesson.

3. My students are more knowledgeable than I am when it comes to technology.
35 de răspunsuri



According to Figure 3, one can observe that the percentage of participants who strongly disagree or disagree that students are more knowledgeable about technology use than teachers is 54.3% versus to 45.7 % who agree with the given statement. It is important to think about the digital competencies both teachers and students need to be able to practice in order to use technology tools effectively. As the new generations of digital natives are technologically savvy the rapid growth of information and communication technologies cannot go unnoticed in the field of foreign language teaching. Students are enthusiastic about handling gadgets that they can easily turn into interactive learning aids because they enjoy autonomy in what they want to focus on and learn about.

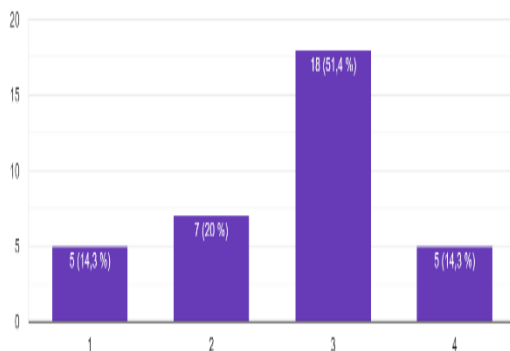
4. Online learning has become a great way to supplement traditional classroom learning.
35 de răspunsuri



According to the representation in Figure 4, the majority of the respondents (73.3%) admit the fact that online learning has become an important part of the whole educational process. Only 26.7 % of them consider that traditional lessons should not be supplemented by online resources. Consequently, teachers must be clear on the aims of the lesson, what the use of a particular technology brings to the learning outcomes and how it enhances learning and adds value to it.

5. There is too much technological change coming too fast without enough support for teachers.

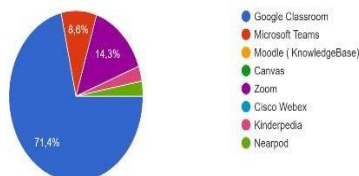
35 de răspunsuri



The bar chart in Figure 5 indicates that more than half of the secondary school teachers involved in the survey (65.7%) agree with the fact that there are too many changes that happen in the field of education due to the technological impact that is not in accordance with the current school context. Only 34.3% disagree with the above statement.

6. What types of e-learning platforms did you use in your school during the Covid-19 pandemic?

35 de răspunsuri

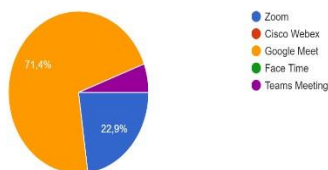


In Figure 6, 71.4% of the participants acknowledge the fact that an online learning platform such as Google Classroom increases students' participation,

collaboration and it improves learning outcomes. Other e-learning platforms to be selected are Zoom (14.3%), Microsoft Teams (8.6%), Nearpod (2.9%) and Kinderpedia (2.9%).

7. What kind of video conferencing tools did you use during your online English lessons at that time?

35 de răspunsuri

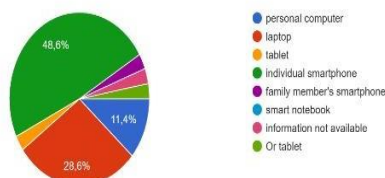


With the expansion of internet-based technologies in the education system, the online teaching has been challenged by the introduction of video

conferencing tools such as Google Meet (71.4%), Zoom (22.9%) and Microsoft Teams Meeting (5.7%) as mentioned by the participants in Figure 7.

The pie chart in figure 8 illustrates the range of technical devices that students used during their online lessons; more than 48 % of the students used their own mobile phones, 28.6% used laptops, 11.4%

8. What type of technical device did your students frequently use during their online lessons?
35 de răspunsuri



used personal computers; whereas 11.4% of the students revealed that they utilized family member's mobile phone, tablets or information was not available.

Item 9 requires a paragraph-length response in which the teachers are invited to share their perceptions on the e-learning environment as an effective foreign language learning tool. Respondents have to provide examples of online resources such as apps, websites, digital tools etc. that they currently use during their English lessons in the post-pandemic context. The internet displays a rich source of authentic input via online dictionaries, songs, videos, electronic books, or podcasts that help learners with pronunciation as well as with the acquisition and reinforcement of new vocabulary. Digital textbooks (<https://manuale.edu.ro>) provide instructions on how to use the symbols displayed in the main menu, such as a user guide for the digital textbook; for example, zoom in or zoom out, go to first/previous/ next page; how to use interactive exercises; how to use the video or pop-up icons etc. They include videos with extra information and activities; pop-ups incorporating pictures and extra practice and interactive activities structured as multiple choice, true or false, writing, and matching exercises. The objectives focus on skills and language. Digital textbooks also provide opportunities for personalisation, for developing students' spoken fluency and for promoting collaboration between students through pair and groupwork. A variety of interactive activities and games are available online; hence, teachers must select them according to specific contents and

language skills: www.teachingenglish.org.uk;
www.learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org (short stories, songs,
vocabulary and grammar activities); liveworksheets.com;
islcollective.com; lyricstraining.com; britannica.com; web 2.0 tools as
Kahoot; Mentimeter; Wordclouds: Readwritethink etc.

In Item 10 participants have to write down their personal thoughts or comments about technology needs, challenges, training, assistance. Most of the responses are related to particular areas of improvement or needs pointed out by teachers regarding technical support, professional development and integration of technology in the English lesson:

a. More support from national and regional level administration when it comes to teachers' technological needs as well as more technical support to keep computers and applications running, faster access to the internet.

We need more computers, video projectors and interactive boards in classrooms.

Important technical resources are still missing in my school, and I find it difficult to apply all my new ideas in the classroom.

Many students did not have their personal devices, especially from disadvantages social and economic backgrounds.

There is a greater need for help from the local authorities and parents' associations in order to get smartboards for rural schools, but also to become a national strategy to reduce the educational gap between the urban and rural schools.

A lack of technology related to equipment, internet and even the knowledge in using technical tools in most rural schools, especially in remote areas.

b. More ongoing opportunities for professional development in the area of technology must be provided to teachers in order to develop their understanding of the value of technology and effective uses in the classroom.

Free and useful training sessions for teachers.

More appropriate professional development to help teachers become proficient in digital technology.

Teachers should be more skilled in online teaching.

Teachers need more training related to online evaluation.

Teachers should benefit more from effective professional development on up-to-date approaches and technologies.

c. More time and access to technology tools in order to integrate them into curriculum/ classroom instruction.

Activities that involve the use of technology are sometimes time-consuming. Also, considering that technology is under constant change, teachers need to make sure that they remain up to date. However, if used correctly, technology can provide lots of benefits for the students. It would be really helpful for the students if we could integrate at least once a month a review of the lesson or chapter in a playful way on apps.

It is necessary to have an efficient and reliable online tool or platform for students' assessment. It is difficult for students to create different accounts on different platforms which could be used in class for interesting activities. A more complex platform, integrating more types of activities would be highly appreciated.

The pandemic has definitely changed education and the way we teach forever. Despite not being well prepared to move everything in front of a screen, teachers have managed to survive and embrace the challenge. I think traditional offline learning and e-learning can go together. Teaching virtually was a lot more work than actually teaching in class. I have heard people saying, 'Teachers are not working' but I think we were working harder than ever.

It has been a challenging period, but we have learnt new skills, we had to get out of our comfort zone, and I think we did a great job.

The post-pandemic world needs to look very closely at the role digital connection plays in our lives and how information and communication technology enables access to education that focuses on the students' abilities, interests, and needs. Learning to use technology to support one's language learning is important because it makes students more autonomous learners. Nevertheless, "it is not technology per se that affects the learning of language and culture but the particular uses of technology. This emphasis on use highlights the central importance of pedagogy and the teacher" (Kern 2006: 200), enabling educators to re-think their digital teaching approach from a pedagogical perspective.

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REIMAGINING TEACHING STRATEGIES IN A POST COVID-19 ERA. ARE MA STUDENTS PROPER CANDIDATES FOR THE E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT? (A CASE STUDY RESEARCH)

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Romania

Abstract

The recent pandemic situation caused by Covid-19 has forced people all over the world to reconsider their positions in terms of living and working conditions, educational attitudes and practices as well as general social relations. Traditional educational systems that viewed physical social contexts as a prerequisite of a successful teaching-learning environment were forced to enlarge their horizons and adopt less conventional strategies that initially proved to be a challenge for educators and students alike. Starting from the demands of the new reality and the earliest difficulties encountered (low digital competence, poor ICT infrastructure, lack of confidence in the efficiency of such virtual techniques, etc) my paper attempts to objectively assess the last two years' experience with the students of two Master's Programmes (English Literature for Children and Young Adults and Ethnotourism/Ethnology and Cultural Tourism) in order to demonstrate the validity of the new e-Learning environment.

Key words: *e-Learning, MA students, age-group related criteria, employment variable*

Preliminary issues

The pandemic caused by Covid-19 not only threatened the stability and welfare of the great majority of the societies of the world (as viruses and diseases do not care about social status, financial sustainability, age, skin colour, ethnicity, race, etc), but it also forced people to reconsider their positions, analyse their options, make choices and take decisions that might have been unthinkable of a few years ago. In what concerns the educational process, one has to admit that in spite of the fact that distance education or learning has a long tradition ("a history that spans almost two centuries," according to

Spector, Merrill, Merrienboer and Driscoll (qtd. in Moore et al., 2010, p. 129)), its origins being traced “back to the advent of the modern postal system and the mass production of printed publications” (Loveless, 2022), there are societies in which the traditional face-to-face system prevailed, being considered the only viable alternative to a high-quality teaching and learning environment. Dismissed as second-rate, distance learning was seen, at least in Romania, as a viable solution exclusively for adults that had no time to spend in the classroom, an alternative which was meant to offer a temporary solution and definitely not a serious and high standard studying opportunity.

Even if e-Learning has become an increasingly popular training option as technology has spread its wings more than one can have imagined some years ago and technology developments have rendered it less costly even in the case of underdeveloped or least developed countries, the prospect of changing habits, thinking outside the box, and facing challenges has not been widely welcomed or easily embraced by those forced to adapt and reconsider the methods and techniques they were initially accustomed to.

E-Learning has usually been defined as learning done by studying at home while using computers and courses provided on the internet, so it is the process that enables people to have access to education and training without facing the prospect of being physically present in a classroom.

Distinguishing concepts

There are plenty of expressions used in relation to this strategy of delivering training or instruction through online classes, video recordings, conferencing or other audio/visual technology mediums. In their article “e-Learning, online learning, and distance learning environments: Are they the same?”, Joi Moore, Camille Dickson-Deane and Krista Galyen (2010) distinguish between these three concepts, analyzing and defining them in an attempt to clarify the “inconsistent use of terminology” (p. 129) they have encountered while surveying forty-three people.

Distance learning comes first in line, starting as “basic correspondence through postal service” (Moore et al., 2010, p. 129) and having as its main purpose the idea of accommodating

geographically distant students, i.e. students living in remote areas. Keegan (qtd in Moore et al., 2010, p.130) suggested that distance education should be seen as an “umbrella” term, a superordinate concept having “correspondence education” or “correspondence study” as hyponyms. There are voices, however, that differentiate between distance learning and distance education (King, Young, Drivere-Richmond, and Schrader (2001)), claiming that the former focuses on people’s ability to perform a certain action while the latter is somehow subsumed under the general meaning of the former: “distance education is an activity within the ability [of learning at a distance]” (Moore et al., 2010, p. 130).

Nevertheless, once computers became involved in the delivery system, the term evolved and adapted itself to the new reality, making reference to the medium through which education/instruction became available, i.e. the computer and the internet. So concepts such as online learning, e-Learning, technology, mediated learning, online collaborative learning, virtual learning, web-based learning or cyber learning became commonplace. Seen as a “newer version” or “improved version” of distance learning (Benson qtd. in Moore et al., 2010, p. 130), online learning focuses on the idea of providing access to information and learning experiences through the use of technology, thus offering the possibility of students having a full-time job or living in remote areas to benefit from the accessibility provided by cyber learning environments. For the sake of simplifying things, this paper is going to use these concepts interchangeably, paying little attention to the small differences that differentiate them.

Advantages and disadvantages of e-Learning

The literature in the field registers a series of advantages and disadvantages that might influence an instructor’s choice, now the pandemic’s threat is over, and educators have the possibility to opt for one of the three possibilities that are presently available to them: the online version, the traditional onsite alternative or a blended/hybrid variant. Some of the advantages worth mentioning are: efficiency, accessibility of time and place, affordability, improved student attendance and suitability for a variety of learning styles, while the drawbacks gravitate towards the inability to focus on screens for a long period of time, technology issues, sense of isolation and poor teacher

training (Gautam, 2020). However, there are voices that try to be as thorough as possible in their analysis, offering a double perspective or interpretation to each point, be it an advantage or a disadvantage. Thus, Terry Anderson, in his book *The Theory and Practice of Online Learning* counteracts the enthusiasm produced by the existence of a multitude of online resources students are exposed to by simply claiming that “online learning neither advantages nor disadvantages knowledge-centered learning in comparison to campus-based learning.” (2008, p. 49) Although he agrees that “the Net provides expended opportunities for learners to plunge ever deeper into knowledge resources, providing a near limitless means for them to grow their knowledge and find their own way around the knowledge of the discipline, benefitting from its expression in thousands of formats and contexts,” he, nevertheless, acknowledges the fact that the provision of resources can sometimes be “overwhelming, and the skillful e-teacher needs to provide the big-picture scaffolding upon which students can grow their own knowledge and discipline-centered discoveries.” (2008, p. 49)

One has to agree that independence of time and place represents the main reason why online learning has been so easily embraced by students. However, this freedom led to a higher drop-out rate, especially in the case of BA level students who, facing the sudden opportunity of studying online, decided to take a part-time and sometimes even a full-time job, being driven by the false impression that they can handle both (studies and a job). The reality, however, contradicted them as the online courses designed by the teachers did not fully respect the features of pure, traditional e-Learning environments. Forced to resort to a cyber space that the great majority of instructors had not initially been familiar with, they switched the channels of transmission, from face-to-face to online modes, preserving the timetable they used in campus-based classes. Thus, instead of using a blend of both synchronous and asynchronous methods, the teaching experience mostly became a synchronous process (happening in real-time) consisting of video lessons or live chats that forced students to be present in front of their computers, ask questions and actively participate in building virtual relationships with each other. The asynchronous activities which were meant to actually help students by allowing them to complete assignments at their own

time and pace were quite rare. This was not necessarily a problem for the MA students whose timetable was designed in such a way that offered them the possibility to have a job or go to work and still be able to attend classes mostly in the evenings or at the end of the week.

As it has already been mentioned, this paper attempts to objectively assess the last two years' experience with the students of two Master's Programmes (*English Literature for Children and Young Adults* and *Ethnotourism/Ethnology and Cultural Tourism*) in order to demonstrate the validity of the new e-Learning environment. However, to reach this purpose one should start by creating/ drawing the profile of the student in view.

The Adult Learner

MA students belong to the category of adult learners who are more disciplined than other age groups, being often prepared to struggle on despite boredom. They have a longer concentration span and they are also more motivated. Many adults, as Harmer (2007, p. 84) claims, are "able to sustain a level of motivation by holding on to a distant goal in a way that teenagers find more difficult." Adults take more responsibility for the learning process, getting involved into the proposed activities voluntarily, so their motivation seems to be "relatively stable" (Ur, 1991, p. 296), depending less on the teacher's ability to make these activities attractive or provide incentives.

There are five assumptions that create the profile of an adult learner and help us differentiate it from a teenager or a school-aged learner. Coined by Eduard C. Lindeman in 1926, they constitute the "foundation of adult learning theory" (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 39). According to his point of view,

1. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy.
2. Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered.
3. Experience is the richest source for adult's learning.
4. Adults have a deep need to be self-directing.
5. Individual differences among people increase with age.

(Knowles et al. 2005: 40)

Adults can be defined in at least four ways. The biological definition makes reference to the age at which people can reproduce; legally speaking, one becomes an adult when he or she can vote, get a driver's

license, marry without consent, and so on; from a social point of view, one becomes an adult when certain roles have been adopted, such as a full-time worker, a parent, a spouse, a voting citizen, and the like; and last but not least, psychologically speaking, adulthood is reached when self-directedness appears, or the idea of people becoming responsible for their own lives. (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 64) Andragogy is the science that deals with the theory, methods and activities involved in teaching adult learners, and instructors should try to understand and become aware of the characteristics of adults as learners in order to design the best learning strategies that might be applied when dealing with them.

So, what defines an adult learner? According to Malcolm Knowles, Elwood Holton III and Richard Swanson (2005, pp. 64-68), adults need to know why they have to learn something and try to find the benefits of it before actually getting involved into that activity. They bring in a great volume of experience, which might sometimes be beneficial to the entire educational process, but it can also be detrimental to it, as experience means habits that are already formed and biases and presuppositions that can hardly be challenged or changed. However, they can be externally motivated (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, and the like) as well as internally (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, better life quality, and the like), being ready to follow their goals as long as they see the benefit of their actions.

In the light of the above mentioned characteristics, one can easily claim that an online learning environment suits better adult learners who willingly get involved into the learning process, having their goals clearly stated from the very beginning. Penny Ur (1991, p. 296) associates the relationship between instructors/teachers and their adult trainees/students with a business relationship: the teacher has a commodity which the learner is willing to pay to acquire. The latter, consequently, knows what he/she wants and the level of concentration and motivation is relatively stable throughout the process.

Case study

The students taken as a reference point in this analysis can be included in the above mentioned category of adult learners, people that are employed/have a job and/or family responsibilities. If we are to

focus on the MA programmes mentioned at the beginning (i.e. *English Literature for Children and Young Adults* and *Ethnotourism/Ethnology and Cultural Tourism*) one could easily notice, after two years of online experience,

- an increase in the number of students enrolled at the beginning of the academic year (2021-2022) (with students coming from different countries, such as Greece, Italy, Spain and even Oman). The reason resided in the accessibility of time and place offered by the cyber environment which facilitated classes that could be taken from home or location of choice, so the chances of students missing out on lessons were considerably reduced;
- a lower rate of drop out – a direct result of the online system that gave them the possibility to pursue other interests and take care of different other social and personal responsibilities.

The benefits of distance education in the case of MA students became obvious in the light of these findings. In order to assess students' satisfaction in relation to the online experience they have been going through during the past two years, a research has been conducted covering a sample of ninety-seven students enrolled at the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, North University Centre of Baia Mare, Romania, more precisely the students of the two Master's Programmes already mentioned (*English Literature for Children and Young Adults* and *Ethnotourism /Ethnology and Cultural Tourism*). The aim of the research was to find answers to several crucial questions, as follows:

1. How would you rank your distance learning experience up to this point?
 - a. Poor
 - b. Below average
 - c. Average
 - d. Good
 - e. Excellent
2. Do you have access to a device for learning online as well as good internet connection?
 - a. Yes
 - b. Yes, but it doesn't work well all the time

- c. No, I have to share with others
- 3. How much time a day did/do you spend on an average on distance education?
 - a. 1-3 hours
 - b. 3-5 hours
 - c. 5-7 hours
 - d. More than 7 hours
- 4. How effective has remote learning been for you?
 - a. Not at all effective
 - b. Slightly effective
 - c. Moderately effective
 - d. Very effective
 - e. Extremely effective
- 5. How helpful has your university been in offering you the resources to learn from home?
 - a. Not at all helpful
 - b. Slightly helpful
 - c. Moderately helpful
 - d. Very helpful
 - e. Extremely helpful
- 6. How stressful has distance learning been/still is for you?
 - a. Extremely stressful
 - b. Very stressful
 - c. Moderately stressful
 - d. Slightly stressful
 - e. Not at all stressful
- 7. On a scale from 1 to 5 (consider 5 being extremely well and 1 being not at all) how well could you manage time while learning remotely?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5
- 8. Did/do you enjoy learning remotely?
 - a. Yes, absolutely
 - b. Yes, but I would like to change a few things
 - c. No, there are quite a few challenges

- d. No, not at all
- 9. How helpful have your teachers been while studying online?
 - a. Not at all helpful
 - b. Slightly helpful
 - c. Moderately helpful
 - d. Very helpful
 - e. Extremely helpful
- 10. If you were asked to choose the environment in which to study in the future, what would you choose?
 - a. On-line learning
 - b. A hybrid version with online sessions alternating with face-to-face meetings from time to time
 - c. Face-to-face activities

Based on the results of this research, indicative data for this form of education have been collected. The most significant findings are listed below:

- For the first question, eighty-two out of ninety-seven people questioned chose point d (good), while the rest of them went for the last option: e (excellent). This indicates that students were quite satisfied with the online activities provided by their institution.
- The answers received for the second question show that all interviewed students (one hundred per cent of them) have access to the necessary technology in order to attend online courses, even if the internet connection does not work well all the time.
- The third question registered different options, the opinions of students being quite varied, this fact underlining the idea that they are a heterogeneous group in terms of learning styles, interests and goals and they adjust the time spent in front of the computer to their own priorities and interest criteria.
- The fourth question underlines the idea that approximately ninety per cent of students (eighty-nine out of ninety-seven respondents) appreciated the online experience as very effective, i.e. useful and appropriate, in comparison with only ten per cent that rendered it slightly effective. This indicates that not all students can be considered entirely satisfied with

their distance learning experience, which means that there is always room for some improvement.

- For question five, a large number of students who participated in the survey stated that according to their point of view, the university's involvement in accommodating and helping them was rather moderate, this fact proving that more could have been done in order to have created a really efficient learning environment.
- Eighty-seven per cent of those questioned had no complaints about the stressfulness of the process, which shows that the majority of students could handle this kind of learning experience.
- Even if their timetable was not flexible, a reasonable number of those interviewed (eighty-four out of ninety-seven) managed their time well, being able to attend classes while handling all the other responsibilities they were in charge of.
- The majority of students found the system convenient, even if a small number of them (approximately six per cent of those questioned) suggested some improvements, such as weaving synchronous and asynchronous interactions or blending in the right technology.
- The responses received for the ninth question show that students appreciated their teachers' activity, ninety-two percent of those questioned having no complaints about their instructors' involvement and dedication.
- The last question, however, stressed, once again, the positive opinions students had in relation to the cyber learning process they have been going through during the last two years, sixty-seven out of ninety-seven choosing the hybrid version, while the rest opted for the online variant.

