

TeachingEnglish

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# Language teaching experiences during Covid-19

By Sophia Mavridi



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**Sophia Mavridi**

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**Sophia Mavridi**



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# Foreword

If there's one thing that teachers do well, it's respond imaginatively to a crisis. The recent crisis in education due to the Covid-19 pandemic has seen educators challenged like never before. A wave of school closures took the world by surprise and led to a rush to alternate means of reaching students that have ranged from forming *WhatsApp* groups to share content and practice, to having to turn to radio and TV to provide educational support to students at home who are unable to attend school or university. A colleague of mine told me about a village in Peru where teachers were using their own money to make photocopies of worksheets that they then delivered to students' houses so learning could continue. Overall, I have been continually surprised by the resourcefulness of the educational community as a whole.

In contexts where good connectivity and access to devices are available, there has also been an explosion of remote teaching and online learning. Synchronous, "live online" lessons are particularly important in language teaching to enable the interactive practice that is necessary for students of a language to improve. The internet and technology such as videoconferencing software and learning management systems (LMS) have become the cornerstones of effective language teaching and learning.

Now this unusual situation has become usual, and although schools have reopened in many parts of the world, we have an obligation to learn what people have done well in order to plan our response to potential future crises so there is less disruption to learning. In many institutions, hybrid teaching and learning has been adopted, and teachers find themselves with the extra burden of teaching some students based at home while others sit in front of them in the classroom. The way we teach and learn is changing rapidly and it is happening in front of our eyes. This is the main reason why reports such as this are needed to be able to share our experiences, learn from each other and understand what changes are still required; to be able to use evidence-based experience to improve what we do.

In the pages that follow, you will read the results of a research project that took place at the height of the pandemic. These language teachers have shared their teaching experiences during the crisis and their answers tell us a lot about their realities and perceptions about remote teaching, the support they received when they were forced to switch to teaching online, their satisfaction with this mode of teaching, how engaged they felt their students were; and how well they were able to assess their students. What they have learned and what they feel is important for others to know.

Now more than ever, we find ourselves in an age of 'perpetual beta', or learning 'any time, anywhere'. We live in a time of great technological change. There are few people who haven't been touched by the digital revolution. The recent crisis has also shown us that internet access is now essential if we are to provide inclusivity in education. Educators need to be open to change. The terms 'school', 'college' and 'university' cannot be tied to the brick-and-mortar, and it is necessary to change the way we educate. In this report you will read about many changes. There are changes educators have had to make temporarily. There are changes that some still have to make or are in the middle of making. Then there are the changes that we should make if we are to ensure an effective response to any future crisis. Finally, there are the changes that we should make to move our educational system forward. This report will hopefully help educators to make informed decisions about the changes that are necessary to make.

**Graham Stanley**

English Programmes Lead, Americas

British Council

# Preface

The purpose of this research is to inform language professionals' understandings (teachers, trainers, managers and policy makers) about the perceived impact of remote teaching on language teaching experiences during Covid-19.

The breadth and depth of the data, in both their qualitative and quantitative perspectives, offer in-depth insights into language professionals' perceptions, experiences, challenges and opportunities as instruction shifted from face-to-face delivery to online. With a sample of 1102 respondents from 49 countries around the world, the findings show that language education adopted an Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) approach over the first phase of the pandemic characterised by trial and error, resilience, and innovation. Language educators seem to have made heroic efforts to adjust to online modalities, and in many cases they did so successfully; however, lack of preparation, training and ongoing support affected their teaching experiences negatively. This is not to say that ERT was not an effective approach during the pandemic. In fact, given the state of unpreparedness and rush that institutions and teachers found themselves in, ERT may have been the only realistic approach to provide continuity of language instruction. However, the literature (Moser et al., 2021; Rapanta et al., 2020) and the findings of this research overwhelmingly suggest that such an approach may not be pedagogically sustainable in the long run.

Because Covid-19 restrictions and limitations may persist over time, this research may lend itself to reflection-on-action at later phases of Covid-19 teaching, as well as in the post-pandemic era. In what ways are current language teaching experiences different from those described in this report? For example, the findings of this research showed a clear need for specialised support and professional development in online learning pedagogies. Has this support been provided by online learning professionals or are teachers and managers still left alone to improvise with pedagogical approaches and technologies? Are online materials and instructional design engaging for language students or do they still reflect face-to-face instructional approaches? Has online assessment been given more strategic attention or are teachers still unsure about whether they have met students' needs and curricular aims?

It is very likely that language educators will have made and continue to make remarkable progress as they develop familiarity and experience with remote teaching. However, if the challenges identified in this report have not been fully addressed, there may still be much more to be done in order to improve language teaching experiences. Unfortunately, research into later phases of ERT (see Ofsted, 2021) indicates that, despite the progress, there are still considerable issues in terms of the pedagogy, materials and assessment and suggests that further adaptation is required to enhance these components.

It is hoped that this research will directly benefit language educators in developing their approaches to online language teaching, not just as an emergency response but as a way of expanding the educational potential afforded by online learning environments. Many respondents thought that their experience with ERT can signal new opportunities for the integration of technology in language education. There remains, however, the danger that educational systems will simply carry on with improved versions of ERT rather than developing quality and robust online learning solutions. Such approaches are likely to increase the digital divide in language education, not just between those with access to bandwidth and devices, but also those with access to robust online pedagogies and infrastructure and those without. It is hoped that the present report will point the way in the right direction.

**Sophia Mavridi**  
June 2022

# Executive summary

With a sample of 1102 language educators from 49 countries worldwide, the findings of this research show that language teaching experiences during Covid-19 were characterised by trial and error, resilience, and innovation. Language educators seem to have made heroic efforts to adjust to online modalities, and in many cases they did so remarkably well; however, lack of adequate preparation, training and ongoing support affected their teaching experiences negatively.

## Major findings

Respondents appear to be relatively satisfied with their teaching experiences during Covid-19.

The overwhelming majority had never taught online before the pandemic and most of them did not receive substantial training from their institution when they moved online.

Almost half of the participants self-organised their own training via freely available webinars/resources and relied on peer support.

A significant majority lacked ongoing specialised support to improve their online teaching, often due to overwhelming demand for and shortage of relevant expertise. They were provided, however, with technical troubleshooting, non-interactive materials, and peer training (i.e. by colleagues or managers who were equally novice).

Respondents report issues with students' access to suitable technology, i.e. fast bandwidth and reliable devices, highlighting that this disrupted the teaching and learning experience. While this was widely recognised as a temporary issue (e.g. bandwidth infrastructure could not handle the sudden increase in demand for fast internet), for some teachers – especially from areas with low connectivity – the reasons reflected existing digital divides mostly associated with poverty and location.

Most educators report that student engagement has been affected negatively. They think that:

- synchronous online classes became more teacher-centred and students were distracted by their phones;
- the asynchronous materials were not engaging enough;

- the lack of physical proximity and embodiment can have a negative impact on teaching a language as it can affect authenticity, communication and bonding among class members. Because it is quite common for less experienced online educators to identify engagement with embodiment, this finding is extensively discussed in the *Summary and Discussion* of this report (Section 7).

Assessment (both formative and summative) seems to be posing significant challenges for more than half of the respondents, who:

- fear that search engines and translation software can give a false impression of students' language learning;
- lack assessment guidelines, criteria and standardisation procedures specific to online modalities, with most teachers admitting that they have been asked to use the same criteria they used for face-to-face assessment.

In general, the data captures a perceived difficulty in assessing, evaluating and monitoring students' performance when teaching a language online.

An age group that emerged as raising additional concerns for language teachers was that of young learners. While pupils seem to have shown surprising resilience and adaptability, teachers felt that their progression relied significantly on adult/parental support and this not only caused practical difficulties for teachers (e.g. parents did not always have the time or skills to provide support), but it also interfered with assessment (e.g. teachers were not sure what the impact of this help would be on students' actual learning).

Finally, the data captured concerns about teachers' wellbeing during Emergency Remote Teaching. Common causes of these concerns seem to include the steep learning curve, lack of adequate support, heavier workload and increased expectations from stakeholders (institution, parents).

Despite the many challenges, this report showed that the pandemic has been an extraordinary time for learning and growth and that language teachers demonstrated remarkable determination, adaptability and resilience. Many think that their experiences during Covid-19 can signal new

opportunities for online and blended language learning after the pandemic. Others admit that they are now more receptive to change and innovation.

As we look forward, we must reflect on what worked, what didn't work, and how we can use the lessons learned to develop more robust and pedagogically sustainable approaches. It is to this end that the last few sections of the report discuss how language teaching, learning, and assessment can be re-envisioned as we move out of the pandemic and into the post-pandemic era.

# 1

## Introduction

The World Health Organization declared Covid-19 to be a worldwide pandemic on 11 March 2020 after the number of cases outside China rose alarmingly and Europe became the epicentre of the pandemic. To mitigate further transmission of the virus, national lockdowns and school closures were imposed around the world. It is estimated that in March 2020 over 144 countries suspended face-to-face education, affecting approximately 1.2 billion students (UNESCO, 2020). Considering this emergency, education systems worldwide were faced with important decisions about how to provide continuity of learning while keeping staff and students safe from the pandemic. New modes of instruction, such as Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), enabled education systems to shift classes quickly online (OECD, 2020), at least for those with access to bandwidth and devices. Language education was no exception, with remote instruction becoming the main form of delivery during the crisis (British Council, 2020).

The term *Emergency Remote Teaching* (ERT) was coined to make a distinction between courses that were designed to take place face-to-face but moved online in response to Covid-19 and those which were intentionally designed to take place online (Hodges et al., 2020). The latter are usually designed by a team of experts – instructional designers, educational technologists and teachers – who, informed by pedagogical, technical and

organisational principles, will try to equal or exceed the learning outcomes of face-to-face instruction. Fundamentally different from this approach, ERT is a response to a crisis, characterised by an abrupt migration to online modalities in order to provide quick and temporary access to instruction that would otherwise be delivered in a physical classroom.