The conclusions of the research show that in spite of the negative reactions and skepticism surrounding the topic of online learning experience, this form of studying still has a large number of advocates, the most important ones being exactly the beneficiaries of it, i.e. the students.

Conclusions

As it became obvious up to this moment, there are both advantages and disadvantages of cyber learning. Being forced by the pandemic context to adopt the online version and due to the technological advances that have taken place in the information world, people have become aware of and better informed about the choices that exist for their education. Even if the education system provided via the Internet, mostly in the developed countries of the world, has already become a tradition, in the developing countries (such as Romania), forced by external circumstances to resort to an online system, there are still doubts about the efficiency of such web-based programs and the quality they can provide.

The reality is that online education is suitable and works perfectly in the case of certain categories of people, i.e. adults with work and family commitments, as this paper has attempted to prove, or shy students who see an opportunity in the online chat-rooms, these providing them with the confidence they lacked in the normal face-to-face environment, as well as students who can exert control over their own studying experience, mature, self-disciplined individuals for whom an online method of education can be a highly effective alternative.

Even if the online scenario has managed to demonstrate its functionality, being preferred by students as it offered them flexibility and independence, the hybrid or blended courses are thought to be the best solution, providing the opportunity for instructors and students alike to mix the best of onsite and online in order to create a new learning environment. As Stein and Graham (2014) claim, “research suggests that blended courses can have a positive impact on efficiency, convenience, and learning outcomes. By moving more of the learning to online environments, blended courses add flexibility to participants’ schedules, provide learning benefit through automated and asynchronous online tools, and can tap into the modern, social Web to help learners venture beyond the traditional confines of the classroom” (p. 9).

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IS THERE LONGEVITY TO ONLINE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION BEYOND THE SARS-COV-2 PANDEMIC?

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Abstract

After two years of lockdowns and restrictions, after having plunged straight into the online realm without training or warning, bombarded with eLearning platforms and videoconferencing apps – one more enticing than the other – all players on the education stage seem to have reached a point of saturation. In this article we explore the issue of technology employment in education, the impact of these past two years on the teaching-learning process, while focusing on what online learning might look like moving forward, the value and challenges of online learning and its future in higher education, from the narrow perspective of those involved in the teaching- learning process within the North University Centre of Baia Mare.

Keywords: *(smart) technology, electronic devices, online learning, eLearning platforms*

1. Introduction. Current situation

After two years of lockdowns and restrictions, after having plunged straight into the online realm without training or warning, bombarded with eLearning platforms and videoconferencing apps – one more enticing than the other – all players on the education stage seem to have reached a point of saturation. The online environment, which initially seemed like a blessing because it allowed people who live or work far from the university to access and participate in the educational activities from the comfort of their homes or offices, became a nuisance and a source of stress because it alienated people from each other. It affected the educational process in a most unexpected way: it eliminated direct interaction between teachers and

students – the source of ideas, debates, interrogations, and all these other aspects that breed growth and development in any field of study.

The familiar environment of the classroom was no longer available to anyone; educational institutions that once teemed with life became "ghost towns", silent, empty, useless. The change was sudden and radical, but the psychological impact was something to be acknowledged in the long run, for at that moment the thrill of attending (or delivering) a lecture from the comfort of one's living room overshadowed the danger of social alienation, as well as the negative effects of prolonged screen time on health (both physical and mental). Three semesters later, both teachers and students realized the importance of face-to-face interaction in a classroom and that the one major advantage of teaching online was the feeling of safety. Being online meant being safe, and that was the only real advantage.

2. Theoretical approach

In the face of an educational process steeped in technology, the question this article seeks to answer is whether online learning is a thing of the future, or have we become too fed-up with it after two years. We know that technology has been used in education for decades. Projectors and televisions seem ubiquitous and are still used in the classroom, even though the former now fit in a handbag and the latter have been replaced by smart TVs. Yet teachers around the world are asking themselves whether education has not become too dependent on technology [1].

As education has continued to evolve, so has its worship of technology. Laptops, handheld devices, electronic whiteboards, sophisticated word processing apps, 3-D printing and more are making their way into classrooms [1]. At the current state of technological development, people in general and schools in particular can hardly keep up with all the gadgets and electronic devices available to the general public. Classrooms are flooded with electronic devices and one can "find some kind of screen in almost every classroom" [2]. It is true, however, that some of these devices enrich the classroom and engage students in ways that were unimaginable not so long ago. Yet it is also true that they can become a distraction, because "no matter how animated or engaged the

teacher, it is hard to compete with all the distractions" [3] that are available with a tap of a smartphone.

The issue of technology in the classroom has been addressed before from different angles, as technology has always been present in the classroom in one form or another. However, with the shift to online teaching in recent years, it has become more important. It is a fact that "students are enthusiastic users of smart devices and the latest technology" [4], and the transition to online learning, however sudden it came, was greeted with great enthusiasm by most stakeholders. But after a while, the whole process became tiresome, and like everything else, technology began to lose its appeal through overexposure and overuse. And nowadays it has become even more obvious that "moderation should be the norm" [4], especially when it comes to the use of technology in the educational process.

In previous research, we have looked at the use of technology in the classroom to improve the quality of the teaching and learning experience [5] and to harness students' technological skills with the same goal in mind [6]. The results of our research have shown that technology has a positive impact on the educational experience and that students enjoy using it in all aspects of their lives. However, in this article, we challenge this statement to some extent as we believe that the current situation of the global pandemic has led to a paradigm shift in education.

Numerous articles [8-13] address this issue of overuse of technology in the classroom. While some point out the advantages and disadvantages of using technology for educational purposes [8], the main disadvantage being that it can be distracting, others focus on the negative effects of technology on humans, from addiction to bullying to changes in our communication style, social behaviour, travel patterns and even the way we research (we are less likely to pick up books and use the internet extensively) [9]. The addictive aspect of technology seems to be very much to the fore and has given rise to new types of mental disorders with strange names, problems that may not have existed a few decades ago, such as gambling addiction, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), an addiction to social media, all of which follow the same pattern and where the chemicals in the brain change in a similar way to drug addiction [10]. We are not qualified to approach the topic of addiction, but in our study we touch

on the topic to some extent, as the overuse of technology in the classroom can contribute to the overall harmful effects of an over-dependence on technology. However, we focus on the students' perceptions, as well as their preferences for technology and education and how much they are intertwined so that they have become inseparable.

In a previous paper [7], where the studied group also consisted of TUCN-NUCBM students, we looked at the issue of smart device employment during educational activities for activities unrelated to the actual teaching-learning process. At the time, these devices were considered disruptive and the use of these devices by students was seen as a challenge that needed to be addressed. The solution proposed was to use these devices for actual educational purposes [7]. Since then, smart technologies have become so commonplace and incorporated into virtually all educational environments and processes that we cannot imagine the teaching-learning process without them. And so in [4] we described the first steps we had taken towards online education at a time when the possibility of a pandemic outbreak was a subject matter of dystopian science-fiction films. These steps referred to the implementation of a Moodle platform within the NUCBM. We had no possibility of anticipating that the eLearning platform would become indispensable, but the fact that the platform had been piloted several years before the pandemic, made the transition to online teaching less traumatic.

3. Case study

This article analyses the use of different educational platforms within NUCBM, the students' perceptions of online education, as well as the use of technology and its future in education two years after the outbreak of the pandemic.

To this end, we designed a thirteen-question survey and delivered it to 202 bachelor students from the three faculties (i.e. Humanities, Sciences, and Engineering) of the NUCBM, a smaller campus within the TUCN. We covered quite a wide range of domains, thus ensuring diversity of opinions on the issue at hand. The focus of this analysis is on the use of technology during the English classes in particular. The questionnaire contained some general questions, as

well as questions to which students had to provide their own viewpoint.

The first two questions referred to the type of electronic devices owned by the respondents, and the frequency with which these devices were employed, providing a list of seven very common devices from which students could choose. Unsurprisingly, all respondents own a smartphone, a laptop, and/or a smart TV, and their frequency of usage follows the same pattern. The third question referred to the average amount of time students spent daily on these devices (see fig. 1). The lowest percentage (15%) reflects the choice in terms of the shortest period of time, i.e. 1-2 hours, while the highest percentage (36%) was scored for the timeframe “more than 6 hours a day”. This only confirms the trend regarding the increasing amount of time people spend on electronic devices.

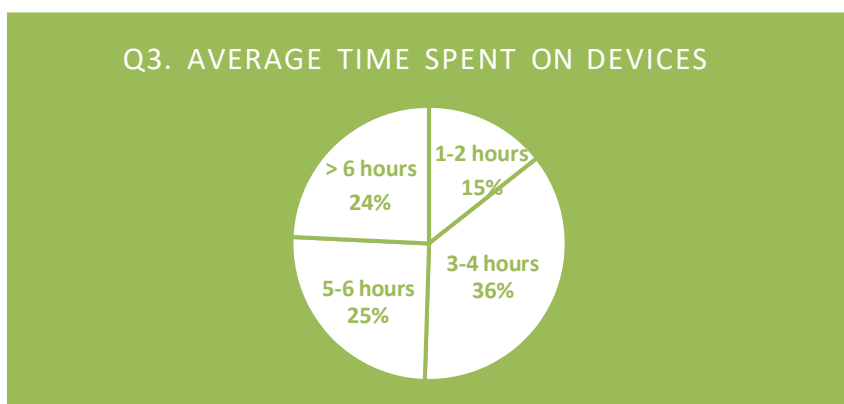


Fig. 1. Question 3 – On average, how much time do you spend daily on your preferred device?

For the fourth question (see fig. 2) the students had to decide upon the three most frequent uses of that particular device, the six response options provided being categorized into personal interests (communicating with friends and family, playing games, shopping) and educational purposes (reading, studying, solving school-related tasks), while also being provided with the option of mentioning other purposes (amongst which some mentioned watching films or videos on YouTube or performing job-related tasks). Thus, *communication*

with friends and family was the number one purpose for using a smart device (164 respondents mentioned it), while the second and third most frequent employments of the electronic devices, i.e. *studying* or *solving school-related tasks*, were mentioned by 132 and 121 students respectively.

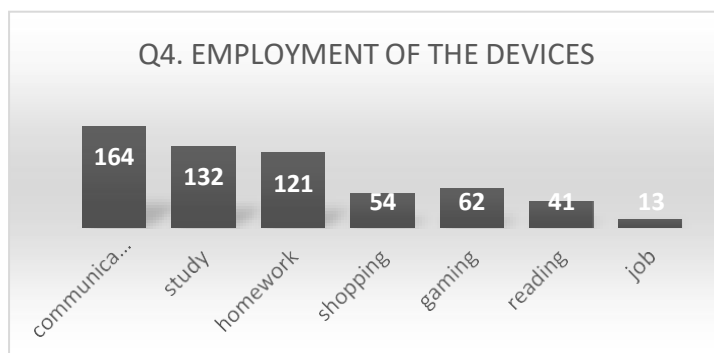


Fig. 2. Question 4 – What are the 3 main purposes for using those devices?

The second part of the questionnaire was dedicated to the actual use of electronic devices in education, and the students' perception of the issue. Thus question no. 5 inquired about their preference regarding online or face-to-face teaching, and the responses were almost at a perfect tie, with 104 students choosing online education and 98 opting for the traditional on-site or face-to-face education, i.e. a mere 6 responses difference.

Question no. 6 was the first open-ended question of the survey, asking students to name one advantage and one disadvantage for each of the teaching variants, no matter their preferences. It was clearly easier to identify an advantage for their preferred variant since that only justified their initial choice. Yet when it came to mentioning a disadvantage, students found it more difficult to identify one, and many ignored that part completely. Responses to this question brought an insight into the students' perception of the online teaching process with which teachers and students had been faced for the past two years. Thus, the argument of those who were in favour of face-to-face teaching was the fact that they could focus much better in class and understand much better the topic being taught. Lack of socialization and lack of teacher-student interaction were some other,

quite frequently mentioned arguments in favour of face-to-face education. Yet online education had its share of support, with respondents arguing that it provided ease of access to educational resources to those living far from the university, thus eliminating expenses incurred by the commute, or to those with jobs for whom online education provided the otherwise unavailable opportunity of attending classes from various locations outside the university, from virtually anywhere.

As of question no. 7 (see fig. 3), which referred to videoconferencing platforms used during classes, the focus was on the actual educational experience. This question required students to choose from a list of six videoconferencing platforms (Zoom, Cisco Webex, Google Meet, Skype, Microsoft Teams, BigBlueButton) the one(s) they were familiar with from their courses and seminars, as well as providing the option of mentioning any other videoconferencing platform they may use.

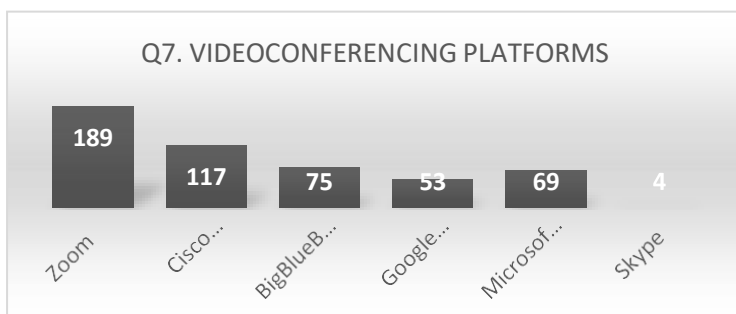


Fig. 3. Question 7 – What videoconferencing platforms do you use during the educational activities

Question no. 8 addressed the issue of educational platforms, more specifically eLearning platforms used during classes, providing four response options: Knowledge Base (a Moodle platform developed for use within the NUCBM before the pandemic), Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, and Didatec (another eLearning platform developed within the TUCN). With the onset of the pandemic, when all educational activities moved online, Knowledge Base, having already been used for a couple of years, became the prevalent platform for educational activities in the NUCBM, fact

confirmed by the students' responses as well. Microsoft Teams is predominantly used within the engineering milieu of the university and came second in terms of usage within the NUCBM.

Question no. 9 addressed the issue of educational platforms and applications used by the students for tasks and assignments they had to work on individually, outside the timeframe of the courses and/or seminars (see fig. 4). The question provided a list of six options (Knowledge Base, Google-provided applications – such as Classroom, Docs, Sheets Forms – Microsoft Teams, Didatec, Microsoft 365, the classical Office package – Word, Excel, PowerPoint etc.), plus the extra option of mentioning any other platform or application they may use, the platforms mentioned being all used during the educational activities within all faculties of the TUCN.

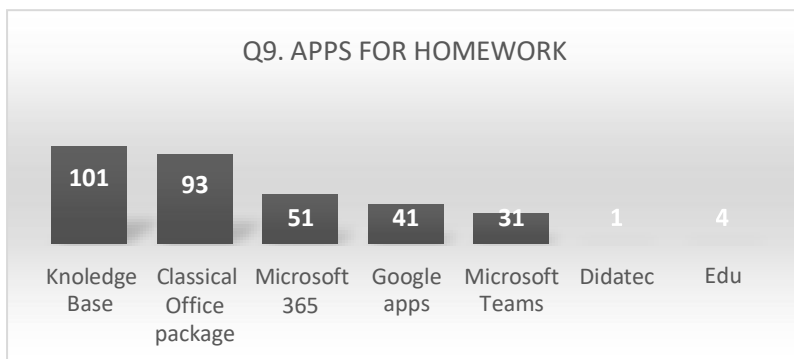


Fig. 4. Question no. 9 – What platforms and/or applications do you use for assignments and homework?

With question no. 10 the focus shifted again on the students' preferences, this time asking them to choose their preferred educational medium, i.e. electronic devices or the classical pen-and- paper option. The respondents' preference clearly leans towards electronic devices, with two thirds (66%) expressing preference for these (134 students), and only one third (34%) going for the classical pen-and-paper (68 students). In a world overcome by technology changing at a pace unseen before, with people emersed in electronic screens for the most part of the day (for work, study, or pleasure), it is unsurprising that people prefer them (see fig. 5 below).

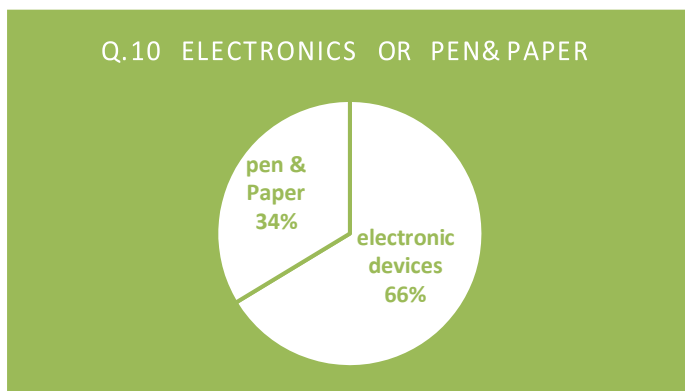


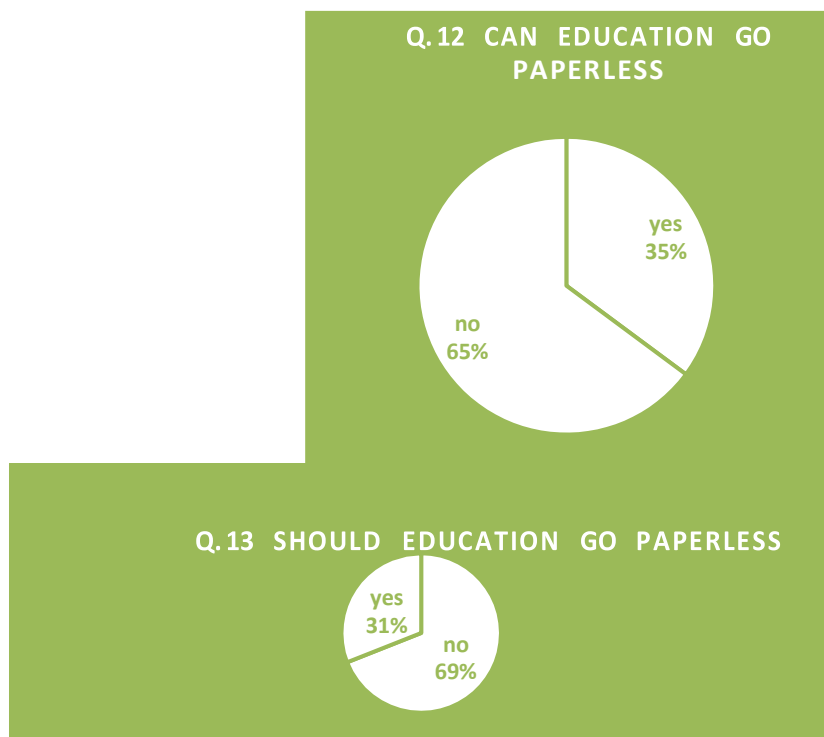
Fig. 5. Question no. 10 – In the educational process, what would you prefer: the use of electronic devices or of the traditional pen-and-paper?

In question no. 11, directly linked to question no. 10, respondents were once again faced with an open-ended question for which they had to provide an advantage and a disadvantage of each of the two options. According to the respondents' opinion, the major advantages of electronic devices were ease of use and fast access to information, while the most frequently mentioned disadvantages were the negative impact on the users' eyes, the lack of speed when taking notes, and limited battery life. The main advantage of the use of the traditional pen-and-paper identified by the respondents was the fact that information is retained with more ease through the process of handwriting, while the disadvantages mainly referred to the environmental impact of the cutting of trees required for the production of paper.

The last two questions were an exercise of imagination: question no. 12 was a simple yes/no question which required them to express their opinion on whether education *could* become completely paper-free, while question no. 13 challenged them to think about the possibility of paper-free education, requiring them to express their viewpoint on whether education *should* become paper-free, as well as support their response with a short argument.

Responses to question no. 12 showed a quite clear inclination towards traditionalism, despite the students' preference for electronic

devices which resulted from question no. 10. The percentages generated for this question seem to be almost a mirror-view of the percentages resulted for question no. 10. Thus only one third of the respondents (35%, i.e. 71 students) considers that education can become paper-free, while the other two thirds (65%, i.e. 131 students) take the opposite stand. The important aspect in question no. 13 is how respondents argued in favour of their response. Thus, the arguments of those in favour of paperless education were in the same line of thinking as the answers provided to question no. 11 where respondents had to point out one advantage and one disadvantage for each of the choices in question no. 10, i.e. electronic devices or pen-and-paper. Consequently, those who said that education should go paperless considered the environmental impact of paper production, the negative impact on human eyesight, and energy consumption, while those who were against paperless education argued that writing information on paper aids in the retention of information, that children need to start in pen-and-paper and exposure to electronic devices should be delayed as much as possible, as well as the fact that writing develops creativity. Another aspect mentioned in opposition to paperless education was an economic factor, namely the fact that not all students can afford to make the switch from pen-and-paper to electronic devices, this risking to become a major issue of inequality in schools. And yet another aspect referred to the infrastructure required for the proper functioning of paperless education, viz. internet connection or even access to the power grid. Yet some respondents saw compromise as a solution, suggesting that pre-schoolers and primary school pupils still study traditionally, using pen and paper, and that education should only shift to electronic devices in secondary school or later (see fig. 6 below).