The purpose of this research report is to bring teachers' voices to the fore and explore the effect of this shift on their language teaching experiences. More specifically, it aims to examine teachers' perceptions, assumptions, concerns and perceived support as they transitioned to remote language teaching at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Aligning with a mixed-methods approach (see *Methodology* section), the research gives voice to 1102 teachers based in 49 countries across the world, with almost half of the respondents based in Europe and more than a quarter in South America.





# 2

## Literature review

In December 2019, when Covid-19 began to spread in Wuhan, very few imagined that the virus would soon travel across the globe and disrupt all sectors of life including work, communication, and education. As a result of social distancing and lockdowns, universities and schools were forced to stop in-person teaching immediately and seek alternative modes of instruction.

This was not the first time that education has had to find creative solutions due to a major pandemic. For example, social distancing in education was first introduced in the early 20th century during an outbreak of tuberculosis, with classes taking place in open-air schools, even in freezing cold temperatures (Spielman & Sunavala-Dossabhoj, 2021). Additionally, the 1918 Spanish Flu brought about the rise of distance education via mail correspondence as the disruption “coincided with the availability of extensive railway networks and reliable postal service for delivery” (ibid., p. 744). Similarly, Covid-19 brought remote learning to the forefront of education, coinciding with the proliferation of technology and the ubiquitous connectivity it affords.

Different countries used different terms to describe the forms of remote teaching that took place during Covid-19 (e.g. online learning, home schooling, distance learning). However, online education specialists were quick to point out that these terms did not accurately capture the educational practices that took place during the Covid-19 pandemic; as a result, the term *Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)* emerged to distinguish between online courses that were deliberately designed to take place online and those which were originally designed for face-to-face instruction but temporarily switched to remote modalities due to the pandemic (Hodges et al., 2020; Rapanta, et al., 2020). According to McCarty (2021) the term was coined to ‘non-judgmentally describe the circumstances of educators mostly unprepared to cope with the new necessity to teach online, relieving them of unrealistic expectations as to learning outcomes’ (p.4).

To better conceptualise this difference, it is necessary to briefly look at the field of quality online education, which, for the purposes of this report, will refer to online, remote, blended or hybrid courses that are intentionally and purposefully designed to be engaging and effective.

Online education has been studied for decades, with researchers focusing on how learning theories and models can inform teaching, learning and assessment. Many theoretical frameworks relevant to the pedagogical aspects of online education have evolved over the last two decades – for example, see the Community of Inquiry model (Garrison et al., 2000); the five-stage model of online learning (Salmon, 2004); Connectivism (Siemens, 2004); the Online Collaborative Learning model (Harasim, 2011); and the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2014). What all these frameworks recognise is that online learning can only be effective when it is carefully and systematically designed and implemented according to how people learn online, and that different instructional design decisions can affect the quality of the learning experience. Apart from mastering the platforms and technologies necessary, designing and teaching such courses involve “a paradigm shift in perceptions of instructional time and space, virtual management techniques and ways of engaging students through virtual communications in addition to the communication skills already required for general effective classroom teaching” (Compton, 2009, p. 75). Fundamentally different from these models, ERT does not presuppose this expertise or organisational infrastructure and refers to the rapid and often improvised shift to online modalities during a disruption.

There is substantial literature on the teaching that took place during Covid-19 reporting that despite the devastating consequences, this global crisis has also been a unique opportunity for learning and growth for educators. To begin with, the literature acknowledges that the educational community stepped out of their comfort zone and made concerted efforts to maintain continuity of



instruction (Schleicher, 2020). Additionally, ERT seems to have encouraged educators to embrace professional development related to digital and online learning and become more digitally literate (Xie et al., 2021). Even if this shift was because teachers did not have a choice but to rely upon technology (Brereton, 2021), it does signal an important opportunity for digital education with teachers becoming potentially more receptive to the use of technology in the future. Finally, there is evidence indicating that teachers were encouraged to develop their creativity to keep students engaged online as well as to understand the need for more flexible and meaningful student-teacher interactions (Barron et al., 2021).

However, despite the opportunities, evidence shows that Covid-19 teaching has been considerably challenging for most teachers and students. Schlesselman (2020) refers to it as “chaotic” (p. 1043) arguing that institutions relied on quick fixes rather than robust online pedagogies. Similarly, Rapanta et al. (2020) assert that because of their pedagogical unpreparedness in online teaching, most institutions and teachers resorted to “tips and tricks” (p. 924) rather than pedagogically sound guidance and training. The literature also provides explicit and implicit critique about institutions’ and teachers’ resistance to technology before the pandemic, pointing out that this was a significant barrier to designing quality remote instruction during ERT (Schlesselman, 2020; Thompson & Lodge, 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2020).

Worryingly, the crisis appears to have exposed existing inequities and divisions in our education systems, but the type and degree of these issues varies from context to context. For example, in high-connectivity contexts education systems may have had the infrastructure and facilities needed for remote instruction (hardware, software and bandwidth) but may have lacked the knowledge to make effective use of these resources (Hazaea et al., 2021). On the other hand, in low-connectivity contexts the challenges were much more severe, seriously impeding or even suspending the learning process (Hazaea et al., 2021). Beyond access to broadband, however, several studies indicate that disadvantaged and vulnerable students have been less engaged with remote learning. For example, according to a study in schools across the UK, teachers noted that 62% of vulnerable students and 58% of students with SEN were less engaged with remote learning than their peers and, as a result, they were at serious risk of falling behind (Lucas et al., 2020 cited in OECD, 2020b).

Despite the large number of studies on the broader education scene, there have been fewer studies exploring how language education in general, and language teachers in particular, experienced ERT. The empirical studies that have been carried out since the outbreak of the pandemic suggest that most Covid-19 teaching, perhaps understandably, tried to replicate face-to-face practices, rather than pedagogies inherent in online learning (Moser et al., 2021). It has also been pointed out that there has been a shortage of language specific professional development during ERT (Moser et al., 2021), which may have led language teachers to resort to low-quality drills or easy-to-find but ineffective activities available online (Guillén et al., 2020). Hazaea et al. (2021) found that “students’ and teachers’ digital illiteracy” significantly reduced the effectiveness of the online experience. Perhaps more importantly, there is evidence that language teachers may have struggled to nurture students’ communicative competence because of a perceived lack of authenticity in online interactions (Cheung, 2021; Hazaea et al., 2021). Additionally, teachers seemed to have had difficulties catering for disadvantaged students and mixed ability classes (British Council, 2020). On the other hand, there is evidence that language teachers became more creative and collaborative in their instruction, something that is likely to open up new possibilities for language teaching in the post-pandemic era (Yi & Jang, 2020). Additionally, teachers said that the opportunity to reflect on and improve their current teaching approaches as well as join informal communities of practice were important to them (Bruce & Stakounis, 2021). Because teaching languages effectively online requires knowledge and skills specific to online language pedagogies (Compton, 2009; Meskill & Anthony, 2015), this large scale study aims to bring language teachers’ voices to the fore and explore their language teaching experiences during Covid-19. In doing so, it seeks to shed light on how language education experienced the transition and help teachers, trainers, managers and policy makers to make informed decisions as we recover from the pandemic.

# 3

## Methodology

The purpose of this research report is to explore language teachers' experiences teaching online in response to Covid-19. More specifically, this research report answers the following research questions (RQ):

**RQ1:** What were language teachers' experiences teaching online as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic?

**RQ2:** What was the impact of these experiences on their perceptions of language teaching and learning?

**RQ3:** What support (if any) did language teachers have/would they like to have had to improve their online language teaching experiences?

The term *teachers* was used here as an umbrella term to refer to language professionals who taught at least one class of students/ trainees; this encompassed state and private school language teachers, lecturers, freelancers, tutors, and managers/ administrators with some teaching responsibilities.

An electronic questionnaire was circulated via teachers' online communities (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) and email from 11 April to 11 June 2020 at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe. Participation was completely anonymous and to get the largest available sample participants were encouraged to share the survey with their own teacher communities.

Aligning with a mixed-methods approach, the questionnaire consisted of 26 close and open-ended questions comprising three main parts:

**Section 1** was about the profile and context of the respondents, including the country they were based in, the language taught, previous teaching experience (face-to-face and online), type of school, specialism, students' age, and online class size. Because of the nature of this information, questions were closed-ended, i.e. they had a stem question and

a set of answer alternatives to choose from (Mrug, 2010).

**Section 2** of the questionnaire focused on i) teachers' training and support with regards to teaching online, ii) access to and use of technology, iii) teachers' satisfaction with teaching online, iv) teachers' satisfaction with student engagement, and v) teachers' perceptions on students' assessment online. In this part, both closed and open-ended questions were used; closed questions had a predefined set of answers for participants to choose from and these were followed by optional open-ended questions as means of elaborating and providing insights using their own words. For example, in the question exploring their satisfaction from their teaching online, respondents were asked to choose their answers based on a 10-point Likert scale; following this, they could opt to comment on what they would like to be different if their rating was 9 or below.

**Section 3** was entirely open-ended to give the participants the opportunity to express the experiences, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours or emotions that they themselves deemed important (SAGE, 2019). More specifically, the researcher wanted to receive rich and unconstrained responses to the broad, optional question: "Would you like to add anything else about the effects of the Covid-19 school closure on your teaching experiences?". 664 teachers (58.9%) opted to answer this question and this generated a significantly long and deep data set (53,120 words) with teachers sharing more personal and genuine perspectives.

Given the diverse nature of the three sections described above and the data they generated, the data sets were analysed following different approaches:

- The close-ended questions of sections 1 and 2 were analysed following descriptive statistics to help the researcher simplify large amounts of data in a sensible and prompt way. The answers generated by the open-ended questions were analysed thematically according to the overarching themes that emerged.

- Section 3 generated a qualitatively rich and diverse data set of 53,120 words in total, which required a more systematic approach to thematic analysis. To this effect, Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach (2006, p. 81) was used to organise, analyse and interpret the data set as well as determine common perspectives among participants (Creswell, 2012). See more details about the analysis and coding of this data in *Findings Part B* (Section 6).

The survey included a detailed consent form informing educators about the purpose of the survey, the researcher's background as well as how data would be stored and used. There were three prerequisites for educators to take the survey which were clearly stated in the consent form. Respondents had to:

1. teach or train online/remotely so that they could reflect on their online teaching experiences;
2. be language educators, e.g. teachers, trainers, managers with teaching responsibilities;
3. be teaching/training at least one group of students; one-to-one teaching was not included because it involves different class management and interaction patterns from group teaching.

The online survey received 1160 responses in total; however, 5% of them (n=58) did not meet the criteria above and thus their responses were not considered. Therefore, the valid responses received totalled 1102.

# 4

## Participants' profile and context

This section discusses the results based on the research questions.

### 4.1 Location

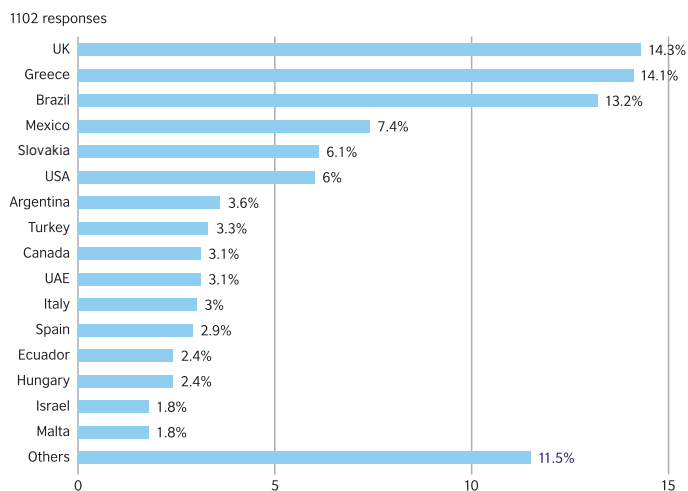


Figure 1: Countries representation

The 1102 participants who took the survey were based in 49 countries (figure 1), with six countries providing the most respondents: the United Kingdom, Greece, Brazil, Mexico, Slovakia and the USA. Other locations with significant percentages included Argentina, Turkey, Canada, UAE, Italy, Spain, Ecuador, Hungary, Malta and Israel, reflecting perhaps the spectrum of the countries that the researcher's networks are based in.

The remaining 11.5% of the respondents (n=127) were based in China, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Pakistan, Norway, Ireland, Australia, Egypt, Portugal, Kosovo, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Albania, Belarus, The Netherlands, Russia, Lithuania, Poland, Tunisia, India, France, Morocco, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Qatar, Japan, Finland, South Korea, Colombia, Lebanon, Switzerland, Chile, Nepal, Indonesia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Moldova, Peru, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Uruguay, Serbia, Romania, Belgium, Austria, Sweden, Thailand, Hong Kong, Iran, New Zealand, and Myanmar.

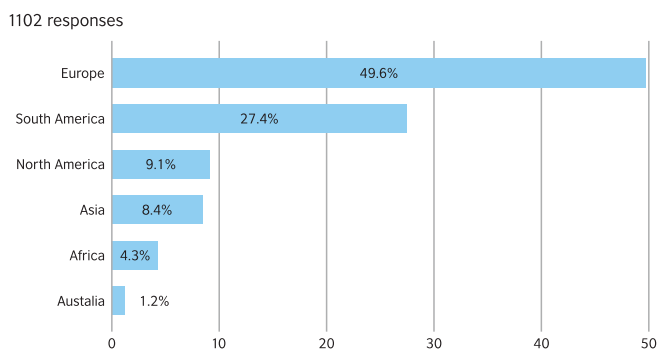


Figure 2: Continent representation

In terms of continent representation, almost half of the respondents were based in Europe and more than a quarter were based in South America. North America and Asia appear to be relatively well-represented while Africa and Australia are less well represented (figure 2). As mentioned earlier, these percentages may reflect the researcher's distribution networks as well as teachers' connectivity. For example, there was little representation from parts of Africa and other places of low connectivity, which is to be expected as the questionnaire was circulated via online communities and, as a result, it did not reach educators with limited access to the internet and devices.

### 4.2 Language teaching specialism

The overwhelming majority comprises practitioners (71.5%), while 18% are teacher trainers and 10.5% school owners and managers/ administrators.

A significant majority (35%) represents primary and secondary school level educators, 31.4% work in private language schools, 21% teach in Higher Education, 8.4% are freelancers and 4.2% represent kindergarten, preschool, volunteer teaching of ESOL or vocational education.

The overwhelming majority of language educators were teachers of English (91%) with the remaining 9% teaching French, Spanish, German, Chinese, Italian, Greek, Slovak, and Dutch. Again, this representation

is to be expected because of the researcher's distribution networks.

With regards to ELT specialism (English Language Teaching), the results show<sup>1</sup> that the vast majority (87.5%) are involved in EFL/ESL and around a third (32.1%) teach English for Specific Purposes (ESP), of whom 16.6% teach EAP (English of Academic Purposes) and the remaining 15.5% other ESP specialisms, e.g. Business English and Aviation English. 4.3% of the respondents are EAL professionals (English as an Additional Language) and the remaining 8% is quite inhomogeneous, comprising professionals who teach BA/MA TESOL modules, ESOL, literature, CELTA, CLIL, and IGCSE/A LEVEL.

### 4.3 Learner ages

A broad spectrum of learner ages is also represented in the results, with a majority of the educators mainly teaching young learners and teenagers (51.4%). From those teaching this group, 48% teach teenagers, 40.3% teach young learners and 11.7% teach both young learners and teenagers. Another significant group is that of young adults with 34.7% of the respondents identifying themselves as teachers of 18-22-year-olds. Finally, 13.9% of them are involved in adult education. The distinction with regards to age groups was made to reflect pedagogical considerations specific to students' age as well as potential e-safety issues, parental intervention, consent and various data protection regulations.

### 4.4 Class size

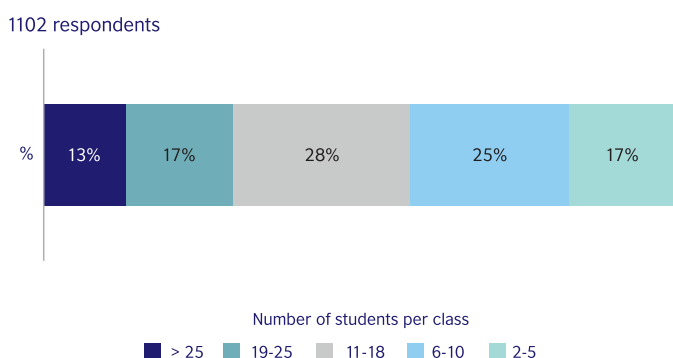


Figure 3: Class size

A wide range of online class sizes is represented in the results (figure 3) with the significant majority of educators (53%) teaching normal size classes ranging from 6 to 18 students. However, a quite large share of the respondents (30%) seem to teach large classes (from 19 to more than 25 students), something that may have added extra challenges to the transition.

Finally, a smaller number (17%) teach small groups of students (2-5 students per class) and, perhaps, class management and interaction may have been less challenging for them.

### 4.5 Face-to-face vs online teaching experience

There are some surprisingly significant differences represented in the data between the educators' face-to-face and online teaching experience. It seems that the overwhelming majority of educators were experienced or very experienced face-to-face teachers while very few of them were experienced online teachers. More specifically, as shown in figures 4 and 5, a total of 87.6% of the respondents had 6 to more than 20 years of face-to-face teaching experience while 91% of them had never taught online before the pandemic.

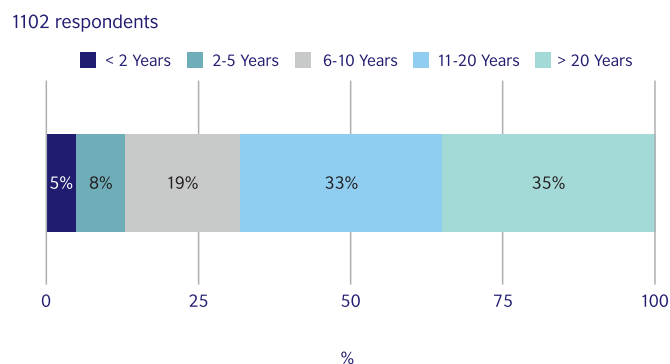


Figure 4: Length of experience teaching face-to-face

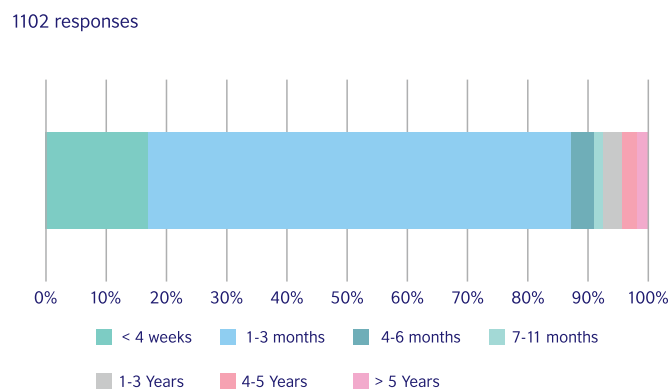


Figure 5: Length of experience teaching remotely/online

The first three time frames in figure 5 seem to represent educators who moved online as a response to the pandemic and had no previous online teaching experience. More specifically, the online teaching experience of the overwhelming majority (70.1%) was 1 to 3 months and a significant number (17.2%) had less than 4 weeks of experience of teaching online. These discrepancies are not surprising given the different times at which the pandemic broke out across the world, e.g. January 2020 in China and

1. Respondents could choose more than one option, e.g. an English teacher may teach EFL at a language school and EAP or ESP on a part-time basis.



other parts of Asia; March 2020 in Europe and the USA; April 2020 in Latin America. They may also reflect how quickly institutions moved online. For example, the next section shows that some institutions transitioned online as soon as lockdowns were imposed while others moved online after a month or more. Finally, figure 5 shows that only 9% had taught online before the pandemic, with varied lengths of experience (from 7 months to more than 5 years).