*Fig. 6. Question no. 12 – Do you think education **can** go paperless?
and Question no. 13 – Do you think education **should** go paperless?*

4. Conclusions

In the light of the information collected through the survey, we can conclude that, despite the fact that the sample of students who answered the questionnaire own various electronic devices, favour them in educational activities (see question no. 10) and use them extensively (see question no. 3) in their everyday lives (at the job, at school, for entertainment purposes, at home etc.), they would not support a complete transition to paperless education. Oddly enough, when it came to online education, the opinions were split almost evenly (see question no. 5), with almost an equal number of respondents preferring online education and those preferring the

classical, face-to-face interaction between teachers and students, in the traditional environment of the classroom. Considering all the aspects in the theoretical part of our paper, corroborated with the outcome of the survey, we draw the conclusion that online learning is here to stay, and that we will continue with our hybrid approach indefinitely. It is true that some classes and some subjects are more suitable for the traditional face-to-face style, yet for others the online approach or a combination of the two seems to be more beneficial and will have a long life. Technology in the classroom is an amazing tool and it can provide great help and generate extraordinary outcomes in the educational process, and it has done so for ages. We cannot imagine education without it, because we are not talking only about electronic devices connected to the internet, while at the same time technology could not have been created without education. Education and technology have always been interconnected and will continue to work in harmony towards the brighter future of humanity.

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GETTING TO KNOW OUR NEIGHBORS THROUGH THE FAIRYTALE: A DIGITAL STORYTELLING PROJECT TO PROMOTE INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present the design and implementation of an interdisciplinary project implemented into a secondary school classroom for enhancing students' intercultural skills. The digital storytelling project was carried out in a high school class, and lasted for 12 weeks aiming at enhancing students' knowledge in aspects of cultures of neighboring countries as well as their digital skills. Folk stories of five Balkan countries, Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia were at the core of the project, since they are considered an optimal way to introduce students to a diversity of cultures. The students also created their own digital story, in which they incorporated elements related to geography, culture and language of neighboring countries. The project was evaluated by using both initial continuous and final assessment tools: a pre and posttest, a digital portfolio including the students' products, a short questionnaire in digital form that was delivered after each intervention and a satisfaction questionnaire provided to students upon the completion of the program.

Key words: *Intercultural awareness, digital storytelling, folk tales, project.*

1. Introduction

Modern societies are characterized by multiculturalism, ie the coexistence of people with different linguistic, ethnic, religious, cultural characteristics. Diversity of societies and the need for peaceful coexistence create the conditions that can bring peoples closer together with new terms of equal and reciprocal understanding, acceptance,

awareness. The concept of intercultural awareness has its starting point in intercultural knowledge and intercultural understanding (Griva & Kofou, 2020). The purpose of the paper is to present the design and implementation of an interdisciplinary project applied to secondary school students, in a digital environment, for enhancing their intercultural understanding skills.

1.1. Intercultural competence - Intercultural awareness - Intercultural communicative ability

Intercultural awareness is defined as the understanding of someone's culture and other culture/s, and the common elements and differences between two or more cultures (Bennett, 1994; Panocová, 2020). Intercultural competence is defined as the understanding of the unwritten rules that make up the moral circle of each society and vary according to the culture and cultural characteristics (Hofstede, 2009). Intercultural communication is an expression and not a behavior. Effective intercultural communication involves being able to perceive a culturally different person as complex as yourself and being able to perceive them from a culturally different perspective (Bennett, 2004). Byram (2002) suggests a model of intercultural communication competence that includes four core skills a) attitudes that include curiosity openness, a willingness and readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures b) interpreting and understanding interactions and cultural practices from the perspective of the culture and culture within which were created, c) ability to reconstruct new knowledge and to make discoveries through social interaction and the use of texts, d) ability to make a critical evaluation of others and one's own cultures. Cultivating intercultural competence is not only about cultivating tolerance and empathy but there is a need to redefine the basis of how values, identities and meanings are sometimes obscured behind a common illusion of effective communication intercultural awareness (2020). According to Zhu (2002), intercultural empathy is a conscious process of intercultural communication that is based on the identification of differences with others and the adoption of the perspectives of culturally different people to understand the cultural characteristics of others. Stereotypes and prejudices, fear and ignorance constitute obstacles to the cultivation of intercultural empathy (Deardorf, 2006)

2. The project

2.1 Objectives

The project aimed at providing students with the possibility to:

- Enhance their knowledge in aspects of cultures of neighboring countries
- Get acquainted with multicultural stories/fairytales
- Develop their intercultural awareness
- Enhance their digital skills

Thirteen secondary students from High School of Laimos in Prespes participated in the project, which was piloted for 12 weeks.

2.2 The design of the program

The design of the program was based on five principles: creativity-intercultural skills-communication- cooperation-digital skills. The mini-syllabus included stories from five Balkan countries, Greece, Albania, Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria, and was structured around five thematic strands.

Greece: The nice lady and the 12 months, The man from semolina, The princess and the salt, The false shepherd.

Albania: The wolf and the 5 little goats, The girl with curly braids, Little Fani, The jealous neighbor.

Bulgaria: The golden girl, The most delicious fruit, The little girl and the winds of winter, The golden apples and the 9 peacocks.

Romania: The wise queen, The boys with golden stars, The princess and the fisherman.

Serbia: The downstream of the poor peasant, The girl who was wiser than the king, The oath of the three sons to their dying father.

Moreover, the creation of a game-based and digital environment was of great importance in the design process. A variety of digital games, role plays, creative activities were included. Those activities involved different classroom dynamics, from whole class activities to pair and group work, aiming to engage students actively and creatively in the learning process.

The final product was a fairy tale created by the students, in which they combined both elements/characteristics of fairy tales and cultural aspects of the Balkan countries.

2.3. Implementation of the project

2.3.1. Pre stage

The purpose of this stage was to activate students' background knowledge, to raise their understanding about each of the five countries and their awareness of certain aspects of its cultural practices.

The teacher introduced each country to the students through the thinglink application (by locating it on the map) and she made them understand certain cultural elements (music, gastronomy, traditional customs). Also, she prepared the students to listen to or read, in digital environment, the fairy.

2.3.2. Main stage

In the main stage the students were placed in the center of the learning process. They listened to the story in a digital environment, and they worked in pairs on a common task/activity. Student involvement in games and playful activities can be an enjoyable way of making them identify common or different cultural elements and views in the stories from different countries. Among the digital tools used by the teacher for the creation of the activities, were conceptual maps, learning apps, genially, vocaroo etc. On the other hand, students created quizzes, crosswords, cryptowords, concept maps, digital games.

2.3.3. Post stage

This stage was dual focused aimed at: provision of feedback, b) formative evaluation (Griva & Kofou, 2017; Griva & Semoglou, 2012; Leung & Mohan, 2004; Patton, 2002).

2.4 Evaluation of the project

A summative and formative evaluation was conducted by using the following instruments:

- a) In the first meeting students filled out a pre-test (Google form) which included questions related to their knowledge of the stories but also their knowledge of the Balkan countries.

- b) The same form was filled in by the students as post- test, after the completion of the program. The comparison of the answers provided an increase in both students' knowledge related to the characteristics of folk tales/stories and the cultural aspects of the neighboring countries.
- c) Formative evaluation was also used after the completion of each unit. The material was posted in a padlet environment where each student individually completed a short questionnaire in the digital environment about the previous unit.
- d) Journal entries were kept by the teacher after the completion of each session.
- e) Upon the completion of the program, the students filled in a satisfaction questionnaire. The questionnaire included five questions 1. write what you liked most, 2. write what you didn't like, 3. write what made it difficult for you, 4. write what you would like to change, 5. write if you wish to participate in such a program in the future.

From the analysis of the students' answers it was revealed that the students were satisfied with participating in the program. They particularly liked the digital activities as well as their own final product (their involvement in writing their own fairy tale).

3. Conclusion

This paper provides an account of a project implemented in a secondary classroom with the purpose to develop students' digital skills and enhance their knowledge in aspects of cultures of neighbouring countries through folk stories. The results indicated that the project offered them considerable familiarization with the target cultures, and the stories and the digital environment gave them stimuli and learning opportunities. However, the project was implemented to a small number of students and was related to a limited number of Balkan countries. Nevertheless, it can be the basis for a more expanded project in the future both in terms of the number of participants and the number of countries and stories to be included in it.

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ENHANCING DATA-DRIVEN LEARNING AND CORPUS-BASED TASKS INTO EFL CLASSROOM.

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Abstract

Provided the fact that my field of study is Corpus Linguistics, it is worth mentioning that it includes components such as computers and the internet, corpora and corpus tools, online databases. All of these serve the scope of an EFL classroom activity or a homework assignment, using corpus-based online databases to help students conduct a mini-research project or respond to a question about English language patterns. This study reflects the use of corpora in English vocabulary learning and the benefits of using concordancers and KWICs (Key Word in Context) to EFL Master students. It provides an overview of the impact that DDL (Data-driven learning) on the web exerts in order to concretely and fully define a word.

Targeted at EFL proficient learners but not only, the study introduces a range of tasks that may be considered as a new approach for language practitioners and English language learners. The tasks can be generated from Lextutor Concordancer, which is part of a Compleat Lexical Tutor, a multi-faceted, web-based language resource for data-driven language learning developed by Cobb (2000). The implementation of these new methodological tools in my teaching classes fostered genuine DDL and resulted to my English Language Teacher Master students, fun to use, engaging and challenging.

Key words: *Corpus Linguistics, corpus, DDL, Lextutor, task, KIWCs, concordancer.*

1. Introduction

In today's language learning acquisition a major challenge focuses in developing language teaching materials and resources to facilitate overall learning and teaching process and provide learners with language input that accurately reflects the way genuine language is used in the real world. Corpus Linguistics and the development of large-scale databases or corpora of different genres of authentic language has offered to both learners and teachers a range of teaching

materials that prevail notably the traditional language teaching materials as well as highlight new approaches that reflect the authentic language use. The present study introduces the use of corpora in English language teaching and learning. It provides a comprehensive and very accessible set of tasks generated from corpora use in EFL (English Foreign Learning). Once you are introduced to them and intentionally direct your attention to these new language resources you would want to eagerly know how to use and implement them in your language classes. In the field of corpus linguistics Reppen (2010) defines corpus as a large, principled collection of naturally occurring texts (written or spoken) stored electronically'. These naturally occurring texts consist of language that is being produced from actual language situations, such as people formally or informally conversing, friends chatting, phone calls, situational meetings, lectures, class assignments...etc.

The present study supports Reppen's (2010) conclusive remarks that Corpus linguistics provides a vehicle for bringing natural language into the classroom in a way that involves learners through hands-on activities interacting with 'real' language. Moreover, Corpus linguistics and its new approach, DDL (data-driven-learning) allows teachers and learners to be confident and demanding to learning English; to know how to deal with the real language being at times arbitrary as they encounter its occurrences in the real world outside the classroom setting. Indeed the in-class tasks that it presents include components that we daily use such as internet, computers, corpora (free or purchased) and corpus tools to explore the vast range of electronic texts that appear in an instant so to conduct any linguistic inquiry when learning English on the web. The generated corpus-based tasks, resulted to raise my present ELT master students' attention and interest to deeply explore the corpora lines by means of using the tools that they decided among a range, as most efficient in building the targeted language tasks enabling them to find the proper answer/s to the addressed research question/s.

Since vocabulary acquisition seems to be a central concern in most language classrooms, the present study provides a new foundation path to language learning, embracing and implementing corpora that might be considered as a valuable language resource, in terms of knowing

what to teach, how to teach and in providing a rich source of language practice.

2. Methodology

The present study highlights EFL learning and teaching throughout technology which is crucially becoming more and more accessible and practical in all the spheres of life. Data-driven learning (DDL) is the main approach that the whole study is constructed on. It was Johns (1991) that pioneered data-driven learning and coined the term. It first appeared in an article, *Should you be persuaded: Two examples of data-driven learning* (1991). And later on his paper "From Printout to Handout" (1991). Accordingly, DDL is an approach to foreign language learning that treats language as data so that students or language learners playing the role of independent researchers to undertake guided language discovery tasks. Underpinning this pedagogical approach is the *data – information – knowledge* paradigm that deliberately informs all kinds of '*researchers*' by a pattern-based approach to grammar and vocabulary and a lexico-grammatical approach to language in general. In addition, Thomas task-based study on Sketch Engine (2015, p.22) further exemplifies that [...data-driven learning is based on the principle of "cutting out the middle man", a reference to learning language directly from language rather than from mediated resources such as textbooks, grammars, dictionaries, and teachers.]. He also acknowledges John Tims throughout.

Thus the basic task in DDL is the identification of patterns of language from the students' autonomous findings, viewing how an aspect of language is typically used from the genuine corpus-data, which in turn informs them how they can use it in their own speaking and writing discourse in dependence to the situational context they might happen to be in real life contexts. This approach guides them how to frame language questions and use the resources to obtain data and interpret context-like language presentations on the web and logically reach to valuable conclusions enhancing so highly their thinking skills on the basis of their solid linguistic knowledge gained and accumulated in the course of years of foreign language study.

Indeed, in the DDL present study my ELT Master students used the same types of tools that professional linguists use, namely a corpus from a plethora of options provided on the web, and a concordance, which is a search engine designed for linguistic analysis. Throughout,

corpora use they were exposed to abundant input, from which they independently induced rules and patterns, constructed language tasks which were product of corpus- data manipulation and specific in-class tool implementation which led them from basic observations to advanced linguistic investigations. DDL reports to be a consistent approach in Second Language Acquisition particularly in upholding Friginal's (2018) conclusive remarks; an estimate of the theory of noticing language hypothesis in his recent book on 'Corpus Linguistics for English Teachers',

A language learner needs to notice some feature of the input to have the best chance of acquiring it. DDL works by drawing the learner's attention to the target feature by providing numerous examples in context (pp.224).

Thus the implementation of DDL and the selection of concordance and KWICs (Key Word in Context) among a range of tools from the program Compleat Lextutor (Cobb, 2000) (see Figure. 1) reported to be a novelty at my EFL master students when teaching my doctoral field of study "Corpora in Applied Linguistics". A concordance is a piece of software, either installed on a computer or freely accessed through a website used to search all kinds of language production across different genres. Once being acquainted to the Compleat Lextutor interface which is designed for demanding learners, teachers and researchers with low to advanced degree of difficulty in reference the tools it displays, you can choose any of the tools you decide to explore the written/oral discourse and the accurate information about the way language is authentically used.



Figure 1. Compleat Lextutor Interface (Cobb, 2010)

3. Generating corpus-based tasks by implementing Compleat Lextutor and its tools: Concordance and KWIC in EFL classrooms

As Reppen (2010) states, ‘a corpus is a large, principled collection of naturally occurring texts (written or spoken) stored electronically’. These naturally occurring texts consist of language that is being produced from actual language situations, such as friends chatting, formal or informal conversations, phone calls, meetings, class assignments. The use of DDL in EFL learning and teaching aims to enhance vocabulary acquisition by exploring and concluding beyond the concordance lines. *Concordance programs* create word lists that can be arranged in either alphabetical order or in order of word frequency in dependence to what lexical significance we aim at eliciting. *KWIC* (Key Word in Context search) is a concordance search for a word, which shows all its occurrences in different contexts in a chosen corpus. Provided the fact that vocabulary is the target feature that EFL learners and users find somehow difficult and challenging to be successful as native speakers do, dealing and learning with corpora means to know a word. This statement supports what Richards (2008) refer to as other important lexical features embedded in a word such as: polysemy, affective meaning, associations and collocations. The large number of contextualized examples furnishes learners with the above-listed vocabulary characteristics typical of corpus data. Moreover, the immense interest that technology exerts on people has given me new

insights how to intertwine technology and its devices to my teaching practices.

Specifically, the use of free online corpora tools as displayed in Compleat Lextutor website: Concordance and KIWC (see Figure. 2) guided my master students to generate a range of tasks and activities developed in the classroom and for the most were intended to enhance vocabulary learning. Graphically presented in the framework of literary lines, centering any KWIC, attained the students focus on this novel approach of viewing and fostering vocabulary. The tasks and activities that will be presented in the flow of this study provided these students with the skills and knowledge necessary to pursue by far deeper autonomous vocabulary learning.

Figure 2. Interface of Keyword search

3.1 Observing *phonetic, morphological, semantic, etymological, collocation* vocabulary searches vs hard book dictionary entries.

- ✓ **Task 1.** Type a word for instance: ‘*Glare*’ at the QUICK LOOK-UP or LISTEN box that is on the top right side of the interface to get the pronunciation of the targeted word either in American English or British English.
- ✓ **Task 2.** You can search for the English definition (Figure. 3)
- ✓ **Task 3.** For specific linguistic research issues you can find information on the word’s etymology.
- ✓ **Task 4.** Find the word’s reference in various dictionaries
- ✓ **Task. 5** You can continue by scrutinizing its denotative

meaning as well as connotative ones; viewing its usage in various parts of speech

- ✓ **Task. 6** Learn the word's use and meanings throughout images (a long-term memory strategy for enhancing vocabulary), (Figure. 4)
- ✓ **Task. 7** View for further word use Forum discussions with the word(s) for instance "glare" in the title (see Figure. 5) to reinforce the possible usages for a better contextual apprehension in a larger context.
- ✓ **Task. 8** Expand your vocabulary by searching for its synonyms (Figure. 6); English collocations (either as noun or as verb)
- ✓ **Task. 9** Then you can continue the word exploration in the corpora data by getting a concordance of the word, right in an instant (Figure. 7).

Figure. 3 Etymology word search interface

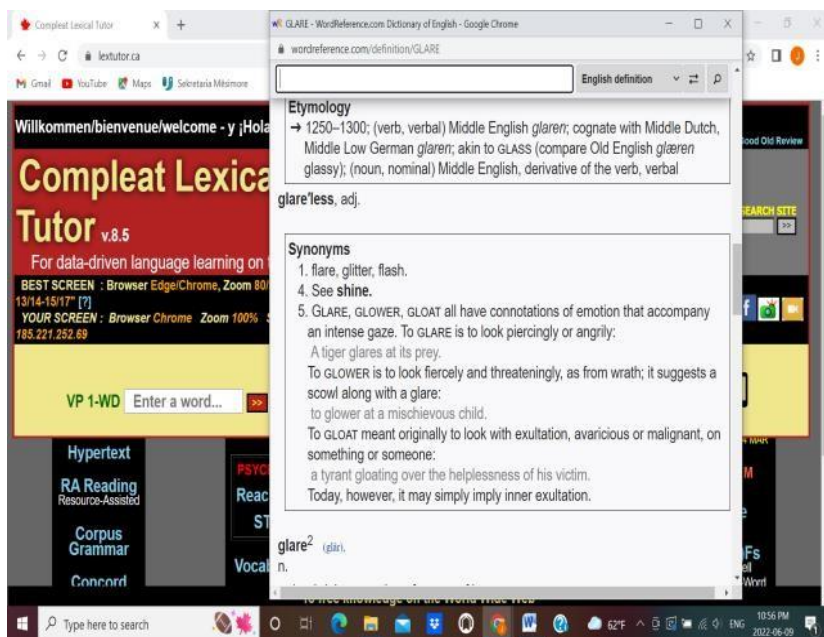




Figure. 6 Dictionary form-like Synonyms word search

Notably the use of corpora and its computational tools assists EFL students to delve with the language in a faster, innovative, easier way in addition to the amount of knowledge obtained just by following some simple yet to become routine steps. It is less time consuming when compared to looking up words in large and immense informed page of any language dictionary. The scope of making such comparison relies on the fact; rejuvenating the SLA process in such a way so to foster critical and reasoning thinking skills, provide space for the students to experiment with the authentic language, notice variations of language across genres and context-like situations, challenge in a way hard copy books, grammars and resources once they have already been theoretically acquainted with those issues in the basic stage of acquiring the foreign language.



Figure. 7 Concordance of search results from the Brown Corpus

3.2 Identifying and analyzing vocabulary

- ✓ **Task 1.** Use concordance from the central tools under the Researcher classification to deal with unpredictable and often ambiguous context-like questions in vocabulary exercises or tasks or certain prepositional uses in cases for instance: *Which is correct? Glare at, or Glare on?*

Mistakes in the use of prepositions are common to both native and foreign language learners. Concordance searches can give solutions for the correct use in terms of speaking and in a more solid way in written extracts produced in various situational contexts.

- ✓ **Task 2.** After deciding which corpus (Figure. 8) serves your purpose, type the word for instance “insight” into the keyword box, and finally, press **Get Concordance** (Figure. 9).

As it can be seen from the computational results: the keyword ‘insight’ in Brown Corpus is used in a frequency of 30 times in English; the keyword is equal to the sort of word (having no inflections or other derivative forms of it in various contextual uses; the line width of each concordance line is equally distributed in 100 characters.

- ✓ **Task 3.** Investigate upon pattern use to elicit data by sorting to the left and sorting to the right side of the KWIC to explore the use of *function* and *content* words that collocate with the targeted word.

Specifically, Karpenko-Seccombe (2017, p.5) defines [...words are more likely to occur together with the keyword are said to be collocates...]. Indeed, corpus-based data which displays in such disconnected sentences in each respective concordance line increases student's desire to unveil what is hidden beyond this graphical way of language resource. Yet, prior attention should be focused on the fact that EFL students ought to be guided theoretically since the starting point of introducing Corpus Linguistics, corpora and certain innovative computational tools. Once the new approach and its methodological instruments are made known, it is up to them to decide which one increases and cherishes their *appetite* to learning languages untraditionally.

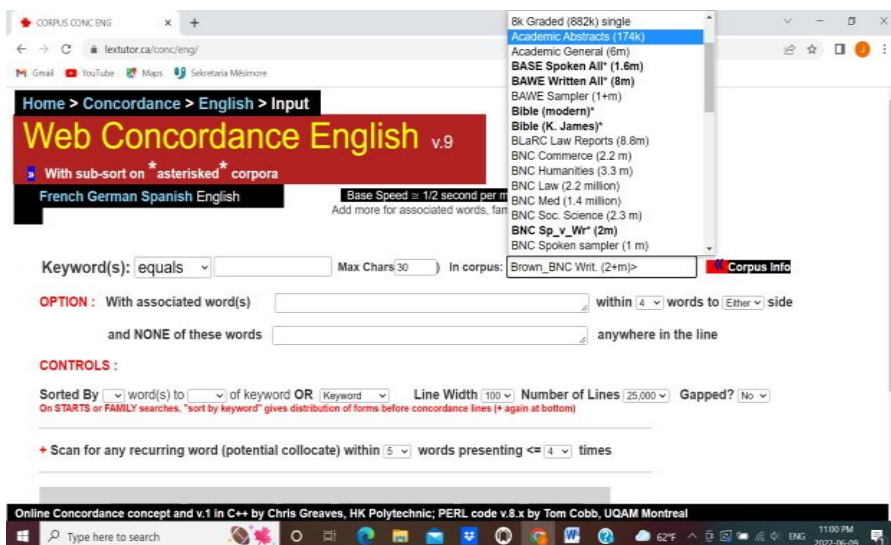


Figure. 8 Interface of various corpora

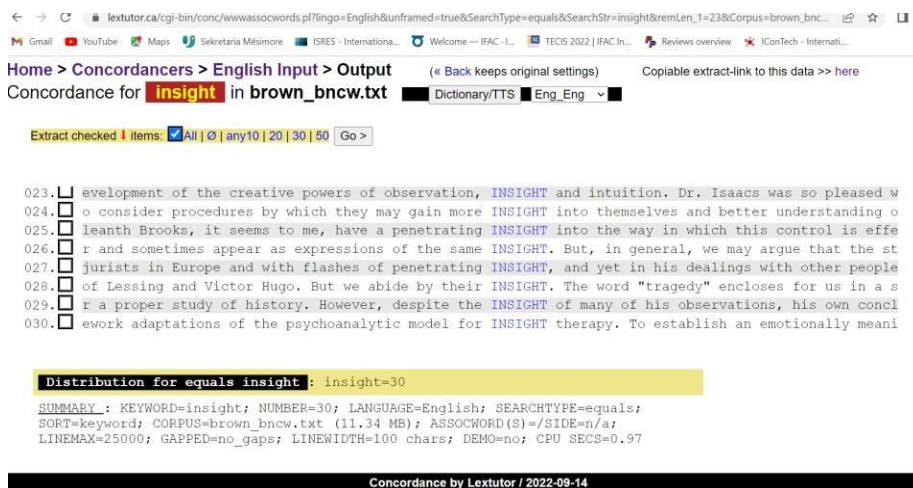


Figure. 9 Concordance word search example

3.3 Improving word choices

- ✓ **Task 1.** Observing and using language patterns by means of **Keyword(s)** search option: **equals, starts, ends, contains** and **family** are options that allow you to choose whether you are looking for an exact word, part of the word or the word with its derivatives.
- ✓ **Task 2.** A more concrete example to test your knowledge upon vocabulary/ grammatical use is the use and/or misuse of prepositions. Concordance searches can provide you with the instant solution just following some successive steps in Lextutor i.e type again the word “insight” in the **search box**, use an **equals** search **to sort to the right** (viewing patterns and collocations coming after the targeted word, and then press **the Get concordance** to finally look for the recurrent patterns of prepositions used with the keyword.

For instance: The linguistic question you might come up with is:

- Which preposition to use: We hope to get an **insight** – *to, into* or *about*? (see Figure. 10)
- To be sure of the choice provided, it is advisable that you try several corpora, record the findings so as to see that the same results will yield in terms of corpora type, across different genres and contexts; in this case we have chosen British Academic Written English (BAWE)

3.4 Enrich your vocabulary

- ✓ **Task 1.** Besides the correct use of the pattern insight + into as noted from the Figure. 10, a vast number of occurrences are attained as you scroll down the concordance lines. The linguistic measure that defines this linguistic result is carried out by *frequency* to indicate the density of use of this pattern in both selected corpora Brown Corpus and BAWE.
- ✓ **Task 2.** Find other possible patterns of the targeted word as displayed in the concordance lines: for instance verb + article + insight;
- ✓ **Task 3.** View the targeted word in a larger text, by simply clicking on the keyword **insight** in each line to get a prompt use of the full text where the word is/was used. This serves the scope of indulging learners for a better and deeper comprehension of the word across the disciplinary variation.

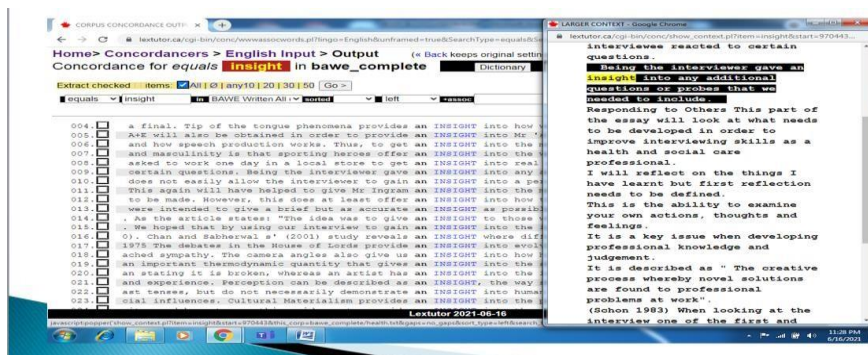


Figure. 10 View a larger text targeting the KWIC ‘insight’

4. Conclusion

Participants of the present study’s tasks that generated and implemented in my ELT master subject ‘Corpora in Applied Linguistics’ were the 2nd Course Master students of the academic year 2021-2022. As explained earlier in dependence to the nature of this new subject in SLA, they were given flexibility of selection, experimentation in EFL classroom usage but not only (hereby referring to their implementation in their active teaching practices), to undertake

independent and substantial steps in investigating certain linguistic features that demand deliberate analysis. The presented tasks and tools might be considered moderate in number but of an utmost importance compared to the wide range of tools that Compleat Lextutor (Cobb, 2000) indeed offers. In today's world literature EFL language learners do not lack course books, grammars, dictionaries, guides or any hard-copy resource in reference acquiring *vs.* learning languages. This result to fade their interest despite the immense information that is launched either physically or virtually. Professionally speaking, a solution for remedy is indulging them either instructionally or independently from the above-mentioned 'traditional' resources. Technology development has made possible the intertwining of blended learning throughout corpus-based tasks, hands-on activities that the novel corpus linguists (my master students themselves) designed at full conscience, infinite experimentation *vs.* imagination to coming up with ideas and remarks of future in-class progress. With only few laboratory equipment such as: a personal PC, laptop, video projector, internet and a plethora of free online corpora we all managed to undertake innovative EFL classes by means of the successful accomplishment of concordance and KWIC tools embracing strongly the outcome that DDL indeed improves and fosters overall EFL learning competence and teaching as well. Just as Hoey (2000) metaphorically characterizes language competence as '*a mental concordance*' storing for deeper analysis every word that is being encountered in any social, physical, discourse, generic and interpersonal context.

To sum up we conclude that:

- Corpus Linguistics and Corpora can provide innovative methodological models for foreign language learners
- Compleat Lextutor website serves the scope of providing evidence of DDL and a range of easy- to- follow tools for certain linguistic computational outcomes
- The present study furnishes EFL students with meaningful examples and tasks to assist them unconditionally in dealing and solving grammar and vocabulary issues
- Concordance and KIWCs give basic to advanced learners the opportunity to generate corpus-based tasks either physically or virtually in EFL classrooms and as a result get the benefit of the doubt as the only designers of a range of classroom

activities.

- Corpus attributes attained during the process of acquiring English naturally such as: authenticity, objectivity, reliability, representativeness, accessibility, data frequency instyle, use and variance may serve as perquisites for EFL teachers, practitioners, student learners (but not only), and material and curriculum designers.
- Corpora, the tools, corpora examples, corpus-based tasks generated from Corpus Linguistics (a new discipline in SLA) are just the 'tip of the iceberg' demanding from the 'sun' (hereby. learners) to melt it slowly and furnish the rivers of knowledge with modest but valuable evidence in EFL classrooms.

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PROOFREADING AND CORRECTING STUDENTS' TRANSLATIONS DURING DISTANCE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

Distance learning was a challenge for all of us and the difficulties faced during this process made us think about ways to adapt and find new solutions to improve teaching in certain areas. The translation practice is one of them. Therefore, this article aims to acquaint you with the way the online translation practice is organized in online teaching and learning and will mainly focus on the target text correction from the students themselves and the professor.

Our stop in this second phase of translation is intentional. A significant number of students think that by completing the first phase, i.e. the transition from the source text to the target text, the work of the translator is over. This way they neglect a step as important as the translation itself, which is proofreading.

The article will be based on two key elements, which are the questions of when and how the translation proofreading will be performed. By teaching the students how we proofread and correct their translations, for example in final exams, at the same time we are teaching them how they should proofread and correct their own works. Our aim is the implantation of this practice as a mandatory part of translation practice. Proofreading is a process that with distance learning got the attention it deserves in translation practice.

1. Distance Learning and Translation practice

During the pandemic, as a completely new situation, we have switched from face-to-face teaching to online teaching and therefore we had to find new solutions and give to the students the possibility to benefit as much as possible from online learning experience. We have thus attempted to improve teaching in certain subjects such as translation practice. Some of the methods used during the translation practice

were: explanation of terms and concepts, discussions about problem-solving questions, linguistic analysis of different texts, debates about different translations and analyses of typical translation errors, proofreading of their own translation and of the translations of other students, etc.

By doing all this, we try to teach the students, that, generally, translation is composed of two phases of equal significance to the final product, which are: to understand and to make understandable. Therefore, referring to translation practice as a study subject in higher education, we try to lead the students through these phases. The first one is closely related to the text and the translator's ability to understand and make text-related research. The second one is related to the ability of the translator to make the text understandable and to transfer it correctly to the addressee. We proofread and correct, but this does not always mean we want to highlight the problems or errors; quite the contrary, we want to make students improve their own work. Therefore, we explain and we also give to students the necessary criteria for correcting their own translations. Christiane Nord writes about this: "Überall dort, wo „korrigiert“ wird, wo als „Fehler“ (oder auch besonders gute Leistungen) markiert und zur Grundlage einer Gesamtbewertung eines Produkts (und damit in aller Regel auch der Person, die dieses hergestellt hat), gemacht werden, ist es ein Gebot der Fairneß, die Kriterien der Bewertung offenzulegen, um der bewerteten Person die Möglichkeit zu geben, ihr Verhalten (rückwirkend oder für die Zukunft) zu korrigieren. Das ist in der Ausbildung professioneller Übersetzerinnen und Übersetzer besonders wichtig, weil die Qualität einer Übersetzung nicht im naturwissenschaftlichen Sinne „messbar“ ist, sondern subjektive Zweckmäßigkeitserwägungen oder auch ästhetische Urteile zumindest eine Rolle spielen. / Wherever "corrections" are made, where "mistakes" (or particularly good performance) are marked and used as the basis for an overall evaluation of a product (and thus usually also of the person who manufactured it), it is a requirement of fairness to disclose the criteria of the evaluation to give to the evaluated person the opportunity to correct their behavior (retrospectively or in the future). This is particularly important in the training of professional translators because the quality of a translation cannot be "measured" as in the exact sciences, but also subjective

considerations of convenience or aesthetic judgments play at least a role”¹.

2. Components of the transfer process

In the phase of making the text understandable, other elements are as important as the transfer of information itself. These significant elements are content, grammar, vocabulary/lexis, and style. As per Margot Lester “content is information presented with a purpose distributed to people in a form through a channel”². The content of the source text is the most important component in translation. Additions and omissions in the content of the target text are not accepted and distinguish a good translation from a bad one. The translator has to be faithful to the content of the source text, but he has also to find the right words to clearly express the message of the text and to use them grammatically in a correct way. For this reason, grammar and lexis are two other important elements to which should be paid attention. Surly the style is a very specific characteristic, which has to be also respected. To control these components was quite difficult during the online translation practice. That is why we will mainly focus on the target text correction. This is an important step that has to be done by the students (in the role of translators) themselves and by the professor as well. Our **stop** in this second stage of translation is intentional. A significant number of the students think that by completing the first phase, i.e. the transfer from the source text to the target text, the work of the translator is over. This way they neglect a step as important as the translation itself, which is proofreading. Our aim, therefore, is to encourage students’ realization of this practice as a mandatory part of translation.

3. Levels of proofreading and correcting the translation

In auditoriums, we often discuss different problems that occur during translation and we make corrections without writing them specifically. Proofreading got, during distance learning, the attention it deserves in the translation practice. By explaining to students how we proofread and correct their translations, we teach them how they should proofread and correct their works.

¹ C. Nord (1999: 384-387). 7

² <https://thewordfactory.com/what-is-content/>

There are two key elements, that help us explain proofreading to students. By this we mean such questions as when and how the translation's proofreading will be performed. Answering the question when the students have to proofread their work, we can say that we teach them that this phase always begins after the full translation of the text. They have to learn first of all to do it preferably with a time lag from the translation, which means some days after the translation, and if this is for time reasons not possible, at least after a break, or some hours later.

Answering the question of how they have to proofread or correct the target text, we can say that the process of proofreading itself happens in two steps. During the first one, we read the full target text and try to understand if there are some passages, that are not properly understood, or where certain communication problems may arise. We often lead students to the question: "How do I say that in the target language? How do the native speakers say, or use it?" During the second step, we check the text according to the criteria mentioned above, namely: content, grammar, lexis, and style.

Regarding these criteria, we can say that the first level of proofreading is the **CONTENT**. It is the most important component and it takes the most points - 50%. Part of the content is text comprehension not only by translator itself but attention has to be paid whether its content is understandable for the addressee. Also important at this point are both accuracy and completeness of the given information and of the content of the source text and the fact whether they have been brought to the target text as well.

The second level is the **GRAMMAR**, which takes 20% of the evaluation. We proofread here the so-called Formal Correctness, which means: orthography and punctuation because the last one is different from the source to the target language; morphology and syntax are very important for translation into such working languages as German and Albanian.

VOCABULARY/LEXIS is the third level of proofreading. We also call it expressiveness, it means that it is very important to use the right words, idioms, polysemy, and language register in the target language. This expressiveness takes also 20% of the evaluation of translation.

The last level is **STYLE**. The question of whether we can translate the style at all is an ongoing debate. We think we can make an effort to

“translate” or “transfer” style, which can be achieved by keeping the same style, if possible, or, by paying attention to stylistic devices and register. Style, therefore, takes 10% in the degree of total evaluation. Following, we introduce an example of how students’ translation have been proofread during online teaching classes:

Die Bioprodukte werden gestützt von Zertifizierungen – rund 75.000 Produkte tragen das deutsche staatliche Biosiegel –, einem starken Verbraucherschutz und einer umfassenden Kennzeichnungspflicht. 2016 gab es in Deutschland etwa 8 Millionen Personen, die sich als Vegetarier bezeichnen; 1,3 Millionen leben nach eigener Aussage vegan. Trotzdem kommt der Genuss nicht zu kurz. Dafür stehen die 300 Restaurants in Deutschland, die im Guide Michelin 2018 einen oder mehrere Sterne tragen – so viele wie nie zuvor.

Produktet organike kanë **certifikatat** - rreth 75,000 produkte mbajnë **etiketën organike shtetërore gjermane** - mbrojtje të fortë të konsumatorit dhe një **kërkesë gjithëpërfshirëse për etiketimin**. Në vitin 2016 **kishte** rreth 8 milion njerëz në Gjermani **që e quajnë** veten vegjetarianë; Sipas deklaratës së tyre, 1.3 milion **vegan të gjallë**. Sidoqoftë, **kënaqësia** nuk është lënë pas dore. Kjo është ajo që **bie në sy në 300 restorante në Gjermani, të cilat kanë një ose më shumë yje Michelin Guide 2018 - më** shumë se kurrë më parë.

The colors serve to explain to students that there is an error in one of the mentioned levels which has to be changed. After the first correction, they have to make the suggested changes and proofread their translation again.

The final evaluation can be made in points or percentages, as given above, or in words, such as: Very good (9 / 10); Good (8) Satisfactory (7) Sufficient (6) Poor (5) Insufficient (4).

This is the formal side of the evaluation, but we should be aware that there is also another subjective side, which cannot be evaluated in a “cold” way.

4. Conclusions

Coming to conclusions, we can state that proofreading and correcting are as important as translation itself, and that is why professors should

obviously not neglect it, and even more so students as future translators. The best way is to proofread target texts some days after completing the translation; if it is impossible due to limited time, we should do it after a break or a few hours. The formal and non-subjective text correction consists of the following assessment criteria:

Content - Text comprehension, accuracy, completeness = 50%;

Grammar – Formal Correctness: spelling/orthography and punctuation, morphology, and syntax = 20%

Vocabulary/lexis – Expressiveness: finding the right word, idioms, polysemy = 20%

Style – register, stylistic devices = 10%

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ROLE OF AFFIXATIONS IN CREATION OF IT TERMS IN ALBANIAN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Language of science and technology, from the point of view of quantity, counts less word-building means in comparison to general language. This is also due to its real concepts and as such it excludes lexical units with emotional and stylistic colouring. Together with them, it excludes also the word-building means that express such colouring, such as suffixes: - *ac*, - *acak*, - *anak*, - *ç*, etc. This scientific work shall focus on those word-building means, which play an important role in creation of IT lexicon terms. They can be native Albanian or loaned. We can mention here Albanian language prefixes such as: *ç-çngjeshje* (*decompression*), *për-përshpejtues* (*accelerator*), *nën-nënprogram* (*subprogram*), *sh- shkyçje* (*turn off*), *jo-jopërçues* (*dielectric*), *ri-riformatoj* (*reformat*), *ndër-ndërfaqe* (*interface*), *bashkë-bashkëlidhje* (*attachements*), *prapa-prapaveprim* (*feedback*), *para-parashenjë* (*beginnings*), *gjysmë-gjysmëpërçues* (*semiconductor*) and those loaned such as: *de- dekodim* (*decoding*), *makro-makrogjuhë* (*macrolanguage*), *tele-telekomandë* (*remote*), *mikro- mikrokod* (*microcode*), *mini-minidisk* (*minidisc*), *meta-matagjuhë* (*metalanguage*), *super-superkompjuter* (*supercomputer*), *tera-terabajt* (*terabyte*), etc. On the other side, Albanian language suffixes such as: -*ar-adresar* (*directory*), -*im-skanim* (*scan*), -*je-rrjedhje* (*flow*), -*ues-kodues* (*coder*), -*shmëri-përçueshmëri* (*conductivity*) play an important role, as well as foreign suffixes as: -*izëm-automatizëm* (*automatics*), etc. Following study of respective literature and illustration with example, this work comes to the conclusion that some word-building words have a wider and more intense use in creation of IT lexicon terms in Albanian language in comparison to other tools. For reader's convenience, examples are presented both in Albanian and English.

Key words: *lexical system, terms, terminology, prefix, suffix, informatics.*

Introduction

In the study of the terminology of informatics, the construction of word-forming strings stands out. This shows the conceptual connection between the terms, which coalesce around a key concept that contains the main load of scientific information, such as: *skaner* (*scanner*), *skanoj* (*scan*), *skanim* (*scan*), *i skanuar* (*scanned*); *printer* (*printer*), *printoj* (*print*), *printim* (*print*), *i printuar* (*printed*) etc., (Caka, Dika & Rodiqi. 2005).

In these system connections, it can be seen how the terms names unambiguously express the relationship between the concept and the term.

However, this connection is also clearly expressed in verbs and adjectives, which are motivated by the noun, for example, *skanoj* (*scan*) is related to *skanim* (*scanning*) or *printoj* (*print*) is related to *printim* (*printing*), although the nouns derive from verbs.

In the construction of computer science terms there are several productive ways such as: building terms through phrases (a very productive way), through composition, compounding and affication. The purpose of this scientific paper is to highlight the role that prefixes and suffixes have in the formation of the informatics lexicon in the Albanian language.

Affication in the language of science and technology have significant limitations in terms of quantity in relation to the general language.

Science deals with literal concepts and as such it excludes lexical units with emotional and stylistic color and with affication that express these colors, such as the suffixes: - *ac*, - *acak*, - *anak*, - *ç*, etc., (Çano & Tupja. 2022. fq 27).

Throughout the study of the literature, we will highlight a set of prefixes and suffixes through which IT terms are built in the Albanian language.

We will see that some of them are more productive than others.

Methodology

This scientific work reviews these linguistic phenomena based on respective international and Albanian references, accompanied with concrete examples extracted from informatics vocabularies and textbooks published in Albanian speaking countries. With the help of

induction method, as well as with the descriptive analysis, this work tries to draw some concrete conclusions.

Analysis

Terms formed with prefixes

Prefixes are productive in the creation of quantitative terms and relatively limited in terms of the formation of adjectives and verbs.

Term names:

- *për-: pëndarje (distribucion), përpunim (processing), përrputhje (consistency), përrshpejtues (accelerator), përrthithje (absorption), përrzgjedhje (selection) etc.*
- *nën-: nënbashkësi (subset), nëntip (subtipo), nënvijë (undo), nënprogram (subprogram), nënsekuencë (underscore) etc.*
- *ndër-: ndërdeğjim (crosstalk), ndërlidhje (link-up), ndërprerje (interrupt), ndërveprim (interaction), ndërfaqe (interface), ndërfutje (stuffing) etc.*
- *sh-: shpaketim (unpack), shkyçje (turnoff) etc.*
- *zh-: zhbllokim (unblocking), zhvendosje (shift) etc.*
- *prapa-: prapafund (back end), prapaveprim (feedback) etc.*
- *para-: paraardhës (ancestor), parakusht (precondition), parashenjë (beginnings) etc.*
- *ç-: çngjeshje (decompression)*
- *mbi-: mbindërtim (upgrade), mbivendosje (superposition) etc.*
- *sipër-: sipërshtypje (overstrinking), sinjeri (android) etc.*
- *ri-: riorganizim (reorganization), riprogramim (reprogramming), ringarkim (reload), riaktivizim (reactivation), rillogaritje (calculation), rishitës (resellers), rishfaqje (rerun), rishikim (revision) etc..*
- *bashkë-: bashkëprocesor (coprocesor), bashkëndarje (sharing), bashkëlidhje (attachements) etc.*
- *gjysmë-: gjysmëpërçues (semiconductor), gjysmëton (halftone) etc.*
- *mos-: mospranim (rejection) etc., (Caka, Dika & Rodiqi. 2005).*

In the terminology of informatics, a number of terms have been formed, names with foreign prefixes.