In conclusion, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (87.6%) were experienced or very experienced face-to-face educators but had very little experience teaching online (91%). This contradiction in teaching experience seems to have had implications on their transition to online modalities as shown in the findings of this report (Part A and Part B).



# 5

## Findings part A: language teaching experiences during Covid-19

### 5.1 Preparation time before they moved online

1102 responses

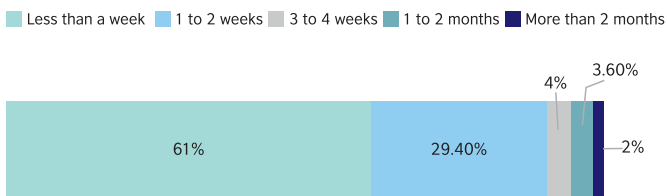


Figure 6: Preparation before moving online

As figure 6 shows, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (90.4%) had very little preparation time before they transitioned online. This ranged from less than a week to two weeks. The remaining 9.4% seem to have had more time to prepare, that is to say from three weeks to two months, while few had more than two months to prepare before they shifted to remote modalities. This may have been either because the institution chose to delay moving online to give educators time to prepare or because they did not have the means to move online, e.g. hardware, software, internet, etc. However, the amount of time and preparation teachers needed also depended on their previous experience. As such, what was “short time” for novice online teachers, may have been adequate for the experienced ones.

**We switched overnight. But we were teaching flipped classroom and thus we just moved the face-to-face to zoom. (UK)**

### 5.2 Teacher training received before moving online

1102 responses

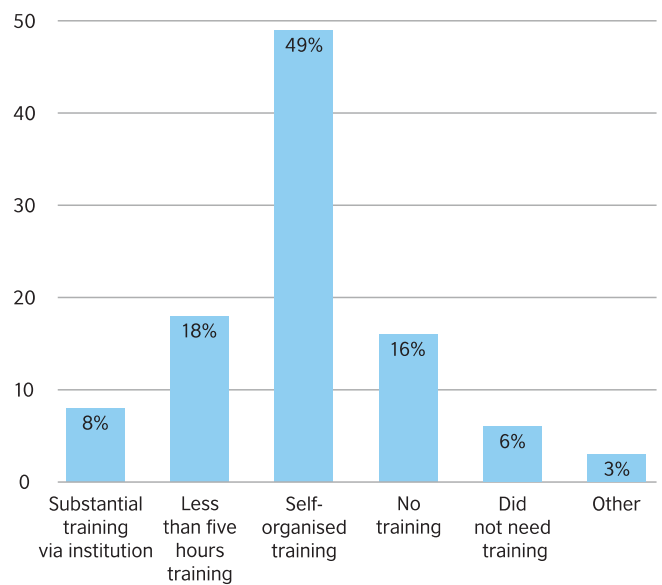


Figure 7: Type of training

Interestingly, as shown in figure 7, about half of the respondents self-organised their training through webinars, videos and other resources freely available online, e.g. online tutorials, blog posts, and webinars offered by teacher associations, individuals or publishers. Indeed, language teachers’ communities seem to have been particularly supportive during the transition, sharing knowledge and resources to facilitate teachers (LT, 2020) but arguably not all of this content has been pedagogically accurate or reliable (Rapanta et al., 2020).

About one fifth of the participants received less than 5 hours of training via their institution just before they transitioned online, but this was mainly with regards to how the platform or other technologies work (e.g. Zoom, BlackBoard Collaborate, Teams,



Padlet, Kahoot, Google Docs etc). Perhaps worryingly, about one sixth of the participants report that they did not receive any training at all before they transitioned to this new modality.

From the above, it seems that a total of 83% of the 1102 educators received very little to no training before they moved online. While identifying what is little and what is substantial training would vary from context to context and from educator to educator, it can be argued that the preparation described cannot be considered adequate for the vast majority of educators (91%) who were new to this modality of teaching.

Finally, 8% reported receiving substantial training via their institution while 6% said that they did not require training. This may have been because they were experienced online teachers (see figure 5) and thus they were already feeling confident to teach remotely. For some others, having used technology in the classroom before the pandemic or having taken digital learning courses seems to have helped too.

***I have taught online before so this was not such a shocking experience for me as it was for many of my colleagues. (UK)***

***Officially 2 hrs of training but I have a background with some moderation training which has been invaluable. (Germany)***

### 5.3 Teaching mode

More than half of the respondents (51.7%) seem to be using both the synchronous and asynchronous teaching modalities, i.e. they have live classes and upload PDF printable files, videos, and other resources online for students to work asynchronously. However, it is unclear what the ratio of synchronous and asynchronous teaching is in this group.

A significant proportion (31.9%) delivers only synchronous classes (e.g. on Zoom) while 16.4% teach only asynchronously, e.g. content and resources are posted online and students send their work back for teachers to provide feedback.

### 5.4 Technologies used

Despite the challenges described above (quick transition, short time for preparation, lack of formal training), educators seem to use a variety of tools with their classes. A significant majority (82%) use video conferencing tools (e.g. Zoom, Teams, Blackboard Collaborate, Skype, Viber, Messenger

video call), with many of them also using the following:

- An LMS (Learning Management System), such as Blackboard, Moodle, Google Classroom, Canvas (52.8%)
- Videos made by others, e.g. available on YouTube or made by colleagues (44.5%)
- Collaborative documents for writing skills development such as Google Docs or OneNote (35.2%)
- Videos made by themselves (33.2%)
- Forums for asynchronous written discussions (20.1%).

Participants also mentioned using the following technologies:

- WhatsApp used by teachers to:
  - exchange messages with students
  - ask students to submit pictures of their completed assignments
  - send activities to students
  - send written lessons to parents
- Microsoft PowerPoint presentations and Word documents sent to students
- PDF of lessons – reading, writing, grammar
- FlipGrid for videos made by students for asynchronous video interaction
- Google docs with links to listening activities
- Websites with ready-made worksheets, e.g. Busy Teacher, EnglishGo
- The coursebook interactive platforms, e.g. Pearson MyEnglishLab
- Digital coursebooks (coursebooks in electronic format)

Teachers, seem to be using a range of digital quiz and game technologies for vocabulary practice:

- Kahoot
- Quizlet
- Quizalize
- Quizizz
- Educandy
- Edpuzzle

- Wordwall
- Edupage

Other technologies mentioned less frequently were:

- Padlet and Linoit for collaboration
- Tricider for debates
- Google Slides for collaborative presentations
- Interactive video/song activities, e.g. Pecha Kucha apps
- Platforms with auto-corrected drill exercises for grammar and vocabulary practice, e.g. ELT Skills
- BBC bitesize for skills development
- LearnCube for video conferencing
- Sway for creating asynchronous materials
- Tools for making infographics, e.g. Canva
- Wikis for collaboration
- Seesaw used as LMS for young learners and their parents
- Miro board as a digital board

## 5.5 Internet and equipment

In this section participants had to answer four questions rating – from very good to very poor – their and their students’

- connectivity and
- access to a quality laptop or desktop.

Mobile devices were not included in the question because of the instructional limitations they may present. For example, users of mobile devices tend to scan content rather than process and analyse it more deeply (Byrne et al., 2016). Also, if the instructional design of the content is not responsive to mobile devices, its readability can be significantly challenged (Lee, 2020). Those using mobile devices were asked to add an optional comment to give more details about the experience.

**Teachers’ internet and devices**

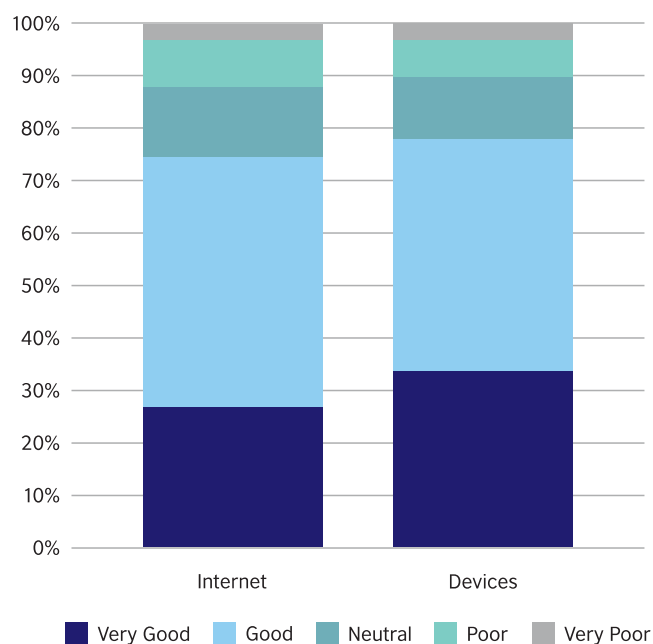


Figure 8: Teachers’ perceptions of their internet and equipment

The results show that most teachers seem to be satisfied with both their connectivity and equipment; nearly two-thirds (75%) of teachers report that they have a good or very good internet connection and only 12% seem to have serious or very serious connectivity issues (see figure 8). Likewise, educators feel satisfied with their devices, with most (78%) indicating them as good to very good. Only 10% find their devices problematic ranging from poor to very poor, and report using their phones for teaching (figure 8).