- *de-:* *dekodim* (decoding), *dekodues* (decoder), *demodulator* (demodulator), *demodulim* (demodulation), *demultiplekser* (demultiplexer) etc.
- *in-:* *invariant* (invariant), *inversion* (inversion) etc.
- *elektro-:* *elektrostatikë* (electrostatics) etc.
- *makro-:* *makroasembler* (macroassembler), *makrogjuhë* (macrolanguage), *makrokod* (macrocode), *makrokodim* (macrocoding), *makroprocesor* (macroprocessor), *makroprogram* (macroprogram) etc.
- *mini-:* *minidisk* (minidisc), *minikompjuter* (minicomputer) etc.
- *mikro-:* *mikroinstruksion* (microinstruction), *mikrokod* (microcode), *mikrokompjuter* (microcomputer), *mikroprocesor* (microprocessor), *mikroqark* (microcircuit), *mikroprogram* (microprogram), *mikroprogramim* (microprogramming) etc.
- *meta-:* *metafajl* (metafile), *metagjuhë* (metalinguage), *metamatematikë* (metamathematics) etc.
- *multi-:* *multiprocesor* (multiprocessor), *multipleksim* (multiplexing), *multiprogramim* (multiprogramming), *multiseksion* (multisession) etc.
- *hiper-:* *hyperdisk* (hyperdisc), *hipertekst* (hypertext), *hypermedia* (hypermedia) etc.
- *pseudo-:* *pseudokod* (pseudocode) etc.
- *tele-:* *telephoto* (telephoto), *telekomandë* (remote), *telekonferencë* (teleconference), *telematje* (telemetry), *telemjekësi* (telemedicine), *telekomunikacion* (telecommunication) etc.
- *post-:* *postindeksim* (postindexing), *postprocesor* (postprocessor) etc.
- *audio-:* *audiodisk* (audiocdisc), *audiokatalog* (audiocatalogue), *audiokonferencë* (audioconference), *audioport* (audioport), *audioshirit* (audiotape), *audiotekst* (audiotext) etc.
- *tera-:* *terabajt etj.*
- *super-:* *superkompjuter* (supercomputer), *superpërçues* (superconductor), *superpërçueshmëri* (superconductivity), *superpërdorues* (superuser), *superserver* (superserver),

supershfrytëzues (superuser) etc., (Caka, Dika & Rodiqi. 2005).

Verb term:

Verbs formed with these prefixes are few: In general, verbs and nouns are in conjunction with each other, for example:

- *ri-: rikodoj (recode), riprogramoj (reprogramme), ringarkoj (reloading), rifreskoj (refresh), ripërtërij (rennew), riformatoj (reformat), rishfaq (rerun), rinis (restart) etc.*
- *ç-: çngjesh (decompress), çinstaluj (unistall), çrregjistrohem (log out) etc.*
- *sh-: shfragmentoj (defragment), shkyç (turn off), shkëpus (terminate) etc.*
- *zh-: zhvendos (shift) etc.*
- *për-: përafroj (approximate), përpunoj (recondution), përthith (absorb), përzgjedh (select) etc.*
- *de-: dekodoj (decode), demoduloj (demodulate), deshifroj (dechiper) etc.*
- *nën-: i nënkuptuar (default) etc.*

Adjective terms:

- *jo-: joaktiv (inactive), jonormal (abnormal), jopërçues (dielectric) etc.*
- *super-: superscalar (superscalar) etc.*, (Bardhi & Lila. 2020. fq.15).

Terms formed with prepositions:

The number of suffixes in the formation of IT terms is relatively small, but active and productive. The most productive suffixes: - *im*, - *je*, - *ues*, - *or*, - *tor*, etc.

Term names:

Names with Albanian suffixes:

- *im: shtrembërim (distortion), dokumentim (documentation), shndërrim (coerzion), konfigurim (configuration), deshifrim (decryption), emulim (emulation), shifrim (encryption), fragmentim (fragmentation), identifikim (identification), dhëmbëzim (ident), informim (information), instalim*

(*installation*), *modulim* (*modulation*), *prodhim* (*production*), *regjistrim* (*record*), *shkallëzim* (*scaling*), *skanim* (*scan*) etc.

- *je*: *përthithje* (*absorption*), *ngjyrosje* (*coloring*), *llogaritje* (*computation*), *sjellje* (*behaviour*), *ngjeshje* (*compression*), *pajisje* (*device*), *gjendje* (*state*), *prishje* (*fault*), *mbushje* (*filling*), *rrjedhje* (*flow*), *futje* (*insertion*) etc.
- *ues*: *kuantifikues* (*quantifier*), *kodues* (*coder*), *përqendruës* (*concentrator*), *transmetues* (*transmitter*), *përdorues* (*user*), *përsheptues* (*accelerator*), *përçues* (*conductor*), *dekodues* (*decoder*), *përshkrues* (*descriptor*), *përcaktues* (*determinism*), *zhvillues* (*developer*), *instalues* (*installer*), *numërues* (*counter*), *akumulues* (*accumulator*), *analizues* (*analyser*), *ngarkues* (*loader*), *formatues* (*formatter*), *ndërmjetësues* (*mediator*), *faqeshenjues* (*bookmark*) etc.
- (*ë*)*si*: *përafërsi* (*approximate*), *shpejtësi* (*speed*), etc.
- *shmëri*: *pajtuëshmëri* (*compatibility*), *përçueshmëri* (*conductivity*), *kontrollueshmëri* (*controllability*), *lexueshmëri* (*readability*), *përdorshmëri* (*usability*) etc.
- *ar*: *adresar* (*directory*), etc., (Caka, Dika & Rodiqi. 2005).

Names with foreign suffixes

- *izëm*: *automatizëm* (*automatics*) etc.

Adjective terms:

Suffixes are active in the formation of adjective terms. The number of adjectives formed with suffixes is greater than those with suffixes. As a feature of the creation of adjective terms with a suffix, the productivity is not very high.

- *ik*: *automatik* (*automatics*), *softuerik* (*software*), *harduerik* (*hardware*), *alfanumerik* (*alphanumeric*), *kuadratik* (*quadratic*), *algoritmik* (*algorithmic*), *akromatik* (*achromatic*), etc.
- *ues*, *-ës*, *-es*: *shtypës* (*suppressor*), *pranues* (*recipient*) etc.
- *ar*, *-or*: *krahasor* (*comparative*), *dipolar* (*bipolar*) etc.
- *al*: *dydimensional* (*two-dimensional*), *audiovizual* (*audiovisual*), *pozicional* (*pozisionale*), *faktorial* (*factorial*), *relacional* (*relational*) etc., (Mydeziri & Gogu. 2018).

Some of the adjectives are formed through joining participles and suffixes such as: *i ekzekutueshëm* (executable), *i programueshëm* (programmable), *i përherëshëm* (persistent), *i përkohshëm* (temporary), *i pjesshëm* (partial), *i ndërrueshëm* (removable), *i njëkohshëm* (concurrent), etc.

Conjugation of participles: *i selektuar* (selective), *i koduar* (coded), *i skanuar* (scanned), *i furnizuar* (supplied), *i përpunuar* (processed), *i modifikuar* (modified), *i aktivizuar* (activated), *i korrigjues* (corrected), *i indeksuar* (indexed), *i komplikuar* (complicated) etc.

Conclusions

Following study of respective literature and illustration with examples, this work comes to the conclusion that some prefixes and suffixes have a wider and more intense use in creation of IT lexicon terms in Albanian language in comparison to other tools such as: *për, nën, jo, ri, ndër, prapa, para, gjysmë, de, makro, mikro, super, -im, -je, -ues*, or any other.

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CREATING A DIGITAL SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM WITH WEB 2.0. TOOLS: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

The utilization of information technologies in education provides new teaching opportunities in a second/ foreign language (L2/FL) classroom. Information technologies play a key role in language learning, create highly motivational learning environments, and promote effective (Ahmadi& Reza, 2018) and autonomous learning (Lee, 2016). New web 2.0 tools create a motivational environment for online interaction and intercultural communication. This paper presents a technology enhanced second language learning framework as well as new challenges and perspectives of Web 2.0. online tools, where young students collaborate, interact and develop intercultural communicative skills (Griva & Kofou, 2020) in a multimodal context (CERF, 2020, p. 84). Systematic reviews and a series of meta-analysis conducted by the researchers indicate some digital favorable tools that cultivate intercultural communicative competencies, digital competencies, while improving all aspects of second language learning. An online virtual classroom is constructed with Edmodo, which is an online social educational platform, creating an online learning community. E-assignments, also a tool in Edmodo classroom seem to motivate students for more participation (Farshi& Safa, 2015). Web 2.0. tools, such as Google documents, foster students' collaboration simultaneously with language skills development. Moreover, digital tools (ex. Google Earth) offer powerful virtual data, but also permit the embedding of interactive language learning activities in online presentations. In addition, through Web 2.0. tools (Audacity, Voki), students carry out authentic communicative tasks in the target language.

Keywords: *Second/foreign language learning, online classrooms, new technologies, web 2.0 tools.*

1. Introduction

Advances and improvements in communication and information technologies may have been revolutionary in second/ foreign language learning, especially as an enrichment supportive strategy for teaching and learning culture in classrooms. Recent research focus on how language learning environments could develop simultaneously the new fangled 21st century learning skills, known as 4Cs (Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication and Collaboration) and other essential skills as intercultural communication competencies in a digital learning context.

Until 2020, communication and information technologies have been a powerful essential tool in language classrooms, deliver real language learning through communication with fluent or native speakers, and in this interactive context, students could cultivate intercultural communicative competencies (Griva & Kofou, 2020), essential skills for learners in order to act and collaborate in modern sociocultural world (Cerf, 2020).

2. Teaching Greek as a Second/ Foreign language in a technology -enhanced educational framework

The application/utilization of new technologies in second/foreign language classrooms is imperative, promoting student-centered approaches, but also autonomous and collaborative learning (Maharani & Santosa, 2021). The utilization of a range of multimedia tools in second/ foreign language classrooms could contribute to empowering learning environments and could cultivate meaningful authentic social interaction between native and non- native speakers (Huffman, 2010·O'Rourke & Stickler, 2017).

Through a systematic review and a metanalysis of 47 pilot studies (Markou, 2022), we recorded the following digital tools that cultivate intercultural communicative competencies, digital competencies, while improving all aspects of second language learning:

Educational platforms

- Edmodo is an easy, attractive, user- friendly educational platform (Purnawarman, Susilawati & Sundayana, 2016· Silitonga & Wu, 2019).

- Moodle a promising educational platform with many features, promoting the implementation of a flipped classroom (Prasetya, 2021).
- Google Classroom, an easily accessible and useable platform for educators and learners (Iftakhar, 2016·Khalil, 2018), promotes students' collaboration, but also facilitates lesson's organization and assignments' management (Khalil, 2018·Prasetya, 2021).

Collaborative tools

- Google Documents allow students' collaboration and simultaneous work from different places (Khalil, 2018).
- Edpuzzle is a web-based interactive learning media tool, promotes active learning for students but also ignite students' curiosity, while improving students writing skills (Emiliya Hidayat & Dzulfikar Praseno, 2021).
- Audacity software is a very user-friendly software, helping students produce intelligible speech and improve their pronunciation in second/ foreign language learning (Benitez-Correa, Cabrera-Solano, Solano& Espinoza-Celi, 2020).
- Voki is a powerful teaching tool, improves students' speech motivation and speaking skills in second/foreign language (Yeşilbağ & Korkmaz, 2021).
- Padlet provides a stimulating learning environment (England, 2017) and promotes participation in an online interaction (Chen, 2022).

Digital instruments for creating learning materials

- Google Earth is a good alternative, offering powerful virtual data.
- Genially is also a powerful tool with several features, utilizes a gamification-based approach, including interactive presentations, escape rooms, quizzes.
- Learning Apps, another learning platform for digitals tools, the educator could create interactive exercises and games, for example memory games.
- Book creator is one of the simplest tools for digital storytelling. It is a free, online, and user-friendly application that helps learners create their own digital artifacts, supporting the learner autonomy in writing (Maharani & Santosa, 2021), and fosters students' communication competencies through text-based online interaction (Cahyono & Mutiaraningrum, 2016).

3. The pilot program “Teaching Greek as L2/FL in a Digital Bilingual Context”

3.1. The purpose of the study and the educational context

A number of the above mentioned digital tools were used in an educational program aiming to develop students’ intercultural competence and intercultural communication strategies in Greek as a second/ foreign language, in order to act as intercultural encounters. It was expected that students would develop and use intercultural communicative strategies in Greek as a Second/ Foreign Language Learning, in a digital context

The program was designed by the researchers and was implemented in a bilingual School in Korca, “Omios”, for teaching Greek as a Second/ foreign language in a digital context. The participants involved in the study were 21 5th grade students.

The program was carried out in two phases: a) the pilot phase lasted for four months, in the spring semester 2022, while the full implementation will take place for 6 months in the winter semester 2022-2023.

In this paper, we present the methodology of the pilot phase implementation.

3.2. The Rational for the study

Taking into consideration the above mentioned innovations created through information technologies, we designed the program considering the following research questions:

- How could we create an effective online bilingual classroom?
- Which tools could enhance students’ intercultural communicative skills?

We created a technology enhanced second language learning framework, as a setting for learner intercultural dialogue, including:

- an educational platform,
- synchronous and asynchronous communicative tools,
- collaborative tools,
- digital instruments for creating learning materials,
- assessment tools.

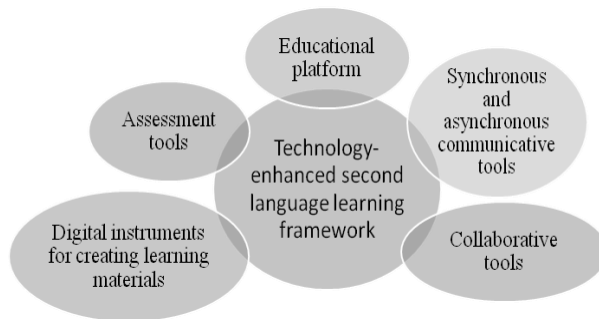


Figure 1. A technology enhanced second language learning framework

3.3. Thematic units

The pilot phase of the program consists of three thematic units, presented in the following diagram:



Figure 2. The thematic units of the project

3.4. Methodology

The project follows the proposed five-stage framework of Griva and Kofou (2020), focusing on intercultural communicative strategies’ development in an interactive digital context.

1st stage: “Defining student learning styles and background”.

In this stage, an assessment tool was constructed to investigate students’ learning styles and previous experience in relation to intercultural communicative strategies. Additionally, the online tool Quizizz was implemented for this purpose.

2nd stage: “Raising strategy awareness”.

In this stage, digital tool as Google Earth, Genially, Book Creator and Learning Apps were used to create interactive activities, digital stories, escape rooms with dialogues.

3rd stage: “Modeling and teaching strategies”.

In this stage, students worked in collaborative activities, which included interactive dialogues, digital stories, constructed with Google Documents, Genially, Canva and other collaborative tools and developed certain intercultural communicative strategies.

4th stage: “Coordinated Practice”

In this stage, students had transfer intercultural communicative strategies in a new communicative context, as in a synchronous communication with other students through Zoom.

5th stage: “Assessment”

In this stage, alternative assessment tools were employed, such as self-assessment questionnaires, constructed with Quizizz, Kahoot in order to record and evaluate students’ intercultural communication skills.

3.5.The implementation of the thematic units

The Units followed a four-step process (Fig.3). The educational platform Edmodo was used as a digital classroom for organizing the lessons and post the assignments, but it also facilitated the students’ engagement.



Figure 3. The process of the lesson

In this section we present some examples of activities of the 2nd Thematic unit “Digital Intercultural Bridges with Europe and Greece”. The educator posts an animation, constructed with online tool Voki, to announce the topic of the lesson in Edmodo.

Additionally, interactive presentations were created with Genially for stimulating students’ motivation. In this thematic unit, an interactive presentation with images and audio records of the myth of the rape of Europe was constructed with Genially and presented to students.

With web 2.0. tool Voki the teacher and the students created their avatars and commented the myth of the rape of Europe, while they were developing their speaking skills in Greek as a second/ foreign language.

With Google earth, students had the opportunity to travel and explore virtually to Greece and Europe, from culture to culture, but also at places where Europe lived.

Students worked independently within groups, conducted asynchronous collaborative writing tasks, and created their own digital stories with google documents, giving an alternative end of the myth. Additionally, Web 2.0 tools learning apps was used for interactive exercises. Also, some activities, for example creating digital puzzles through jigsaw planet, were used for stimulating students' interest. In order to complete the lesson, students present their digital artifacts in a Zoom meeting.

In such a context, for assessing student performance, we used formative and alternative assessment online tools, like online interactive quizzes with Quizziz, online polls and small conversations in Flipgrid. Also, escape rooms for student's self assessment with Web 2.0. online tool Genially (<https://genial.ly>). Students listened to audio records, answer interactive questions, and watch videos in the target language in order to 'escape'.

4. Conclusions

The rapid development of information technologies have created the need for further investigation on how they could be integrated effectively in L2/FL classrooms. Information Technologies and Web 2.0. tools have been widely used in the learning and teaching process (Yeşilbağ & Korkmaz, 2021) and have created innovative student-centered learning educational environments.

Primary results from students' assessment showed the positive effects of the pilot program on intercultural communicative skills, L2/FL skills, digital competencies, and also on students' motivation. It is worth mentioning that students in a multimodal, multicultural environment develop their intercultural awareness and their intercultural communicative strategies (Griva & Kofou, 2020). Also there is no similar intervention in teaching Greek as an L2/FL in Primary Education. Consequently, it is of vital concern for researchers to further investigate the impact of technology applications/implementations on language learning in bilingual intercultural contexts (O'Rourke & Stickler, 2017).

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TEACHER TRAINING IN MODERN ERA: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A DISTANCE TRAINING PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS IN BILINGUAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

In the modern educational context, the need for effective, flexible and reliable professional development programs is more mandatory than ever, with Information and Communication Technologies offering significant benefits and outcomes (Lapitan et al., 2021). For this reason, distance education/training is a flexible pedagogical model (Fragkaki & Mystakidis, 2021), creating the appropriate conditions in the context of innovation and the continuous trend for efficiency, modifying the overall educational situation and dictating new perspectives in teacher training.

This paper outlines the design, implementation and evaluation of a 6-month distance training program offered to language teachers who teach in bilingual educational contexts. The purpose of the program was to enhance teachers' skills on issues related to teaching the Greek language in modern bilingual / intercultural environments. The training program was implemented to 43 Greek minority education teachers in Albania, from the area of Gjirokaster, Delvino and Agioi Saranda, in a synchronous and asynchronous digital context. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to estimate the feasibility and the effectiveness of the program. The results indicated the enhancement of the prior knowledge and skills of the language teachers about "how to work" and the "how to think" of their work (Stephens, 2022) as "reflective practitioners" (Bouras & Griva, 2021). Moreover, it was revealed the development of their ability to take decisions and actions in order to improve daily teaching practices with the ultimate goal of achieving a quality language education in bilingual/intercultural environments.

Keywords: *Distance training program, Greek language teachers, bilingual learning environments, Albania, Greek minority education*

1. Introduction

The key role of continuing education for teachers has been highlighted, in the international literature, as it is linked to the acquisition of teaching flexibility, the adoption of modern teaching methods (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Kazu & Demiralp, 2016), the formation of a culture of mutual communication and trust in the workplace (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2018) and the formation of feelings of satisfaction and autonomy (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). It is a dynamic process of continuous updating and upgrading of teacher knowledge and skills with the ultimate goal of improving teaching and learning results, and increasing the efficiency of the school in general.

Some efforts of a few teachers to attend/participate in lifelong programs on a non-systematic and individual basis do not always result in the desired outcomes, with this gap being filled by the modern model of distance education/training (Ferri, et al., 2020). It is an educational method of teaching and learning that differs from traditional ones, offering flexibility in the space and time of learning. In fact, the design of distance training environments that combines the new technologies of synchronous (teleconferences) and asynchronous communication (online platform) creates suitable conditions for the formation of an integrated training framework for modern teachers (Griva & Bouras, 2018).

One of the modern educational tools is a "blended learning" model that combines face to face learning with distance learning. Its aim is to create an effective learning environment (Bahri, et al., 2021) and it is based on the combination of real-time interactions with online learning in asynchronous environments, through a holistic evaluation of the educational program (Prastiyono et al., 2021). In such an environment, training becomes more effective and it facilitates the continuous communication between the trainees and the trainer, while it allows the creation of an "open" educational environment.

2. The study

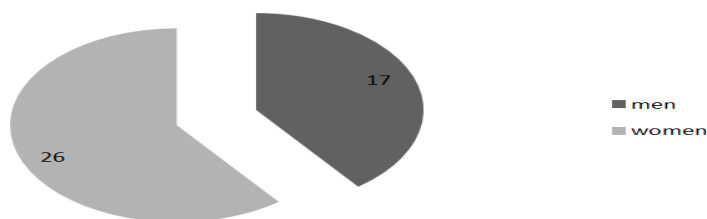
2.1 Purpose of the study

The study focuses on the design, implementation and evaluation of a 6-month training program offered to language teachers who teach in bilingual educational contexts. The purpose of the program was to enhance teachers' skills on issues related to teaching the Greek language in modern bilingual / intercultural environments. More specifically, the goals of the 6-month training program were for the language teachers:

- To design the language course based on the new modern methods of teaching the Greek language;
- To equip them with modern methods and techniques of teaching Reading, Writing and Communication skills and strategies;
- To provide them with modern techniques of cultivating communication and intercultural communication strategies;
- To familiarize them with new methods of evaluating the language course.

2.2 Participants in the implementation of the training program

The training program was tailored to the needs of 43 teachers (26 women and 17 men) of Greek minority education in Albania from the area of Gjirokaster, Delvino and Agioi Saranda, in a synchronous and asynchronous digital context. Their opinions are crucial for the effectiveness of the training program and for updating the Greek language instruction in the area.