**Students’ internet and devices**

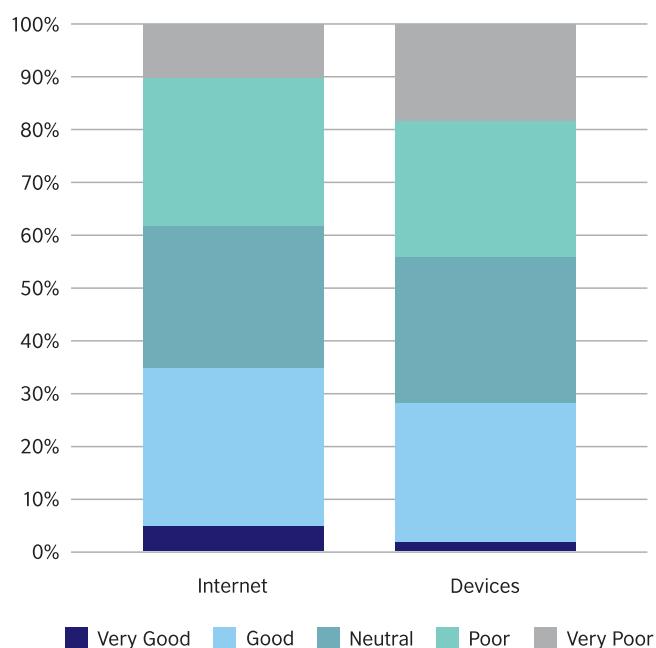


Figure 9: Teachers’ perceptions of students’ internet and equipment

Teachers seem to have mixed feelings about students' connectivity and devices. While 35% of them rate students' connectivity in the good or very good range, only 28% believe that their students have access to good or very good quality personal computers (figure 9). However, 38% of the participants said that their students had a poor or very poor connection to the internet. Quite alarmingly, a large majority (44%) think that students' access to quality laptops or desktops is poor or very poor, and so they use their phones to learn.

**None of my students have a laptop. Most have phones. They have mobile data packages that will prove too expensive to access video of any length. (Myanmar)**

**Often they start with their laptop which is old, get booted out of Zoom, then switch to their mobile device. (UK)**

In the optional follow-up question, 8.3% of them (n=91) reported that their students may not have a personal computer or phone and use their parents' devices when these are available. These students seem to be either young learners – who, perhaps understandably, do not have personal devices – or students from more disadvantaged households.

**Most use their parents' cellphones to do the assignments when allowed to. (Mexico)**

**Most of them use their mobile phones for teleconferencing but I don't know what they use for the platform. (Brazil)**

Finally, in both students' connectivity and equipment questions, the neutral responses are rather high, perhaps reflecting teachers' unawareness of what devices their students were using. This is not surprising if the mode they were using was asynchronous or if they took the survey over the early days of their transition online.

## 5.6 Ongoing institutional support

To explore the ongoing support they received from their institutions, participants were given six options to choose from (see figure 10) and could tick all that applied. Optionally, they could also elaborate in an open-ended follow-up question. Freelancers were advised to choose the option 'non-applicable'.

1102 responses

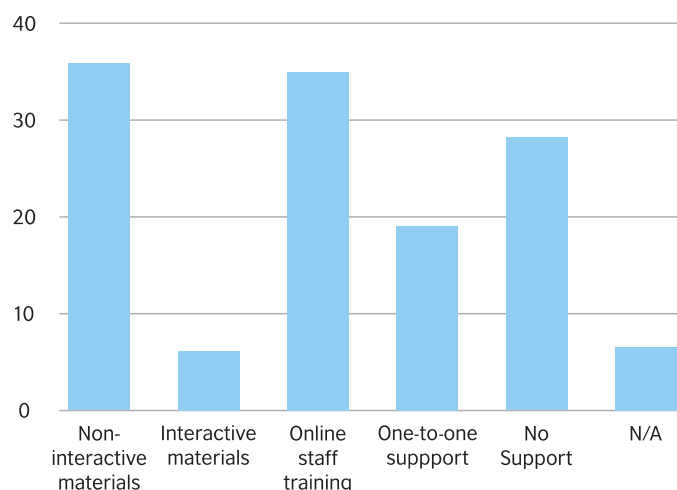


Figure 10: Ongoing institutional support

The results show that a significant part are supported with online non-interactive materials (ready-made PDFs, Word worksheets and PowerPoint presentations) to use in the classroom while an equally large share have online staff training mainly with regards to how the platforms and tools work.

**In the training they tell us how to use the platforms and technologies. (Spain)**

Worryingly, 28.2% of the educators admit that they are not provided with any support and have to teach one another. However, a closer look at their open-ended answers suggests that some of the reasons for this are:

- the institution leadership was still learning;
- the institution was helping ad hoc, either by supporting the teacher when connectivity issues occurred or by sending them invitations to free webinars and online courses. The last one may be acknowledged as some kind of support on the part of the institution although a more systematic approach would have been more effective (Kiddle et al., 2020).

**Teachers share their tips but the owners of the school are always available to help especially when the teachers' internet connection fails. (Switzerland)**

**The principal is trying to learn and then he teaches and helps us. We teachers communicate and share what we learnt and what might be useful. We have online meetings every two weeks to talk things over. (Ukraine)**

***We have weekly meetings with colleagues who have no idea what they're doing. (Canada)***

***Formally from the institution there is very limited support and the IT Department is unable to cope but we are helping each other out. (UK)***

***If I have a question I'm encouraged to ask colleagues for help. (Ireland)***

***I had trained other tutors to use zoom and we are learning Microsoft Teams together. I am a buddy for two members of staff, but the problem is nothing is being provided for the learners. (USA)***

Interestingly, 19.1% said that they receive one-to-one support from a specialist but a significant number of those who selected this option clarified in the open-ended question that:

- a) the specialist was an IT person who may have known how to solve technology issues but could not help with pedagogical issues and changes specific to teaching online. Another issue that emerged was that IT departments were overwhelmed with work and unable to respond to all the needs.

***There is a helpful computer specialist but he is not a learning specialist. (Italy)***

***The computer specialist helps us and answers doubts but it's only one person for the entire school. (Argentina)***

***The one-to-one specialist is for technical support, not for teaching. (UK)***

- b) the 'specialist' was in fact a teacher who was more tech savvy than others. It is therefore unclear whether this ad hoc support could address less tech savvy teachers' needs and what the burden on the more tech savvy teachers had been, considering they had their own classes to teach as well.

***I'm both the teacher and the digital expert who provides support because I'm better at technology. (Saudi Arabia)***

***Ad hoc training provided by peers and the SharePoint for techniques and tips. (Malta)***

Finally, fewer participants said that they are provided with interactive materials mainly in the form of quizzes, digital coursebooks and videos. As expected, 6.7% of the educators answered that this support was non-applicable because they were either experienced online teachers or freelancers.

## 5.7 Teachers' perceptions of their online teaching experiences and student engagement

This section offered significant insights into teachers' online experiences as well as their students' perceived engagement with online learning. To answer this part of the survey, respondents rated on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 meant very poor and 10 excellent) their teaching experiences as well as their students' engagement during online classes. This was followed by questions inviting those who rated their current experiences 9 or below to suggest ways they can be supported in order to improve their teaching experiences and students' engagement. Educators could tick all that applied from a list of ideas and/or add their own.

With an average rating of 6.3, teachers appear to be fairly satisfied with teaching remotely. Just over a third (36.1%) seem to be most satisfied with their online experience (rating it 8 or better), while 37% rated it 5 or below (see figure 11).

Teachers' satisfaction drops when it comes to student engagement. With an average rating of 5.5, teachers seem concerned about how students' involvement with the learning experience has been affected by transitioning online. Only 21.6% rated student engagement 8 or above and over half of them (51%) rated it 5 or below (see figure 11).

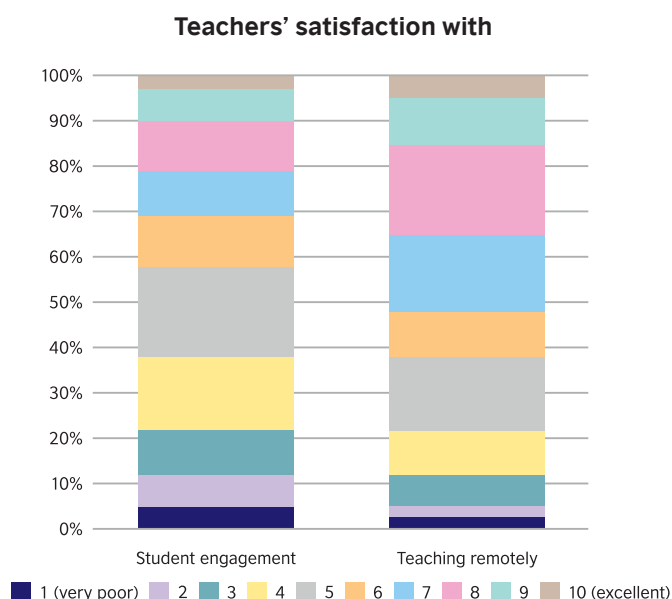


Figure 11: Teachers' satisfaction with teaching remotely and their students' engagement



## 5.7.1 Teachers' suggestions for improving their online teaching experiences

Most respondents feel that they need more training in online teaching approaches and techniques, while almost half believe that they require more training in the use of technology. Better internet and equipment seem to be necessary for a significant percentage, which seems to be contradicting previous data (figure 8) where teachers appeared to be satisfied with their connectivity and equipment. More than a third would also like a lighter workload, and almost a quarter believe fewer students would improve their experience (see figure 12).