Graph 1. Gender of participants in the 6-month training program

3. The design and implementation of the training program

From the investigation of the main educational design models, the ADDIE model (Analysis-Design-Development-Implementation-Evaluation Model) was chosen for this training program, which is

widely used for training and it is characterized by its flexibility as it can be adapted to a variety of educational contexts, incorporating modern digital tools (Hsu et al., 2014). In more detail, the five stages of the ADDIE planning model (Branch, 2010) are as follows (Figure 1):

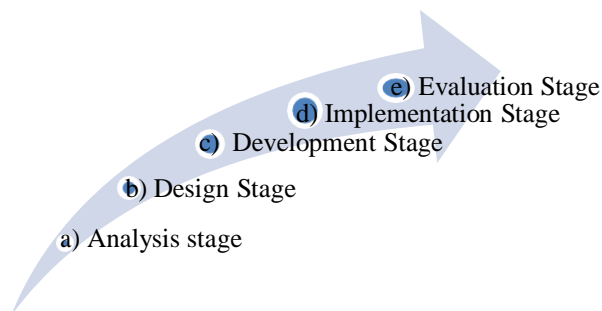


Figure 1. The five stages of ADDIE Model

3.1 First stage of ADDIE model: Analysis

More specifically, in the first stage of the Analysis, it is carried out the analysis of the target group for which the training program is designed for the analysis of the characteristics and the presentation of its training needs.. Therefore, the entire content of the present training program was designed based on the identification of the training needs of the Greek minority teachers in Albania.

For this purpose, a needs analysis questionnaire was distributed to the teachers and individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teaching staff of the department of Greek Language, Literature and Culture of the Eqrem Cabej University of Gjirokaster.

3.2 Second stage of the ADDIE educational design model: Design

After completing the analysis stage, based on the proposed ADDIE educational design model, the next stage is that of planning (Buchem & Okatan, 2021). More specifically, the target location of the training program was determined, the "LearnWorlds" e-platform for teacher training was selected, the digital environment and the online educational material were developed as well as there were selected. the appropriate teaching techniques and digital media for the effective application of the program

Taking into account the teachers' needs and preferences, the modern approaches of language teaching and the principles of adult education, we created an alternative training program based on teachers' active participation, teachers' self assessment and teachers' reflection on the training process.

Each Thematic Module was implemented in the following 3 stages (Figure 2):



Figure 2. Module implementation stages

In the first stage, the trainees watched a 30-40 minute interactive video including the necessary information on the content of the module. *In the second stage*, the teachers were asked to carry out some closed type activities related to certain practices. *The third and last stage*, was the most creative one: In this stage, teachers were given the opportunity to design lesson plans for implementing them into their class, or perform creative activities which were uploaded on the e-platform.

3.3 Third stage of ADDIE model: Development

In the third stage, based on the ADDIE educational planning model, an attempt is made to synthesize the material collected from the previous stages. Here, the pilot application of a thematic educational module in person was carried out in the premises of the Department of Greek Language, Literature and Greek Culture of Egean University of Gjirokaster, the necessary information was included, a variety of activities was utilized that simulated authentic learning environments, etc.

3.4 Fourth stage of ADDIE model: Implementation

In the fourth stage of the ADDIE educational design model, takes place the implementation of the educational program (Branch, 2009). In the present study, the entire training material was uploaded

on the 'LearnWorlds' e-platform in order to make it accessible to the trainee teachers who had already registered. The 6-month training program started on February 8, 2019 and ended on June 30, 2020. Initially, 43 teachers who teach language in the Greek minority education in Albania expressed their interest in participating in the program and in the end 39 trainees completed it successfully.

3.5 Fifth stage of the ADDIE model: Evaluation

The fifth stage of the ADDIE educational model includes the evaluation of the educational program implemented. The present training program was oriented towards the self-efficacy and self-evaluation of the trainee teachers through being involved in a variety of activities that referred to realistic learning environments (Liaw & Huang, 2013).

More specifically, the trainees were provided with continuous feedback from the part of the trainers during the teleconferences that took place upon the completion of 3-4 thematic educational modules. In the asynchronous environment of the "Learnworlds" e-platform, teachers already participated from the first level "Time to start" in self-assessment questions in the interactive video, while in the second level, in each of the 6 categories of questions, the trainees received immediate feedback. Also, in the third level of each thematic educational module, the teachers developed their own material and received immediate qualitative feedback from the scientific team of the educational program.

To assess the effectiveness of the program, a) individual semi-structured interviews were conducted during the implementation of the 6-month training program, b) satisfaction questionnaires were distributed to trainee teachers online, upon the completion of the program. Also, 6 months after the end of the program, the trainees voluntarily completed a follow-up evaluation questionnaire, in order to record the application of the newly acquired knowledge and skills in their classrooms.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, is presented the design, implementation and evaluation of the 6-month training program offered to language teachers teaching in bilingual/intercultural environments. The

participants (trainee teachers) evaluated the training program very positively and highlighted several interesting points which are expected to influence the future training process. The trainees were involved in authentic training activities, they used innovative tools to manage educational materials (Neto et al., 2021) and were equipped with modern methods of language teaching.

The results indicated the enhancement of the prior knowledge and skills of the language teachers about "how to work" and the "how to think" of their work (Stephens, 2022) as "reflective practitioners" (Bouras & Griva, 2021). Moreover, it revealed the development of their ability to take decisions and actions in order to improve daily teaching practices/routines with the ultimate goal of achieving a quality language education in bilingual/intercultural environments. The participants also highly valued the production of their own modern language material after the end of each thematic module (output), as it was linked to the objectives of the program and contributed decisively to their understanding and interaction with the training input (Golonka et al., 2014).

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HUMANITARIANISM THROUGH INTERNATIONALIZATION OF TERTIARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Numerous casualties of wars remind us again of the significance of human life. Even if a certain country's territory is not a battle field, the global community is made to give thought to the ongoing violence. In this regard, speaking of internationalization we immediately deal with the world. There is an urge to address another separate pillar of internationalization of tertiary education which can, presumably, be referred to as humanitarianism, one of whose aspects is the institutionalization of compassion. Academia is chiefly associated with the environment where 'a person who knows' rather than 'a person who sees' is trained. This may lead to the emergence of 'execute culture' within whose framework executing orders comes to the fore. When task orientation dominates over relationship orientation, the value of a human being is lost. A person who sees is a person of vision, the one who is aware of depth of processes. Related to humanitarianism are current discussions touching internationalization of higher education for society (IHES), viewed as the social responsibility component, which is seldom the primary focus of internationalization. With respect to the increasing seriousness of its role in society, a closer look is taken at the concept of IHES. On the way of promoting humanitarianism special attention should be given to virtual exchange programs. There is the need to upscale practices of such programs within higher educational establishments. Hence, the suggested research also aims at revealing the potential of virtual exchange in terms of IHES facilitating the decrease of the humanitarian crisis level.

Key words: *humanitarianism, a person who knows, a person who sees, virtual exchange, IHES, social responsibility*

Introduction

Conflicts and wars, which are constantly arising, cause me to turn to education. Whatever sphere you may think about, people, who work in it, come from educational establishments where they once were trained. Those representing political authorities also used to be someone's students. The question, I am tormented by, is connected to the role of higher education in building societies of prosperity or societies of violence throughout the world where we share our living. With regard to this we cannot but speak about the global dimension of education, in particular, I mean «internationalization».

Catering for societal challenges

Internationalization of higher education is one of the leading trends of development. It is a pivotal aspect of the reform agenda. Internationalization became a key change agent in higher education, in the developed world but also in emerging and developing societies (De Wit, 2020). It is responsible for the institution's enduring achievements. We observe how various dimensions of internationalization in tertiary education establishments are activated throughout the world. However, priorities change too. Economic rationales have become more dominant, but given the extreme challenges faced by global society – summarized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations – internationalization has also recently been called upon to help contribute to meeting these societal challenges and goals (de Wit & Altbach, 2022: 119–125).

Despite the fact that internationalization is traditionally focused on exchanges and cooperation to contribute to a better understanding of different cultures and languages, as well as research collaboration, numerous sources demonstrate that internationalization implies competition. Van der Wende (2001) calls this a shift in paradigm from cooperation to competition. It has to be admitted that it occurs in connection with 'internationalization abroad' and 'internationalization at home'. If it is so, internationalization turns out to be «ad hoc, fragmented, and implicit rather than explicit and comprehensive» (De Wit & Merks, 2012). But the question arises: «How can we deal with meeting societal challenges if competition is given priority?». This is quite controversial. And so we approach IHES (Internationalisation in

Higher Education for Society). Internationalisation and social engagement usually do not cooperate but compete for resources. IHES aims to change this and activate the internationalisation potential for social engagement.

When we speak about the emergence of the practical values of IHES we deal with being responsive to societal issues. Brandenburg et al. (2020) identify xenophobia, hate speech, environmental change and global warming as critical societal issues facing the global population today – the challenges that IHES ought to engage and enact upon. Thus, we may witness examples of different levels of engagement across HEIs and society.

Humanitarianism

Internationalization sprang from the need for institutions to address the growing interrelatedness of peoples around the world (Marginson, 2006: 18). Yet, when we resort to peoples' interrelatedness, we deal with diversity, equity and inclusion. According to Özturgut, it is erroneous to think about diversity, equity, and inclusion (the DEI) within the higher educational context and in the society as natural and inherent. But it is not so. It is important to take into account the global perspective and situate DEI within a larger and inclusive context to embrace institutional internationalization. It is not a separate construct but internationalization framework that takes the DEI vision from local to global (Özturgut, 2017: 83). Internationalization is rarely a topic of interest and / or concern when the talk is about the above-mentioned issues.

Yet, when referring to interrelatedness of people we can barely omit such a topic as humanitarianism. I am not speaking about humanitarianism in its conventional understanding. The meaning of humanitarianism has expanded. «Humanitarian action was formerly recognized as a separate sphere of activity, defined by the impartial relief to victims of manmade and natural disaster; now the term, according to many, includes human rights, access to medicine, economic development, democracy promotion, and even building responsible states. A field of humanitarianism has become institutionalized» (Barnett, 2005: 723).

It becomes evident that there is an urge to address humanitarianism as another separate pillar of internationalization of

tertiary education, one of whose aspects is the institutionalization of compassion. Academia is chiefly associated with the environment where 'a person who knows' rather than 'a person who sees' is trained. This may lead to the emergence of 'execute culture' within whose framework executing orders comes to the fore. When task orientation dominates over relationship orientation, the value of a human being is lost. A person who sees is a person of vision, the one who is aware of depth of processes. Raising a tertiary education institution's visibility through internationalization is as important as enabling a student and a faculty member to become visible. The Nobel Peace Laureate of 2014 Satyarthi (2015) is sure that compassion has to be globalized and stresses on the importance to build bridges of connection and togetherness. However, it has to be admitted that connection should first be established or strengthened with ourselves. F. Ruppert (2022) is convinced that the constructive dynamics looks like this: the truth=the right=peace=individual well-being and the destructive dynamics is this: violence=right=abstract well-being=truth. Peace starts in a person's own heart. It is the feeling of benevolence and love for yourself.

Related to humanitarianism are current discussions touching IHES, in particular, the focus is on the real and potential impact of internationalization activities on local and global communities. IHES is viewed as the social responsibility component, which is seldom the primary focus of internationalization. It emphasizes the relationship between internationalization and society, describing it as making a «meaningful contribution to society». This clearly extends the impact of internationalization beyond the confines of the academy (Leask & De Gayardon, 2021).

On the way of promoting humanitarianism special attention should be given to virtual exchange programs. E-learning is used as a tool for internationalization. It is worth stressing that an interdisciplinary approach to e-learning is quite beneficial. There is the need to upscale practices of such programs within higher educational establishments. It can be stated that the potential of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) / Virtual Exchange (VE) is revealed in terms of IHES. It can presumably be viewed as a preventive mechanism favouring the decrease of the humanitarian crisis level locally and globally, in particular by means of the humanities which

are academic disciplines that study aspects of human society and culture

In this paper the term COIL is used interchangeably with virtual exchange. VE is a practice consisting of sustained, technology-enabled, people-to-people education programmes or activities in which ecological interaction and communication takes place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated and/or from different cultural backgrounds, with the support of educators or facilitators. It is preferably based on regular synchronous or near-synchronous meetings. VE is educational since it is integrated into formal and/or non-formal educational programmes and activities to increase the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that promote pro-social behaviours. Participants are the main recipients and drivers of knowledge; they learn through dialogue during which they seek mutual understanding and construct knowledge, based on their own experiences (What Is Virtual Exchange?). One of the advantages of COIL / virtual exchange is that its implementation is unbureaucratic as there is no necessity to sign any agreements. While obtaining international and intercultural experience students acquire foreign language skills as well as digital competences. Another important point is that this international experience is available for non-mobile students (COIL – Collaborative Online International Learning / Virtual Exchange).

The reason for the humanities to be in the spotlight is, as emphasized by M. Epstein, that humanities are built around a paradox, which lies in the study of a person, that is, the one who conducts research. The individual is a major gap in the humanities because he / she is unable to fully understand himself / herself. The humanitarian aspect is observed in the processes of thinking, creation, communication, writing, interpersonal relations, where a person is the least defined and complete.

Conclusion

Time and events explicitly demonstrate that intercultural understanding and awareness cannot be gained automatically through contact between different groups/cultures. COIL / VE enables fostering mutual apprehension by exploring topics on identity, empathy, critical reflection, intercultural understanding. In this way participants are facilitated to get involved in constructive conversations

regardless of ontological and epistemological discrepancies. Humanitarianism can be cultivated through internationalization of tertiary education. It is internationalization that helps to raise a tertiary education institution's visibility and, correspondingly, to enable a student and a faculty member to become visible domestically and internationally. Visibility awakens the dimensions of compassion: receiving compassion, self-compassion, and extending compassion, making society compassionate. Compassion spreads from inner to outer world. Being relationship persons, i. e. people-oriented in academia, which is a small society, averts the rise of monsters who silently perform tasks without questioning. The social responsibility component of internationalization can finely be examined with the aid of the humanities through practices of virtual exchanges.

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QUALITY ASSURANCE OF E-LANGUAGE LEARNING: UKLO CASE

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Abstract

Over the past more than two years now, as global Covid-19 pandemic has ruled all the social activities including the higher education area and technology use notes immense increasing frequency, E-learning becomes the forefront of academia; the sine-qua-non.

The benefits from the technology for E-learning are undisputable. It ensures the continuity of the educational process under the unexpected conditions. But, at the very moment the continuation is established, the question of its quality arises. The technology or more specifically web-based learning provisions can both guarantee continuation and high quality educational process of disciplines closely related to computer science and even most of the social sciences. The situation is quite different for the natural sciences and humanities.

The main hypothesis of this paper is that E-learning is a reliable and effective process for developing students' knowledge. The research method used for this purpose is based on professor's observations and regular practice of note-keeping and of the students' feedback regarding the role of E – learning in formation of their professional profile. Apart from observations and professor' notes, a significant part in deriving scientifically based conclusions is the comparison of students' achievements, performances, results, views on the study processes during the “normal” teaching process and “pandemic” (E-learning) teaching process. The descriptive method is also applied since this problem involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data. Furthermore, two most common qualitative methods, participant observation and focus groups, are also used and case study, as qualitative approach is put in place. This paper focuses on the delivery of educational content in the frame of language study programmes in a reliable and efficient manner, when using internet based learning. The means of gaining a respected education in E-

language learning are going to be discussed along with some tools for quality assurance of E-learning, put in place in a virtual classroom, in the first cycle study programme English Language and Literature, at the Faculty of Education in Bitola, North Macedonia.

Keywords: *quality assurance, E-learning, study programme, web-based*

Introduction

Language learning has always been a complex and challenging task. During the past few decades foreign language learning has undergone a significant paradigm shift as a result of the experiences that have expanded the theoretical knowledge base on how students learn and acquire a foreign language. Grounded on the data obtained by the structural linguists, the quality and quantity of language and feedback used to be regarded as the major determinant of language learning success. According to this popular method from the past, the major figure in language learning was the instructor, while the students were relegated to practicing almost automatic response to each conversational situation. Over the years the process of language teaching and learning has changed and thus has experienced a numerous curricular innovations in response to the importance of providing students with opportunities to acquire and practice the foreign language in contextualized situations. Communicative language teaching, a term mostly associated with current discussion of method, emerged as a significant approach that found support in theory and application in many contexts and across different disciplines: linguistics, language teaching methodology and curriculum development. Central to this approach was the realization that linguistic competence does not achieve communicative competence and that language used in meaningful and authentic context is more readily acquired. This led to the introduction of interactive tasks focused on the cognitive and affective domains such as pair work, group work, cooperative learning settings, authentic materials as well as culturally integrated lesson content. In addition, there has been a call for modernization of the instructional and working principles supported by the use of information and computer technologies.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, all of the education institutions were largely applying the modern technology in the learning environments to make the educational process more approachable. The

use of ICT in everyday curriculum proved to be a necessity for effective language learning, with many research showing that the institutions which will not be able to meet the needs of knowledge-based societies will not survive the change in paradigm of education. Such use of computer technologies in language instruction provides a student-centered learning environment which helps the students gain knowledge in easier manner, while leaving the teacher with numerous possibilities of incorporating appropriate teaching methods and techniques. Thus the process of E-learning, as a process of utilizing electronic technologies to access educational curriculum outside of a traditional classroom, has become the most predominant model of instruction.

Research aim and methodology

The aim of this paper is to produce arguments in favor of the hypothesis that E-learning is a reliable and effective process for developing students' knowledge. To put it more precisely, this study proposes that the process of E-learning in EFL studies at tertiary level has significant educational value as it enables the students to develop the basic language skills such as: listening, reading, writing and speaking. The attempt to verify the above-mentioned hypothesis is based on a case study conducted at the English Department of the Faculty of Education at the University "St. Kliment Ohridski"- Bitola. Along the path, other more specific and narrow beliefs, elaborated in the conclusion have been also proven right.

The research method used for this purpose is mainly based on professor's observations and regular practice of note-keeping of the versatile online – based activities applied in teaching English language and literature and more importantly of the students' feedback regarding the role of E – learning in formation of their professional profile. Apart from observations and professor' notes, a significant part in deriving scientifically based conclusions is the comparison of students' achievements, performances, results, views on the study processes during the "normal" teaching process and "pandemic" (E-learning) teaching process.

Since this problem involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions or experiences, the descriptive method, obtaining information on what, when, where and how, is

applied accompanied with the why component. Furthermore, two of the three most common qualitative methods, participant observation and focus groups, are used and case study, as qualitative approach is put in place.

Theoretical background

Defining E-learning is not an easy endeavor. For the most part, the concept of E-learning is a flexible term used to describe a means of teaching through technology. This educational process incorporates self-motivation, communication, efficiency and technology. Distance is eliminated since the content of E-learning is designed with media which can be accessed from properly equipped computers and Internet accessible technology. Technology used to implement instruction is not limited only to web-based materials. E-learning can be easily realized by utilizing any form of technology that sustains information media. Technology is the most variable element in E-learning. The more advanced the technology is, the more options there are to further E-learning. As speed increases and devices become smaller and more mobile, teaching will become more flexible and increase the popularity of E-learning. (Comerchero, 2006)

Del Vecchio and Loughney (2006) go further in defining the concept of E-learning by presenting its advantages and disadvantages. E-learning is highly beneficial to education and applies to all types of students. It is also more cost effective than traditional learning because it is affordable, saves time and produces measurable results. One of the most valuable benefits of E-learning is flexibility. It has the advantage of taking class anytime anywhere and makes the education is more available and affordable. E-learning also has measurable assessments which can be created so that both the professors and the students will know what the students have learned, when they have completed courses and how they have performed. Students prefer E-learning because it accommodates different types of learning styles. They have the advantage of learning at their own pace. E-learning allows students to select learning materials that meet their level of knowledge, interest and what they need to know to perform more effectively.

One disadvantage of E-learning is that each and every student needs to have computer skills with programs such as word processing, Internet browsers and e-mail. Without these basic skills and software the

student would not be able to succeed in E-learning. E-learning also requires just as much time for attending class and completing the assignments as any traditional classroom activity. This implies that the students should be motivated and responsible for working on their own. Sometimes they even may feel isolated from the professor, so they need to have self-discipline to work independently without professor's assistance and guidance. According to Del Vecchio and Loughney(2006) when the professor and the students are not meeting face-to-face it is sometimes possible to misinterpret what was said and what was meant.

E-learning in teaching English language and literature

The rapid evolution of technology has greatly changed every aspect of life including language and literature teaching, language learning, and language use. According to some theoretical research E-learning plays an important role of a motivator which is helpful for teachers and students in the classroom. For example Licorish et al. (2017) agree that E-learning also has a positive impact on students' learning as it makes them more engaged in the course material which results in retaining more information. Fitriah (2018) also supports the statement that E-learning promotes the improvement of the memorizing concepts and better performance in terms of results. According to this, the teachers should always be aware and open to experimenting with new skills as well as be creative with the teaching and English in and out of the classroom. They should always be occupied with proper knowledge and readiness to improvise the subject matter according to every student's ability and capacity based on E-learning as revealed by Hardan (2013). This will help students to be more self-confident and expressive when speaking a foreign language, and will also eliminate the fear of making mistakes as they will know the effectiveness of the skills by incorporating them in their daily lives. It is a significant aspect of education because effective teaching motivates teachers as well as aids students in learning and increasing academic performance.

Past studies proposed that E-learning could be measured by the influence of teachers on students' achievement. However, measuring a teacher's quality is a complex process as it involves teaching preparation and assurance, experience and information, pedagogical skills, as well as system and skills (Waxman et. al., 2003). Research on

the use of E-learning tools in the classroom has shown that ICT makes a supportive and encouraging environment for the students to increase their basic skills in terms of quality and quantity. Overall, most of the students were involved during the lesson and used E-learning devices such as their computers and mobile phones which promote their motivation towards learning English. Licorish et al., (2017) agree stating that students will be able to learn better and independently as they are being motivated continuously throughout the teaching process. In this respect E-learning has undeniably helped improve students' cognitive skills as it increases participation in classroom activities. The course of the E-learning process involved versatile classroom activities but for the purpose of our study we will mention the most frequent ones easily adapted for online classes.

One of the classroom activities applied in classes was the so called close reading of excerpts of literary works students were previously introduced with. The close reading as a learning technique asks the students to conduct a detailed analysis or interpretation of a small piece of text and it is effective in getting students to move away from the general and engage more with specific details. This technique was easily applied before the pandemic and the students did not show any inconvenience while taking it online as well. Another activity that was easily adapted and used in favour of developing students' communicative skills was the debate. Usually divided in two breakout groups the students needed to take a position on a specific issue and provide examples to support their position. The professor wrote the statements of each group on the virtual whiteboard and it was used as a starting point for discussion. The third activity that was easily adapted for the online classes was the compare and contrast activity. The students were asked to focus on specific chapters from the books and make connections between ideas that can be found in the books and other articles, materials and even videos they found related to the same issue. This way they compared their ideas in small groups and learned from another's perspectives. One of the activities that students enjoyed while taking the online classes was writing short passages imitating the writing style of a famous author. The professor provided an excerpt from a well-known story and the students needed some time to read it and rewrite it in another style. They used their own style while rewriting the stories and shared the stories among them.

Taking into consideration the regular practice of professor's note-keeping and the final results of the students' exams, most of the techniques used and adapted for online classes proved to work in direction of improving the students' engagement in classes and boosting their self-confidence while taking part in the E-learning process. The results of our particular study showed that the students, which are subject to this study, majoring English and completing their education as ESL teachers, become more comfortable in picking up various strategies during classes such as: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategy to accomplish their goals with the help of E-learning. The observation of students and the comparison of their attitude toward classroom (premises or virtual) activities showed that they are more self-reliant when applying ICT in the study process. The digital era is happening now and students are embracing it. They are crafty in using various technological benefits – gadgets, software, computer tips and tricks, even typing skills. Students feel confident and, in some cases, even superior to their teachers when it comes to computer technology and its usage. This is very important, especially for students studying English language and preparing to become teachers in order to gain skills and develop innovative teaching methods and techniques whether the study process is realized in premises or via technology. Still, the teacher's control mechanism cannot be disregarded, but the opposite.

The study has also provided general information on forecasters on teacher quality and effectiveness such as: reasoning ability, character attributes, and educational background based on E-learning. We can also mention that E-learning process emphasized the importance of teachers' dedication and motivation towards the teaching process if they want to see improvement in the students' academic performance. It also stressed the importance of restructuring of the education methods and approaches to increase the teaching effectiveness and English language teacher's motivation. It is hard to find a comprehensive and practical quality assurance framework that covers higher-education inputs, processes and outputs (Inglis, 2005) and this reshaped reality makes this even harder, since the quality standards that are set and generally accepted in a traditional face-to-face study process cannot be fully implemented in the virtual reality or needs altering.

This study has also shown that both the students as well as the professor are growing together and create different models of strategies, adjusting them to the new reality, in order for the learning outcomes to meet the quality criteria. These quality criteria are assessing the same aspects of students' performance, but incorporate elements not usual for the traditional assessment; for example – possibility of automatically spelling correction, voice interferences, inability for witnessing body language and so on; that are more than relevant and important parts in the process of final evaluation.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to produce arguments in favor of the claim that E-learning is a reliable and effective process for developing students' knowledge. To put it more precisely, this study proposed the idea that the process of E-learning in EFL studies at tertiary level has significant educational value as it enables the students to develop the basic language skills such as: listening, reading, writing and speaking. The attempt to verify the above-mentioned claim was based on a case study conducted with first cycle students at the English Department of the Faculty of Education at "St. Kliment Ohridski" University, Bitola. It was mainly based on professors' observations, and their regular practice of note-keeping referring to the period before and after the pandemic.

Based on the findings, this study proved the common belief that the educational sphere has been highly influenced by the global difficult situation (Covid-19 pandemic) and therefore reshaped, either in its form or contextually, by the intensive usage of the rapidly changing computer technology. This paper focuses on the contextual restructuring and at the same time quality assurance of the teaching process in the E-language learning.

The observations provided sufficient evidence that E-language learning offers student-centered learning environment that is in favour of teaching process quality assurance, but on the other hand the quality assurance of the student-centered E-language environment is possible only if students and teachers are adequately equipped and with advanced skills in using computer technology, apart from other presumed capacities, that are considered fulfilled and normal for face-to-face study process. Additionally, assessment procedures, during E-

language learning face obstacles more frequently than during traditional study process. This is more evident when it comes to assessing students' writing skills, having in mind the automatic correction tools that each gadget is capable of. Assessing students' speaking and listening skills, on the other hand, can easily become less favourable for students, since very often the technology is prone to various voice interferences (microphone or headphones noises and/or complete dysfunction).

Overall, E-language learning has proved to be the most suitable way for knowledge transfer in unexpected situations that make traditional face-to-face study process impossible. Still, the E-language learning should be used only in necessary situations, with precaution and minimum requirements fulfilled, in terms of available equipment and adequate skills needed for proper usage of it. In every other case, the traditional study process should not be replaced by the E-language learning if we want to advance the quality of language learning process.

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CHALLENGES OF ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS ONLINE ASSESSMENT - A CASE STUDY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF SHKODER

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Abstract

With the sudden outbreak of the pandemic, online teaching and learning proved to be the only solution. However, this unplanned transition to online mode caught most of us unprepared and brought up quite a few challenges mainly due to lack of experience. This study explores the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education as well as its implications for the future, with a special focus on online assessment as an important feature of student motivation and learning. Differently from online teaching and learning, research in the area of online assessment is scarce. Although a few online assessment systems had already been used in language certification and distance-learning programs, such educational tools became part of all teachers' and students' everyday practice in all countries and at all levels of education only after the closure by Covid 19. The purpose of our study was to analyse higher education students' attitude towards the use of online assessment system on the Microsoft Teams platform during 2020-21, its impact on learning, and students' feedback on these results. Participants of our study were the students of the Department of English, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Shkodra. A Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect the data. The study found that overall, the students' attitude towards online teaching and learning was positive. It enabled us to identify problems of online assessment and its impact on student learning, as well as draw conclusions about the usefulness of online assessment and provide recommendations for future use.

Keywords: *Covid-19, online assessment, teaching/learning, attitudes, higher-education*

Introduction

In the last few years, technology has increasingly become part of the educational system. However, the sudden outbreak of Covid-19 brought about an urgent transition to online teaching and learning, and the need to adopt online assessment practices for which most universities were not prepared. The shift was a quite challenge for the University of Shkodra due to lack of previous experience. Despite the advancements that have taken place in technology over the past few years, their integration in the education sector in Albania has been slow. The teaching approaches most often continue to be traditional and do not respond to the current technological developments.

As assessment is a very important and delicate component in any level of education, additional caution is needed when using going digital, but in the case of the pandemic, the abrupt shift to online teaching did not allow for enough time to plan and evaluate the impact it would have. Thus, this study aims at analysing such an impact based on students' perceptions. In addition, it explores the implications of online teaching for future use with a focus on the benefits that the integration of new technology in education would have on assessment. The findings suggest areas of improvement in online assessment systems and imply the need for a future coexistence of online and face-to-face learning and assessment. Given the sparse research in the area, the findings from this study can also be extended to higher educational institutions in the country.

A short historical overview of online learning

Distance, online, web-based, internet-based, virtual or e-learning are common terms used to refer to learning requiring a digital device and internet supply. These terms have their subtle differences, that relate to distance between the instructor and the student, learning being synchronous or asynchronous, etc.; however, the perspective employed in our paper emphasises their similarities rather than differences, i.e., remote location, digital device, online delivery of lessons, synchronous and/or asynchronous communication. Thus, online learning is used as

an umbrella term and the other terms will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

Distance/ E-learning, i.e., “a learning experience in using different devices such as mobile phones, laptops, etc. with internet access” (Dhawan, 2020) was born in response to technological advancement and the need to open new educational paths. Even though the pandemic made the online shift indispensable for everyone involved in the education sector, online courses are not a new phenomenon. In the United States, they have been offered on a regular basis for over a decade as a way of making education more accessible to everyone. In Europe, too, Massive Online Open Course, better known as MOOC, has been in use for quite a few years now, although not everywhere (Allen & Seaman, 2008).

Among the benefits of e-learning pointed out by scholars seem to be its provision of more diversity and increased opportunities and flexibility for students who work or those who prefer a more relaxed pace. According to Dhawan (2020), a main advantage of e-learning is that it can make the educational process become more student-centred. In addition, students have access to learning materials anytime and anywhere, they can schedule their time, increase their learning potential, and develop new skills for life-long learning (p. 7). Mahyoob (2020) also highlights access to lectures at any time among the advantages of online learning and adds global access to education, saved time and money, and recording as other benefits (p. 352).

Online teaching and learning during the pandemic: Experiences from other countries

Several studies (Mahyoob, 2020; Rajab, Gazal, & Alkattan, 2020; Alanezi & Al Azwani, 2020; Melvina et al., 2020; etc.) analysed the impact of the pandemic on education. In most of the cases, the results revealed that despite challenges, the overall impact of Covid-19 on online education was positive. The results tended to be negative in underdeveloped countries like Pakistan (Melvina et al., 2020, p. 351).

Among the main challenges, network problems and lack of high-quality devices seem to be the two main technical problems encountered (Mahyoob, 2020, p. 353). Other studies (mentioned above) pointed out lack of online education experience, anxiety and stress related to the pandemic, and assessment among the challenges.

Assessment

“The purpose of assessment is not to gather data and return “results,” but to illuminate ways to strengthen the curriculum, instruction, and student learning” (Pearsons, 2006).

Although a few online assessment systems had already been used in language certification and distance-learning programs, such educational tools became part of all teachers’ and students’ everyday practice in all countries and at all levels of education only after the closure due to Covid-19.

A number of studies (Özden et al., 2004; Kibble, 2007; Donnelly, 2014; Baleni, 2015) have explored students’ perceptions of online assessment. According to them, overall, students hold a positive attitude towards online assessment. The main reasons are usually related to the easiness of online tests and the fact that multiple choices facilitate memory and the thinking process (Donnelly, 2014) as well as immediate feedback (Özden et al., 2004; Kibble, 2007; Baleni, 2015). Baleni (2015) also mentions the convenience of taking online tests anywhere as an advantage of online assessment.

Macdonald (2004) suggests that online assessment can play several roles, of which, the two most important are: to stimulate the learning process, and to help in skills development. What students seem to particularly like is when multimedia such as videos are incorporated in the exam, as they are more engaging than just text, which in turn positively affects results. This is especially true of visual and auditory learners. Another advantage of online assessment seems to be related with the environment. A classroom is not always the most comfortable place to take an exam. This is especially the case of students with special needs who may find it easier and more convenient to take an exam and be assessed online. An example of this is speech-to-text as a great tool to be used by people who have difficulties in writing. Other advantages related to online assessment include the use of a wide range of options to assess students and marking of large student groups. Online assessment methods have also positively affected teaching due to their flexibility (Timmis, et al., 2015; Pauli and Ferrell, 2020).

The drawbacks were related to two main reasons: cheating (Arnold, 2016), and the fact that online assessment does not allow

students to fully reveal their level of knowledge (Donnelly, 2014). The tight time limit can also be stressful for some students. In addition, it can disadvantage students with poor internet access or a busy home life. Finally, students may also be unfamiliar with online assessment, and need training.

During the pandemic, assessment was one of the hardest aspects to deal with online. Even though most professors lowered their expectations and pressure, assessment had to be made some way to match the learning objectives. Transparency and trustworthiness were sometimes hard criteria to meet as students could easily access sources during an online exam. Similarly, there were also concerns about plagiarism in the case of home assignments. As prevention of cheating, which sometimes became a real issue, oral exams, discussions, and presentations offered a better option of online assessment. Still, accessibility was not to be taken for granted as not all the students had a good connection and/or the necessary devices.

The case study

The online platform

After trying several platforms at the initial stage of the outbreak (Moodle, Zoom, Google Classroom and even email and WhatsApp), it was finally decided that Microsoft Teams was to be used at university level. That meant that everything was online from lectures to ‘classroom’ exercises, home assignments, projects, presentations, essays, midterm tests, or any other forms of assessment.

Methodology and sample

The study was carried out at the Department of English, Luigj Gurakuqi University of Shkodra.

A Likert scale questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions was used. Questions focused on: students’ previous experiences with online learning, their attitude towards visual aspects of the platform (configuration, background, design), ease of use, the impact of the online system on the learning process, and more specifically, their evaluation of online assessment.

The Clean Score Project was involved to assist with the data collection and analysis. 60 BA and MA students of the English Department answered questions about their use of the Microsoft Teams

platform concerning online learning in general, and more specifically, the advantages and disadvantages of online assessment and its impact on learning, as well as suggestions on improving online assessment in the future.

Results and discussion

One of the sections of the questionnaire relates to the students' opinions towards online assessment and the table below summarises the findings.

| <i>Students' Opinions About Online Assessment</i> | | Strongly agree | Agree | Average | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|--|-----------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | Online assessment system provides immediate feedback | 31% | 38% | 24% | 0% | 7% |
| 2. | Less exciting | 10% | 45% | 31% | 14% | 0% |
| 3- | Better than paper-pencil test or assignment forms | 14% | 13% | 28% | 21% | 24% |
| 4. | Consistent with the teaching style | 10% | 52% | 21% | 14% | 3% |
| 5. | Faster than paper-pencil tests or assignments | 28% | 42% | 3% | 17% | 10% |
| 6. | Contemporary | 31% | 34% | 28% | 0% | 7% |
| 7. | More systematic | 14% | 45% | 24% | 7% | 10% |
| 8. | Can be applied to other courses in the future | 17% | 41% | 21% | 14% | 7% |

82% of the responses regarding online learning and assessment are positive. Students think the online (assignment) system is easy to use and it facilitates learning. They appreciate immediate feedback, the fact that it is faster than pen and paper as well as accurate, fair, and transparent. For instance, one of the students' responses to the question "Does the online assessment system have positive effect on facilitation of learning?" was "Yes, because the student has the chance to see errors made in record time". Another aspect students seem to have enjoyed is related with the convenience of doing assignments and taking tests from the comfort of their home. They also like the fact that assignments are timed and there are reminders concerning deadlines. Finally, students consider the diversity of online assessment forms (group work, projects, or quizzes) an additional advantage.

Among the difficulties encountered, students point out technical problems mainly related to electricity and the internet connection and technological incompetence of both students and teachers. They also mention fatigue resulting from online reading, and insufficient time during some exams, ease of cheating, and the wrong formulation of certain exam questions as other problems related to online assessment. These findings are in line with those of the researchers mentioned in the literature review.

The results can be used in decision and policy making with regard to online assessment in the digital era (present and future) in higher education and/or education in general. It is important to consider students' views concerning changes in educational techniques so that the transition or integration of technology is smooth and successful.

Conclusions and recommendations

At a time when technology has become an integral aspect of any walk of life, its increased use in education including assessment as a crucial part of it has become a must. However, despite the advancements that have taken place in technology over the past few years, their integration in the education sector in Albania has been slow. The teaching approaches most often continue to be traditional and do not respond to the current technological developments.

While we must acknowledge the negative effects of the pandemic, we must also consider the opportunities it created especially in the higher education. Covid-19 somehow paved the path to a quicker

application of technology thanks to the inevitable shift to e-learning. It proved that despite challenges, education plays an avantgarde role. It emerged as a potential sector for the integration of new tools which can improve the way we teach and learn. As such, blended learning may be the future type of learning, initiated by the pandemic.

This experience of online teaching and learning made us aware of several benefits related to online platforms and the need to use certain aspects as an extension to our traditional classroom. In the digital world we live in, considering new opportunities is becoming a must and online assessment may be an innovative tool to use in evaluating 21st century learning. Embracing the possibilities afforded by technology would help students prepare for the present and future. The students' positive attitudes towards online assessment are an indication that when used effectively it can be a valuable tool in evaluating learning. It also provides more diversity and flexibility.

However, even though the students' attitude towards online learning and assessment is positive, there is still room for improvement. First and foremost, it is crucial to plan training sessions for ITs, academic staff and students on the use of the online platform. Next, the platform should be improved based on the needs of students and professors, for a more successful learning process which promotes learning through a fair, fast, contemporary but also attractive assessment. For example, based on students' feedback, the Microsoft Teams assignment section could be simplified in certain aspects. Finally, technological tools should be provided for students through projects and all-inclusive higher education strategies.

The impact of technology on the education sector is undoubtedly beneficial. Teaching and assessing students are two aspects which should not be limited within the walls of a classroom, but they can be performed anytime, anywhere with the help of technology. This study modestly contributed to providing evidence about students' attitudes towards online assessment that can inform further reflection on its impact on learning and decision-making about assessment methods to be used in the future. The researchers believe that this can help identify the advantages and disadvantages in the possible use of online assessment following the pandemic.

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**LECTURERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS ONLINE
ASSESSMENT:
THE CASE OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, LUIGJ
GURAKUQI UNIVERSITY OF SHKODER**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the position of the lecturers of the Department of English, Faculty of Foreign Languages, “Luigj Gurakuqi” University, on the online assessment conducted during the 2 years of online teaching, due to COVID-19.

A questionnaire was used to collect the opinions of the academic staff, full time and part time, on their experience during the pandemic period. The collected data focused on several issues, such as the attitude of the academic staff towards online assessment, the effectiveness of online system, the advantages and disadvantages of online assessment as well as recommendations. The lecturers are of the idea that the feedback students receive online helps them to reflect on their learning merits. However, we can conclude that the online assessment system does not necessarily help students to learn in a course, compared to face to face learning. Among the advantages, they single out the immediate feedback for the students, which is considered much faster than the paper-based test in the auditorium. A disadvantage is that the online tests or assignments are less effective, in terms of learning along with knowledge control than the paper-based in the auditorium.

A qualitative and quantitative approach was adopted to identify the lecturers' attitude towards online assessment.

Key Words: *Online assessment, teaching, lecturers, students, online system, data*

1.1 Introduction

The educational system of the whole world has been shaken by COVID-19 outbreak. A disease considered contagious, by experts of the field, had it start in the city of Wuhan, China (Remuzzi and Remuzzi, 2019). The impact on the Albanian and world teaching and learning process exposed many challenges. The academic institutions in the beginning of March 2020 were forced to shut down to prevent the further spread of the disease. Therefore, a radical transformation in education brought about online learning.

In the middle of the situation with COVID-19, the Ministry of Education in Albania, March 2020, gave recommendations to the public and private universities in Albania to proceed with the 2019- 2020 academic year out of auditorium. One of the suggestions was to embrace virtual learning. As a result, different institutions opted for distinctive platforms of e-learning. Under these conditions, the lecturers had to change rapidly their teaching techniques to react to the new advancements, even though, the majority were not familiar with remote education. Teaching online is seen as the only way to transmit knowledge in pandemic times. (Basilaia and Kvavadze 2020).

Online teaching and learning poses essential contrasts recognized by lecturers and students. There have been identified many advantages related to online learning, some of them could be flexible schedule, saving time and money, and helping students to take more courses, adding to the advantages are the disadvantages, from the viewpoint of teachers and students (Malley, 1999; Mahyoob, 2020). The students, specifically, were faced with technical problems, lack of motivation, etc. as a result, online learning was dependent on various factors that included technological problems, method use, criteria of assessment etc. Furthermore, the challenges presented to students and teachers were different, but even similar. A lot of researchers pointed out these challenges by saying that accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, life-long learning, and policy are some of the arguments related to online learning (Dhawan 2020). This study was carried out to evaluate the teacher's attitude towards online assessment.

1.2 Literature Review

Online distance education is not a recent term, but it started to be introduced in the beginning of the 90s (Kentnor, 2015). The creation of the internet helped the spread of virtual environment. Nafrees et al., (2020) revealed that online learning is a concept that converts the traditional educational tactics into a new form that transforms in person or physical learning into a virtual approach of learning, where students or lecturers do not need to be available all the time, but the learning resources can be accessible at 24/7 in the form of video or audio or any other file formats. It is the COVID-19 situation that changed the whole pragmatic function of the first online teaching. Officially there were provided some guidelines to facilitate the communication between students and lecturers through tools to help the actors involved in the process. UNESCO in 2020 formally stated that “it tends to have a wide reach, a strong user-base and evidence of impact”.

The new scenario changed the traditional interaction between students and lecturers. Furthermore, online learning puts into question some issues; among them: learning assessment, teaching and learning goals, curriculum change. The immediate problem in this pandemic was the quality of teaching, seen from the perspective of the lecturers. Zhong (2020) was of the idea that teachers and students should be assisted by their institutions to seek their normal classroom teaching.

In order to highlight the attitude of educators in this mode of teaching, everyone should recall the first impressions, like a reminiscence. Let it be students or lecturers, one needs information and communication to progress. That was a period when teaching and learning, information and communication were taken over by broadband internet connection, online teaching platforms, stress and anxiety. Assistance, in the form of logistics, through devices or internet should be provided for online lecturing (Khanom et al., 2021). Murday et al, (2008) admits that online tutoring is possible through the internet providing a lesser cost. As a result, during the pandemic, online learning tutoring helped a lot the lecturers and students in their common purpose that is the integration in the new learning system. It is needed a disciplinary variation to support this learning system. Souleless et.al (2020) are of the opinion that online learning should not be considered as an alternative to face to face learning in the auditorium. The reaction of the lecturers is different. In their research.

Fauzi and Sastra Khasuma (2020) presented many problems such as implementing virtual teaching, availability of facilities, planning and evaluation of learning.

1.3 Methodology

Study design

This study is designed as a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research. It was possible to identify viewpoint, attitudes through the qualitative research. Meanwhile, the quantitative revealed information on the online assessment. A case study is used to carry out this research study. The sample design used in the selection of the sample is purposive because the lecturers provided the necessary information for the study. The data from the analysis was used to group the issues and present them in a paper to explain the lecturers' attitude towards online learning amid COVID-19 outbreak.

Participants

The survey method was employed for investigating lecturers' perspective towards online assessment during COVID-19 outbreak. Respondents who were willing to participate in the survey consisted of lecturers of the Department of English, Faculty of Foreign Languages, "Luigi Gurakuqi" University. 25 full time and part time lecturers were part of the survey. Data were collected in the second semester of the Academic Year 2020-2021.