***The institution should design the course, give the appropriate training to teachers, invest on appropriate planning and materials for online teaching, and prepare students for the transition. None of this was done. From one day to another (less than 12 hours) teachers had to start meeting students online. (France)***

***A clear, shared school vision of student and teacher expectations. (Hong Kong)***

Teachers' suggestion for improving their online experience

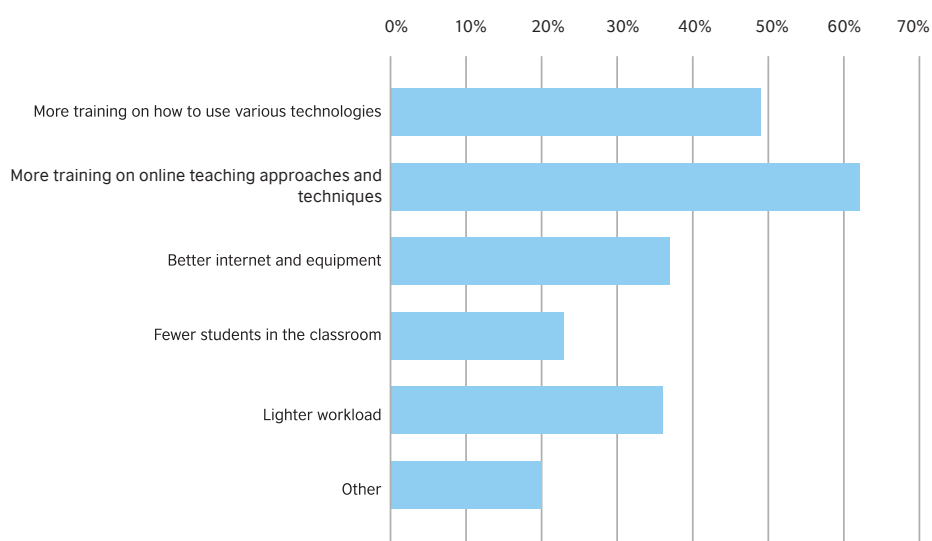


Figure 12: Teachers' suggestions for improving their online experiences

Useful insights were offered by the respondents who added their own suggestions to the space 'other.' These include better equipment, ELT specific pedagogies and better leadership from both the institution and the government. All three themes emerged in the qualitative part as well (Part B) and will be analysed and elaborated on more extensively there.

***Better internet connection for everyone and laptops/personal smartphones for students because from my experience in one family of 3 students of different levels, they have only one smartphone and it belongs to the mother or the father. (Greece)***

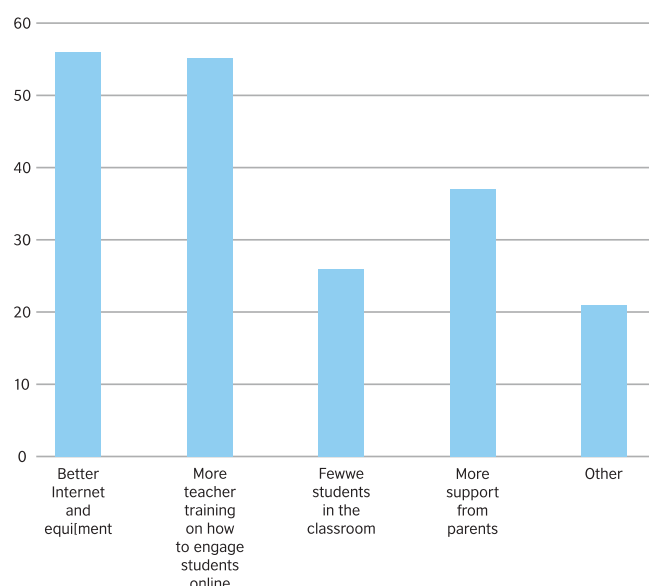
***There is no lack of tools, but most tools are NOT suitable for EFL/ESL contexts, nor lend themselves to formative assessment. (Israel)***

***Less uncertainty about government guidelines. More investment in non-free tools and advanced planning for next academic year, since it should be envisioned as blended learning rather than face to face (we'll probably have intermittent lockdowns and need to plan accordingly). Better guidance and educational planning from governments – we need people who know what they're doing! (Spain)***

## 5.7.2 Teachers' suggestions for improving student engagement

The majority of respondents believe that for students to be more engaged in the learning experience two competing aims need to be fulfilled: better internet and equipment and more teacher training on how to engage students online. In addition, many of them

Teachers' suggestion for improving student engagement



said that parents' support and fewer students in class would improve student engagement (see figure 13).

Some teachers added their own suggestions regarding the improvement of student engagement and the themes emerging can be found below. These themes also emerged in Part B and they will be further analysed and discussed there.

Figure 13 : Teachers' suggestions for improving student engagement

Table 1: Other suggestions for improving student engagement

The pedagogy of online learning	<p><i>Better tasks! They need authentic tasks that make sense being done in an online setting. (Greece)</i></p> <p><i>There was little time to prepare; more time to design learning activities to engage learners needed. (Poland)</i></p> <p><i>Students are not trained nor did they choose to learn online so some of them see it as an opportunity to slack off. (Greece)</i></p> <p><i>Direct tutorial sessions to students so that they understand key points behind the use of technology with educational purposes. (Ecuador)</i></p>
The development of student autonomy and digital literacies	<p><i>More work on self-reflection, self-organisation and peer learning. (Argentina)</i></p> <p><i>More digital literacy training for students. Also, again, the role of the crisis itself is hard to separate. A lot of my students are now taking care of their children and learning full time, so their issues are related to time, sharing devices, and generally dealing with the overall crisis. So maybe more skills related to juggling child care and workloads. (Canada)</i></p>
Access to technologies and having the right conditions to learn from home	<p><i>Most students only have a mobile phone to participate in the classes. (Argentina)</i></p> <p><i>In some cases students are sharing a computer with other family members or are trying to participate in synchronous activities while their children are home due to lockdown. (Spain)</i></p>
More leadership/ government support	<p><i>Support from the Ministry of Education to get students the tools they need to work during these trying times. (Mexico)</i></p> <p><i>Less uncertainty and better planning at all levels (central government, regional and local). (Spain)</i></p>
Students' and parents' perceptions of online learning	<p><i>Students didn't sign up for this and they are not showing the willingness required to learn in this way. (USA)</i></p> <p><i>Less stigma about online learning not being as good as the "gold standard" of traditional classroom learning. (Ireland)</i></p> <p><i>Do students want to move online? Do their parents wish to see their kids in front of a screen all day long. It is convenient but is it suitable for kids? What about all the research done on the negative effects and the isolation resulting from the use of computers at an early age? Will we sacrifice what is right in the name of convenience? (South Korea)</i></p>

## 5.8 Assessment

One of the areas generating concern among language teachers seems to be that of assessment (both formative and summative) as well as ongoing evaluation of students' online performance.

In this part of the survey, respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 meant very difficult and 10 very easy) how easy it would be to ensure effective assessment of students' learning. This was followed by an optional open question inviting teachers to give reasons for their rating.

With an average rating of 5, teachers appear to be sceptical about how best students' language learning can be assessed and evaluated. Only 16.1% found that assessing students remotely can be straightforward by rating it 8 or above; worryingly, 60.6% of the respondents rated it 5 or below (see figure 14) signalling a perceived difficulty in assessing students' performance when teaching a language online.

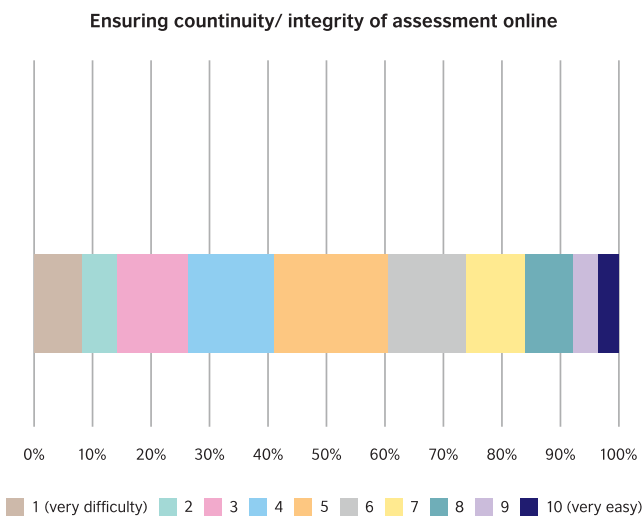


Figure 14: Teachers' perceptions of ensuring continuity/integrity of assessment online

In response to the open-ended question that followed the Likert-type one, 39% (n=431) of participants answered by providing reasons for their rating. The data were grouped thematically and point out both concerns and recommendations about what educators need to be improved. Common themes include issues with plagiarism and standardisation, limitations specific to online assessment, increased workload, lack of institutional procedures and guidelines, as well as their recommendations. Following is the analysis of these themes along with participants' original quotes.

### 5.8.1 Integrity: plagiarism and standardisation

Respondents believe that the current lack of standardisation and invigilation can challenge the integrity of any summative assessment especially with the freely available translation software and search engines that students have access to. For example, language teachers fear that students can easily cheat using translation apps and web searches like Google; even in formative assessment, they feel that it is difficult for the teacher to know whether a submission is students' own work or if it has been written or aided by parents and classmates.

***There doesn't appear to be any way of stopping them from cheating! Even working with more formative assessment options and portfolios, the work lacks integrity. (Vietnam)***

***Assessment is the hardest piece of this puzzle. Academic dishonesty, plagiarism, translation have all occurred in just the first 2 months already. (Canada)***

***Use of books and online translators makes assessing their work difficult. I know they have their books open but cannot prove it so I might turn a blind eye. (UK)***

***It's much harder these days to test students in a standardized way. (Slovakia)***

The very nature of teaching a language seems to make assessing it even more challenging, especially with regards to reading and writing skills where students can easily check vocabulary or even copy chunks from the internet and pass them off as their own.

***We can possibly set online quizzes for vocabulary but what about reading and writing? How do you know that students are not checking online resources during the test? It appears to be impossible to administer valid testing online. (Indonesia)***

Search engines and translation software seem to interfere not only with summative assessment, but also with teachers' evaluation of whether students have understood concepts presented in a lesson. Teachers observe that when students answer questions during the lesson, they usually look up the

answers online and this gives a false impression of what they actually know/have understood.

***The speed with which students can retrieve info online promotes false feedback with a severe effect on remedial work, etc. (Greece)***

### 5.8.2 Limitations specific to online assessment: lack of visual feedback; technical issues; students' age

The online modality, whether synchronous or asynchronous, seems to be posing difficulties to teachers in terms of both summative and continuous assessment. One prevalent concern is the lack of visual clues, especially when cameras are off for privacy or bandwidth reasons. Teachers argue that this hinders them from actually observing, monitoring and evaluating students' performance.

***Not being able (for privacy or tech reasons) to have students put on the camera during class hinders the teacher's ability to accurately assess such vital parts of language teaching – all the non-verbals. It's also impossible to know whether students are actually paying attention or are just quiet. (UK)***

Perhaps more alarmingly, recurring technical and connectivity issues make it difficult for the teacher to evaluate students' learning.

***The audio lag due to poor internet sometimes makes it hard to even have a normal conversation. (Brazil)***

Finally, respondents seem to make a distinction between age groups, observing that assessing and evaluating young learners online is more challenging than assessing other age groups because they need closer monitoring and support, something that teachers feel they cannot provide remotely.

***I find it easier to assess older students because they're more autonomous and don't need such close monitoring. In addition, they are better at technology. Assessment is difficult with young learners (6-8 years old) as everything must be done through parents who are also working from home. (Spain)***

### 5.8.3 Increased workload

Because of the difficulties described above, the need for continuous assessment and homework has increased, which has had an impact on teachers' workload, as they need to provide feedback asynchronously, mark students' homework etc.

***It is hard to evaluate and monitor learning from a distance when you have 30 students in class. But the amount of work you receive from them is huge. (Portugal)***

***I correct my students' homework and offer them feedback but it takes so much more time. (Argentina)***

Even when teachers do use summative assessment, it takes considerably more time to create online quizzes and tests via software.

***We create quizzes online and timed synchronous conditions where we have a 'camera on policy' but it's much more time consuming to create the tests and administer the tests. (Italy)***

### 5.8.4 Lack of institutional procedures and criteria for online assessment

The data captures feelings of uncertainty regarding guidelines, criteria and standardisation procedures specific to online delivery. Teachers argue that they either have to assess with the same criteria they used for face-to-face delivery or that assessment has been put on hold by the educational authorities at the moment.

***It's all vague at the moment. I think they will just move exams for next year. (Greece)***

***We use the same criteria to assess students when interaction patterns and so many other things have changed. (UK)***

This seems to also apply to teacher certification programmes where trainee teachers need to pass both exams and teaching observations online with criteria designed for face-to-face classrooms.

***The online assessment process has not been standardised yet and there has been no real change to assessments or evaluation criteria. We still use the same criteria that we used to assess teachers teaching in a face-to-face classroom. (Poland)***

This is not the case for all institutions, however. Some of the respondents admit that, although there was a long time of uncertainty, once they received the guidelines from the ministry of education, they managed to adapt the criteria to reflect the teaching methods used during the pandemic. This process, however, increased teachers' and administrators' workload, an issue that has already been mentioned in a previous subsection.

***We had to wait for about two months to get instructions from the ministry on how assessment should be done, only to get very generic guidelines that we then had to specify and work on at school level. Then us teachers spent 2.5 weeks coming up with fair and appropriate assessment criteria for each level, had to get it approved by school management and then present it to the students. The long process has created a lot of stress and uncertainty both among teachers and students. (Spain)***

### 5.8.5 Recommendations for online assessment

Despite the challenges, there are a number of recommendations emerging from the data. To begin with, teachers observe that the modality shift from face-to-face to remote has brought about changes in pedagogy and as a result traditional assessment needs to shift as well. They seem to suggest that summative assessment should perhaps adopt an 'open book approach' so that there is less need for close invigilation.

***Testing and 'cheating' has to be rethought. If students are able to google the answers to questions during a test, shouldn't we encourage an open book test? (UK)***

***Our teaching methods have changed considerably, so our assessment should change accordingly. (Uruguay)***

With regards to formative assessment, educators seem to believe that it is easier to implement, especially if students are trained to become more autonomous.

***I think we need to guide our student assessment from traditional, summative mode to a formative one but that could only work if they are prepared to take ownership of their own learning. (Serbia)***

Some of them, however, point out that education systems and schools may not be ready to make the shift, either because it all happened too fast or, worryingly, because they are still in favour of traditional, face-to-face assessment methods, something that seems to leave teachers in limbo.

***We planned written exams and are now scrambling to make them "work" online (instead of just scrapping them or rethinking assessment altogether). (Austria)***

***The school I work focuses too much on tests I think, so it is a bit difficult to change their mind and suggest alternative ways of assessing. (Brazil)***

Some teachers recommend proctoring software for more effective invigilation, and assessment tools for less time-consuming feedback. One teacher recommends Grammarly, a technology that underlines grammatical, spelling and structure errors, thus facilitating feedback provision for language teachers. In addition, plagiarism detection software is mentioned as a good solution against students' plagiarism.

***Online assessment can be easy if teachers have access to the right software. For example, using grammarly.com, English teachers can check the grammar of their students' essays in no time. (New Zealand)***

Finally, being flexible, giving students a second chance and setting clear, actionable and short-term aims are thought to be effective ways of managing the transition to more sustainable forms of assessment.

***We are offering students a second chance (final online exam) if they can't be assessed through continuous formative assessment. (Sweden)***

***We select relevant CEFR statements for the week's target and work towards 'proving' them. (UK)***



# 6

## Findings part B: a detailed look into language teachers' experiences, perceptions and needs

This part of the survey gave respondents the freedom to respond as they thought appropriate and share their experiences, perceptions, feelings and emotions in a more genuine way. More specifically, teachers had the option to answer the following open-ended question:

“Would you like to add anything else about the effects of the Covid-19 school closure on your teaching experiences? If so, please use the space below.”

664 teachers (a total of 58.9%) opted to answer this question with answers ranging from 44 to 250 words and an average of 80 words per answer. Due to the openness of the question, the data generated was overwhelmingly large (53,120 words) and diverse in insights and themes.

It was therefore deemed essential for the researcher to use an analysis approach that would allow her to not only organise and describe a data set but to go beyond the semantic content to examine participants' perceptions, assumptions, concerns or uncertainties. The data was analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 81) six-phase approach to thematic analysis, a foundational method of qualitative analysis which encompassed the following phases:

- Gaining familiarity with the data
- Generating initial codes
- Searching for themes or main ideas
- Reviewing and refining themes
- Defining and naming themes
- Producing the report.

Because the data set was large and diverse, the researcher decided to use Nvivo12 (2021), a

qualitative analysis software that would allow her to code and group data in a more efficient way.

20 initial codes emerged from the data analysis and these were refined into six final themes, namely 1) Pedagogical considerations, 2) Training and technology, 3) Workload and wellbeing, 4) Leadership, 5) Students' learning experiences (from the teachers' perspective) and 6) Opportunities (see figure 15).

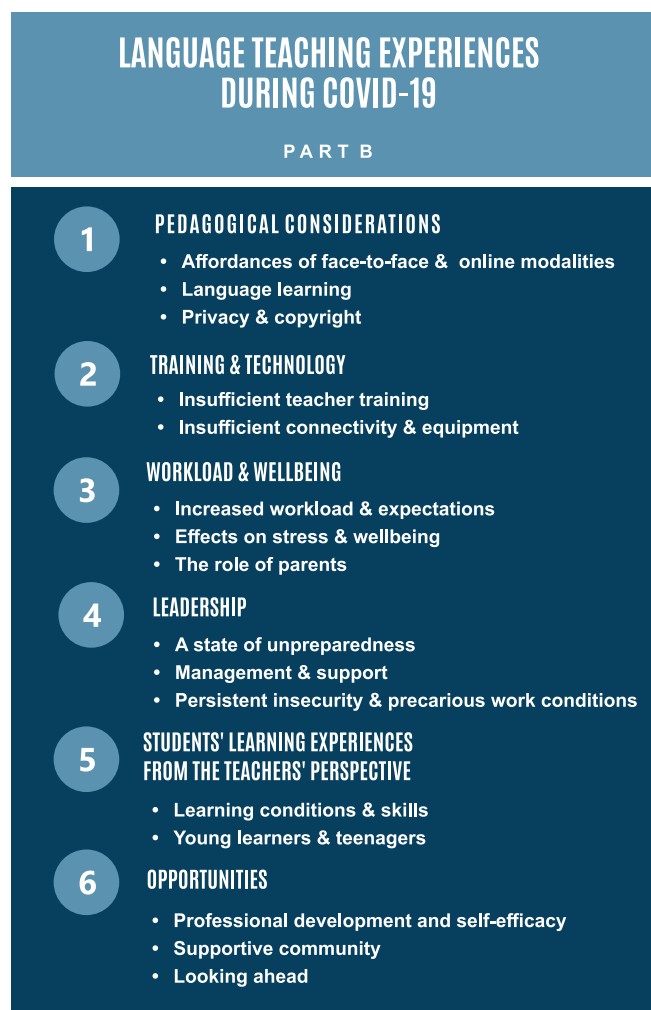


Figure 15: Final themes

## 6.1 Pedagogical considerations

### 6.1.1 Affordances of face-to-face and online modalities

A recurring theme in the data concerned the pedagogical implications of shifting language learning from face-to-face to online. More than half of the respondents (53%) referred to interaction, communication and how the absence of physical proximity and visual clues can interfere with students' level of retention and engagement. A few of these concerns appear to stem from a rushed transition online (and may have smoothed as both teachers and students gained experience with remote modes), but others were deeper and pertain to the affordances that face-to-face learning has on a more general level – affordances that teachers may consider irreplaceable when teaching online.