Instruments

The research instruments used to collect data included an online questionnaire and interview. The research tools were the lecturers' questionnaires towards online assessment amid COVID-19 outbreak. Furthermore, the online questionnaire was made using Teams platform and consists of close-ended questions. The interview was structured. The questions in the interview and questionnaire were adjusted to suit the lecturers' viewpoints and perspectives. The questionnaire was structured according to the Likert scale. The choices ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree so the survey maker can get a holistic view of the people's opinions. A mid-point with Neither Agree/Neither Disagree was for those who are neutral on the subject matter.

1.4 Discussion

The Attitude of the Lecturers towards Online Assessment

In reference to the answers gathered from the questionnaire, the following conclusions can be reached regarding the attitude of the lecturers of the Department of English Language on the online assessment. Generally, teachers retain a positive attitude towards the use of the online site, both for entering the main page and for its general use. More specifically, the use of the site is considered easy and convenient by 95% of the interviewees. A versatility is expressed for ease of access to the online site. The lecturers affirm a facility in using the assignment page and its configuration clarity. The percentage of agreement here reaches a figure of 90 per cent.

Moreover, the assignments page allows you to check the student's past results. The lecturers approach a positive attitude towards this option, where 35% of them reinforce the opinion that they agree with the ease of using this option, 45% of them support such opinion and the rest, i.e., 20%, do not find this option easy. The same percentage is also conferred for the ease and clarity of use of the online assignment results and the statistical assessment page. On the grounds of these results, it can be noticed that the approach of the lecturers towards the operation of the site is more than positive.

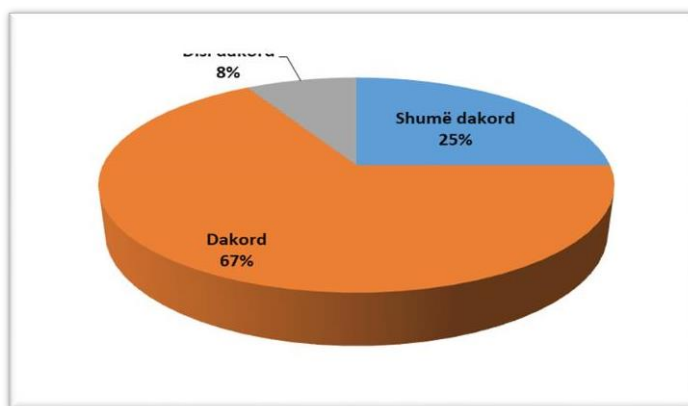


Figure 1. The use of the site is easy and convenient

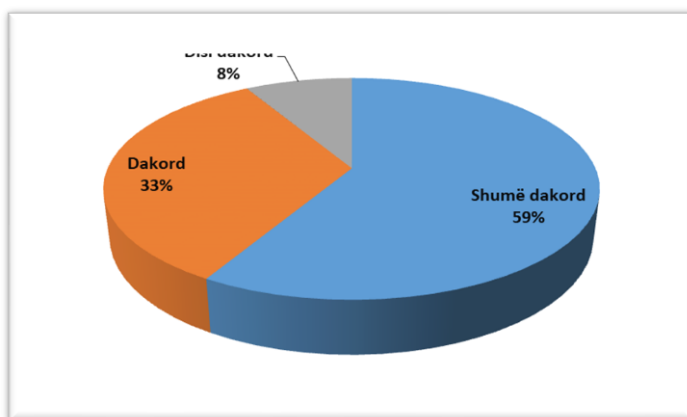


Figure 2. Ease of access to the online site

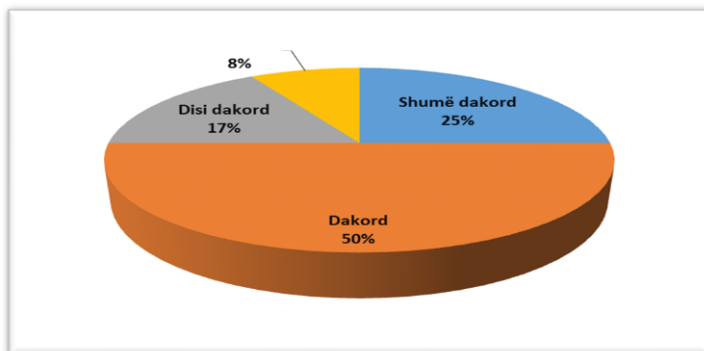


Figure 3. The lecturers affirm a facility in using the assignment page and its configuration clarity

The Online System's Effectiveness and Validity

Another important issue to be discussed is the use of the online student assessment system and its impact on the learning process. What emerges is that most of the lecturers agree on the fact that the students' evaluation system is fair. 95% of them share this opinion. However, at the same time, 90% are of the opinion that students find it easy to cheat in a test or course assignment. 60% of the lecturers are of the opinion that the feedback students receive online helps them reflect on their learning merits. The online system provides students with the opportunity to track their past assessment results, allowing them to

conceive their progress. More than half of the lecturers support this opinion.

The online site helps students to grasp their success or failure in a given course. Furthermore, 60% of lecturers share the concept that online assessment helps students to understand whether they are successful or not, and half of them have the impression that this site motivates them to improve their academic achievement. However, based on the responses given by the lecturers, it can be concluded that the online evaluation system does not necessarily help students learn in a course, compared to classroom teaching. This means that the classroom teaching prevails over the online system in terms of the students' learning achievements. For tests and assignments, where the questions appear according to the one-by-one model, the teachers are of the opinion that this model is not fruitful for positive results. More than half of those who responded to this questionnaire have a negative attitude towards using this system in other courses in the future.

The Use of Online Assessment System

Based on the distribution of the percentages in the graph, it can be said that most of the lecturers declare that online assessment page is easy to use. The instructions and video tutorials provided have been an important help in using this system. Consequently, the majority of the lecturers answer that it is easy to have an online test or assignment with students, while a lower percentage, i.e. 60%, reply that it is easy to create and correct it at the same time. The somewhat agreeable answer of 40% may indicate that some of the teachers do not feel totally comfortable with this way of testing and assessment. Lecturers affirm that the students' assessments, during the course, are always accessible from their side.

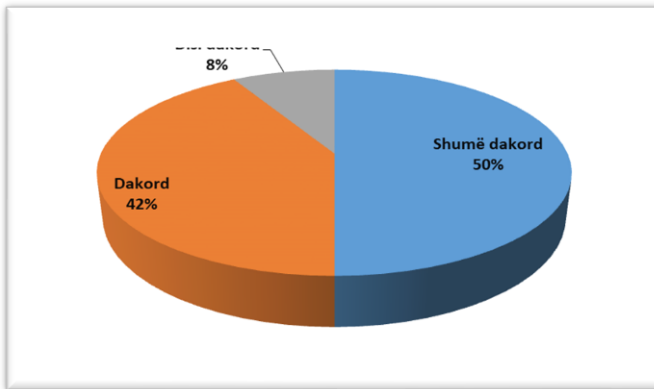


Figure 4. It is easy to use the online system

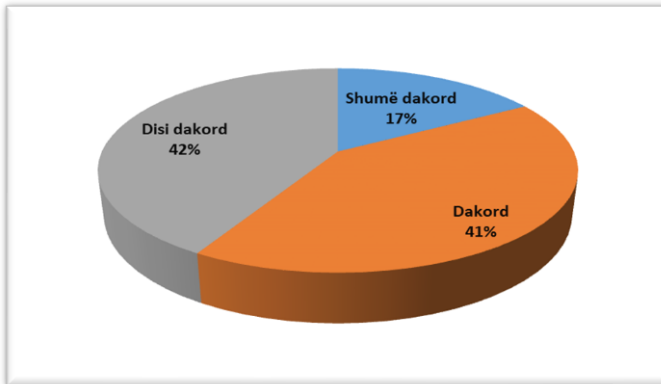


Figure 5. It is easy to create an online test/assignment

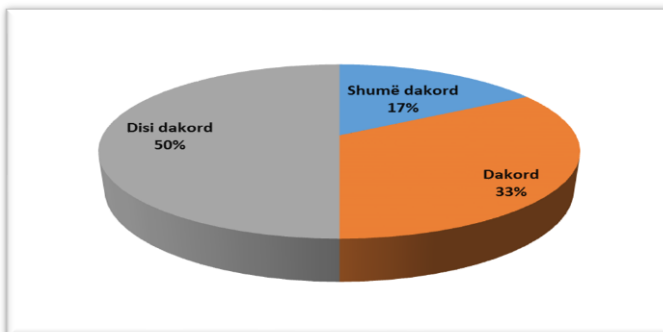


Figure 6. It is easy to correct an online test/assignment

Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Assessment

Among the advantages of using online assessment system, lecturers single out the immediate feedback for the students, which is considered much more efficient than the paper-based test in the auditorium. All at once, it is supposed to be a contemporary and systematic model, even attractive to the eye. Furthermore, it grabs the attention of the students.

Among the disadvantages it can be mentioned that the tests or online assignment are less productive in terms of learning and knowledge control, compared to paper based. Online teaching does not allow the students' interaction in groups during the lectures or seminars. Furthermore, technical problems appear because of the application, energy, or internet quality. It should be stressed that a good part of the students do not have a computer, but are forced to use other means of communication, such as the cell phone. This system is difficult to apply to some courses that have to do with language practice. Moreover, it does not eliminate the chances of cheating.

Some answers in the questionnaire show an ambivalent attitude of the lecturers towards the aspects of online assessments. The uncertainty has to do with the compliance or not to face to face teaching method in the auditorium and the application in the future with other courses. Lecturers generally state that the assessment system is technically applicable as well as necessary but hesitate to express its positive impact on the learning process. We can quote an answer: "it is not difficult to use, but it does give you the sensation of successfully achieving the aims in a course".

1.5 Conclusions

Lecturers' attitude towards online assessment is positive. We can come to some conclusions and suggestions about the general use of online assessment based on the answers given. Lecturers are of the idea that the process of creating tasks and tests should be easier. The page on which the teaching materials are uploaded needs improvement. Content leakage is a problem that puts the content and online exams integrity into question. As a result, there must be an online results service for every student to access personally to the exam results, not making the content of the test reachable by all, to prevent the distribution and unauthorized access to third party. It is required an improvement of multiple answer questions and the chat. The chat configuration

requires more tools. Online teaching and learning was a new experience for lecturers and students in COVID times. Distance learning showed to be troublesome for lecturers and students. For this reason, lectures' and students' training must be compulsory and part of the educational system to overcome the tasks it poses. They must have all the time at disposal to learn the new system.

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THE TURNING POINT: DIGITAL INNOVATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING – FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS AND LEARNERS’ PERSPECTIVES ON THE ACCESS AND USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

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Abstract

This survey follows the Action Plan of the Department of Foreign Languages at UNIKO to provide more evidence regarding digitization in education. The Action Plan presents a coherent narrative on the role of education and training in the digital age and takes an action-oriented approach. Through COVID-19, we have experienced an unprecedented challenge to our education and training systems, which led to a sudden and large-scale switch to digital education modes including online learning and teaching. However, most educators, learners and parents were not necessarily prepared to harness online learning nor able to deal with its limitations. Moreover, in some cases, the resources and infrastructure were simply not available. Through this survey we intend to tackle at least three issues while teaching and learning foreign languages:

- 1. Digital capacity**
- 2. Digital competences for the 21st century**
- 3. Digital ecosystem of education content, tools and platforms**

By surveying head teachers, teachers, students and other stakeholders from the region of Korça, this survey provides detailed information related to access, use and attitudes towards the use of technology in teaching and learning foreign languages. The overall objective is to inform foreign language teachers and other stakeholders about the work of the Department

of Foreign Languages at UNIKO in order to allow them to provide feedback and to participate effectively in future training activities.

Key Words: *digital education, foreign languages, digital platforms, training activities*

Introduction

The assessment of technological possibilities to support language learning has become an essential demand nowadays especially with the lockdown of 2020. As our growing technological culture leads us toward a utopian vision of a 'network society' (Castells 1996, cited in Hawisher and Selfe 2000: 278) with English as the lingua franca of the internet, the social dimension of electronic exchanges between learners promises to 'foster the building of a learning community' (Arnold and Ducate 2006: 44) thereby liberating the language learner from the constraints of the classroom. If institutions are to aspire to and invest in the dream of normalizing technology (Warschauer 1996), there needs to be a broader understanding about issues surrounding the effective appropriation of technology in EFL teaching. There exists a gap between the technological expertise of the teacher and the technologically confident student, and teachers and learners straddle a digital divide in technological proficiency, which in turn upsets the familiar classroom-learning environment. The diversity of student, teacher and institutional technological understanding raises questions about the disparity that exists between the values and expectations each group places on technology.

The present study was conducted in Korça region where the integration of computers into teaching is highly encouraged by the authority at all levels of education especially during and after the pandemics. The lockdown period found the pre-university language teachers unprepared to switch to distance and blended teaching and learning. Teachers are sent for training and facilities are provided to allow for such an integration to take place. Yet the level of teacher commitment is still low. Among the reasons mentioned is the lack of facilities available at the institution concerned. A survey on Albanian teachers' perceived challenges of blended learning shows that their readiness to use ICT is the most relevant obstacle. It was found that the available facilities were not enough to cater for the needs of the whole school. In addition not all of them were in proper working condition. Where

the Internet was concerned, broadband access was often not reliable and sometimes there was no connection at all. The number of computers that were allocated for staff use was also limited. Furthermore, some of the PCs and laptops were either out-dated or poorly maintained. Different schools experience different types of problems and it is interesting to see the challenges that they face in their attempt to use the computers for teaching.

Significance of the study

The findings from the study help to indicate the problems faced by language teachers and learners in integrating digital tools in the language teaching and learning process. Serious attention may need to be given to the stated problems in the move to improve computer integration initiatives in learning institutions, particularly where the problems are common to all. Policy makers and those in the position of authority can use the information as a starting point in the effort to encourage more teachers to adopt the technology.

Methodology

The survey was carried out in various secondary and high schools of Korça region, by conducting interviews with language teachers and students. A range of different topics was covered, including:

- ☐ Access to and use of digital technologies
- ☐ Digital activities and digital confidence of teachers and students
- ☐ ICT related teacher professional development
- ☐ Digital home environment of students
- ☐ Schools' digital policies, strategies and opinions

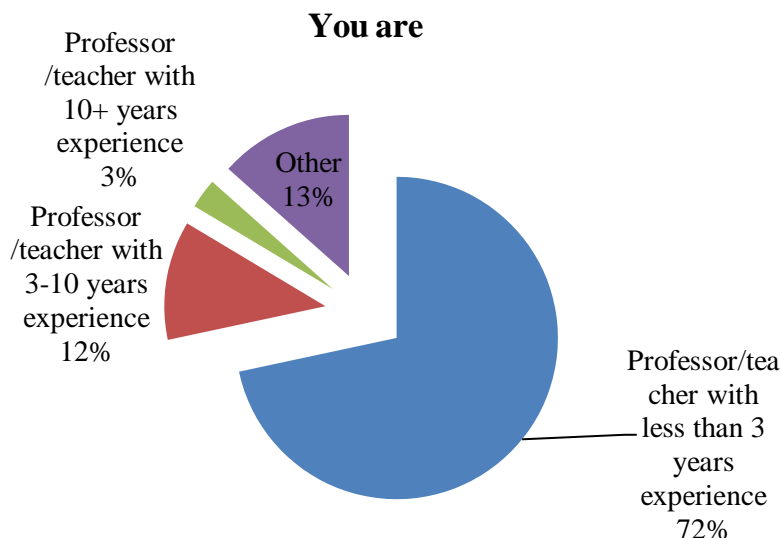
The results of the study will provide useful for the Department of Foreign Languages at UNIKO to mold different LLL training courses for the on-duty language teachers interested in integrating digital tools in their daily teaching practice.

The subjects interviewed were 31 on-duty language teachers and 50 students chosen randomly for study purposes.

Data analysis

The teachers interviewed were all coming from public institutions where English was taught as a secondary language.

With regard to teaching experience 77% of the interviewed teachers had more than 10 years experience in language teaching. The data collected is presented in the following graph.



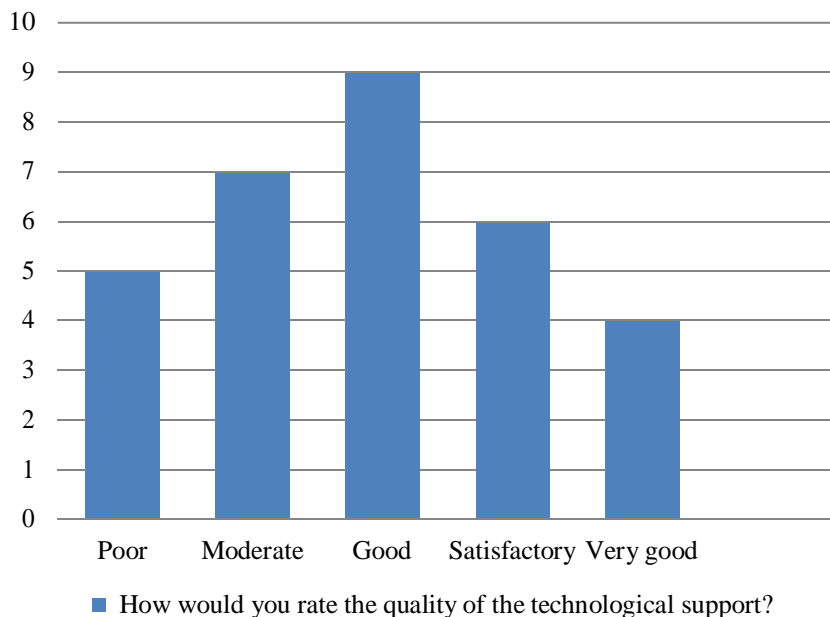
All the subjects were interested in integrating digital tools in their teaching and learning process.

Laptops and video projectors were the only digital instruments used in the classroom as reported by both target groups.

Lack of sufficient means to be effectively used in the classrooms is reported by 65% of the teachers and 75% of the students.

The quality of technological support provided by expert staff in schools is reported as average by the teachers (29%) and lower by students (75%).

How would you rate the quality of the technological support?

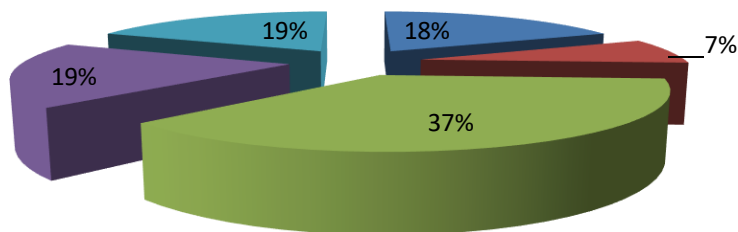


With regard to pedagogical use of digital tools the teachers (81%) reported their necessity to use them in the classrooms as being demanded by the school authorities which coincides with the response provided by the students (100%).

Teachers lack of knowledge and proper training in the Content Managements System tools is reflected in the following graph.

How would you rate the quality of the pedagogical ICT support?

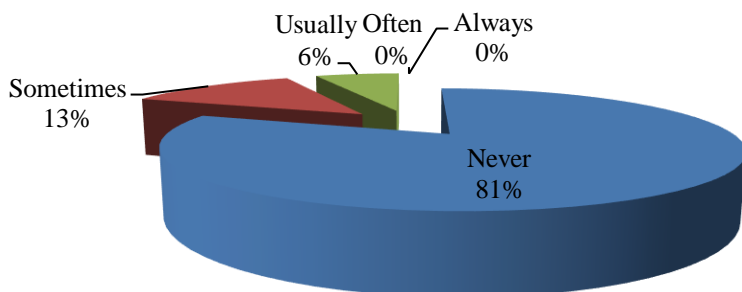
■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good ■ Satisfactory ■ Very good



Skype, email, whatsapp and messenger were the only means used by teachers to communicate with students. Other important means like woovo Tokbox or Cleverbot were not known by them.

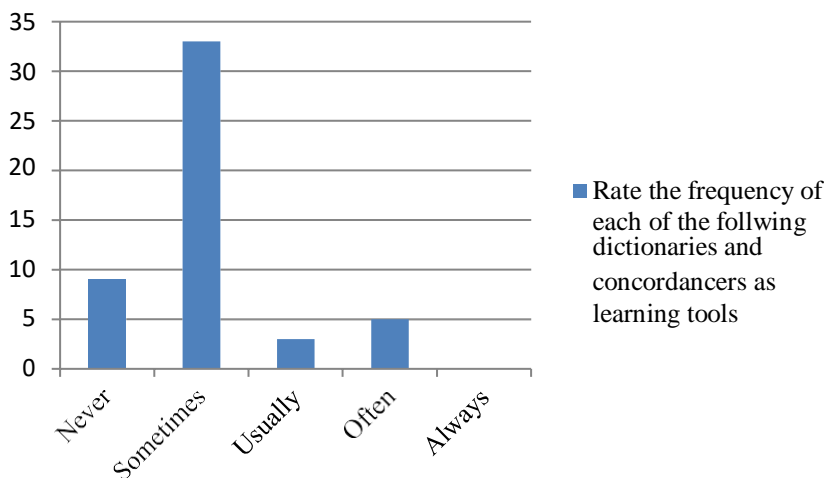
The same quality is seen in the rate of presentation and distribution means used by language teachers. The students were familiar with such digital tools but they claim that their use in the classroom is very limited.

Rate the frequency of each of the following Web Exercise Creation tools as teaching tools



Students reported that the use of different types of digital dictionaries is rarely used by their teachers. Only few of them especially those coming from the centre of the city knew and frequently used some of them.

Rate the frequency of each of the following dictionaries and concordancers as learning tools



Conclusion

The study shows that at both the instructors and eventually the learners were not really prepared to integrate the technology fully into teaching and learning process. Several barriers were identified with some teachers feeling worse than others. Given a situation that was not conducive for this to take place, such a result was not unexpected. The study also highlighted the need for looking into the problems that might discourage them from changing their teaching approach. There is a need for the authority to look closely into what are involved in the implementation to reduce the prevailing and the potential problems. This may help towards a greater rate of success in ICT integration in education

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