***Students need interaction. When they are left alone, they do not work hard enough and they do not see the reason. I quite often use peer to peer teaching and project work but they just can't collaborate in the same way online. (Belarus)***

***There is no real eye contact. Without these visual clues I can't really tell if my students are learning. (Vietnam)***

There are also repeated references to the difficulties of teaching a face-to-face syllabus online, either synchronously or asynchronously. These include existing preconceptions (e.g. only live sessions can lead to real learning), out of sync syllabi and online vs face-to-face affordances as the roots of the issue.

***As a result of the transition to online teaching and the staggered uptake from students, teaching plans and syllabi are now out of sync. Some aspects of classroom teaching are unattainable or unachievable through online methods. (Spain)***

***There is this preconceived idea of replicating the present timetable where I work with online teaching which is hard to cope with including all special subjects. I find it old-fashioned and just trying to please parents who feel that being live online will keep their children busy and "learning". (Argentina)***

Additionally, educators notice that teaching online takes longer than face-to-face, e.g. a task may take double the time to set up and deliver. This is quite contradictory to those reporting that schools reduced students' live classes because of online fatigue or financial reasons.

***An otherwise fifty-minute lesson now takes two or three fifty-minute sessions to be effective. You need extra time for tech issues and extra time to set instructions and check students' learning. (Colombia)***

***We had 4 hours per week to teach this module and now it's 2 hours to cover the same syllabus. Madness and all this for financial reasons. (UK)***

Many of the respondents also mention that the synchronous online classes have become more teacher-centred as a result of the transition and despite popular perceptions, online learning does not really facilitate student autonomy.

***I have to do more talking and the lesson cannot be as student-centred as I would like it to be. (Greece)***

***I feel that moving things online, although it should make the learner less dependent on the instructor, actually puts more stress on the instructor interacting with each individual student. This is just much more work. (Australia)***

Other teachers, however, clearly identify that this lack of student autonomy has to do with insufficient student training and preparation of students to learn online and that students did prove to be co-operative and resilient when guided appropriately.

***Students have adopted technology to their learning very successfully, which highlights students' versatility. Online teaching may encourage students to become more autonomous and appreciate the teacher's role as well, but they need training. (Germany)***

***We try to guide them through and they have proven to be so amazingly consistent and responsible people I would never have imagined. (Greece)***

While most respondents express pedagogical reservations, there are very positive remarks from those who embraced the affordances of technology and tried to make pedagogical changes accordingly. They mention more transparency, paperless classrooms and increased interactivity as a result of the tools a teacher has at their disposal. They seem to believe that student-centredness can still be



achieved if the teacher assumes a less central role in the online lesson and embraces teamwork or Project Based Learning.

***Distance learning also gives the instructor a lot of control and enables parents to see what happens in our classrooms. (Greece)***

***I use more varied and interactive materials now being online since our school equipment in classrooms is very basic (whiteboards, cd players, interactive board once a week as we share with other classes). (Slovakia)***

***Paperless teaching is much more possible than many think. Online tools and methods should finally gain more respect and acceptance. (Turkey)***

***The best classes have been when the students themselves learned to use technology in new ways, e.g. seminar discussions or team presentations with voice-over. (Hungary)***

***The share screen option in Zoom is such a life-saver. I couldn't look at web pages in the same way in a face-to-face classroom; doing it this way has made such lessons much more student-centred and interactive. (Portugal)***

Finally, individual respondents point out that recording sessions is much easier online than face-to-face and this can provide useful opportunities for assessment and reflection on the teaching experience.

***A lesson can be fully and easily recorded and examined at a later date for assessment or reflection/action research. (Italy)***

### 6.1.2 Language learning

Most concerns related to learning a language online refer to the lack of physical proximity that, according to the participants, deters students from developing and practising the language using kinaesthetic or communicative learning approaches and techniques, e.g. Total Physical Response, mingling, moving around, role playing.

Many said that this can have implications for both language learning and group bonding. Teachers also believe that online learning cannot replicate real life communication and thus language acquisition has become mechanical and unnatural. Others fear that a large part of the lesson is now focused on troubleshooting or learning about how the technology works and this seems to have affected language acquisition negatively.

***Are we developing language or the students' ability to interact with the technology? I think we do the latter. (The Dominican Republic)***

***Language acquisition is transitioned into mechanised and artificial acquisition as there is nothing natural about learning via a monitor. (UAE)***

***I did projects, storytelling, creating posters, decorating my class according to what I had to teach, organizing short plays, cooking, making experiments...singing, dancing...It is a pity if all that magic gets lost behind a computer screen. (Greece)***

***Learning and teaching a language is not only based on speaking, listening and watching but also on direct contact i.e face-to-face teaching includes aspects that cannot be underestimated. Your face through a camera is not you. (Italy)***

Additionally, there are mentions of how this may have affected speaking and listening skills development, indicating perhaps that these may be the skills that teachers have identified as the most challenging to develop online.

***Student speaking time has dropped. You can do breakout rooms but they need time to set up and again, students won't be speaking in English. (Australia)***

***Personally I think it's very difficult to develop speaking and listening in a zoom connection with 12 students, noises, WiFi pauses, and audio or camera problems. Writing is easier because you can read their documents especially if you use google docs. (Argentina)***

However, a number of participants point out that it is not the online modality that deters people from learning but teachers' and students' unfamiliarity with both the technology and the pedagogy. They also argue that both online and blended learning approaches could be ideal for language learning if integrated with attention to sound digital and language learning pedagogies.

***I think it is possible as people have been learning languages online for years. The problem is that most teachers just don't know how to teach languages online. And most students don't know how to learn languages online. (Japan)***

***The online element is ideal for information transfer (reading, listening, vocabulary exercises, comprehension questions and for preparing to take part in discussions). The classroom element is ideal for active learning Covid 19 has forced me to hold both elements online but Zoom is a good alternative for active learning. (Serbia)***

### 6.1.3 Privacy and copyright

Some respondents raised e-safety and privacy concerns for both students and teachers. Lack of education regarding copyright laws as well as what happens to students' and teachers' data when lessons are recorded seem to be the most common concerns. For example, do recordings comply with GDPR regulations in Europe and if so, shouldn't teachers and students (or carers) be asked to give their consent to this? One teacher also mentioned that the possibility of students recording and sharing parts of the lesson on social media is a source of anxiety for them.

***There are a lot of copyright issues that have arisen with the sharing of videos/pictures/material online and we feel unable to address these issues as there is no information. (Chile)***

***We now record lessons so that students who have tech issues can go back and watch them but is this legal? How about GDPR and students' data? And our data? I don't remember consenting to this. (UK)***

***How can we be sure we are not photographed or recorded during the lesson and then be exposed on social media or being laughed at etc. This creates some insecurity for us and nothing is done to protect us. (Greece)***

Additionally, there have been references to how the online transition may have affected students' privacy in totalitarian regimes; teachers say that students may now feel less open to talk about controversial issues for fear that they may be monitored by surveillance state mechanisms.

***The constant surveillance technology adds stress, especially to students who have returned to living in authoritarian countries. Students now living in such countries feel less comfortable discussing "controversial" topics than on our campus. (USA)***

## 6.2 Training and technology

### 6.2.1 Insufficient teacher training

An area of concern among teachers was the insufficient training and preparation they received before they moved online. This, along with increased expectations from stakeholders, seems to have impacted their teaching experiences negatively. These concerns seem to align with the findings in Part A where 91% of teachers reported limited to no formal training before they moved online or during the first months of the lockdown. This does not mean that teachers did not value the informal, self-organised, or peer training they have been engaged in, but rather that they needed more solid support and guidance on what works or does not work when teaching online.

***Schools expect great classes and materials but they seem to forget this situation is very stressful and new, and we are expected to have the same performance as before (Brazil)***

***Online transition without real training is one reason that is negatively affecting learning. (Saudi Arabia)***

***I guess it's just one of those things you get on with because you have to and I already feel more confident..... however lack of even a formal training session online makes it difficult to maximise this experience. I don't think it's enough to have teachers go through it on their own and expect understanding and being able to use it in the classroom. (UK)***

### 6.2.3 Insufficient connectivity and equipment

Quite a few respondents from all over the world – not just poorer countries – mention connectivity issues and lack of reliable devices especially on the part of the students. Teachers report that these issues challenge and disrupt the teaching and learning experience considerably. They believe that poor connectivity issues were aggravated because students' family members were also working/learning from home during lockdowns and there was a bigger demand for bandwidth and devices.

As a result, some of them used their phones for learning (instead of PCs) but teachers fear that phones are a poor substitute for a personal computer. This data seems to confirm the quantitative section of this research that identified concerns about students' connectivity and equipment. It should be noted that most respondents were based in high connectivity countries and this may mean that even more serious issues would have emerged if less technologically advanced parts of

the world were better represented, e.g. certain parts of Africa (eLearning Africa & EdTech Hub, 2020).

***I was unable to run synchronous classes because many of my students were unable to log in due to lack of access to a reliable device and/or poor internet connection. (Canada)***

***With parents working from home and children having online classes at the same time means more computers are needed in the house. Not all households can afford four computers. (Greece)***

***In my country, the 60% of 320 students don't even have a cell phone, not to mention computers or Internet. It's really hard to get to all of the students. (Mexico)***

***Most of my students have poor internet connection and use a mobile. With 16 students I feel I interact with 4 at most. (Brazil)***

Both insufficient teacher training and limited access to technology seem to have affected students' experience learning online – a topic that will be analysed later in this report (see section 6.5).

### 6.3 Workload and wellbeing

A few participants report that the switch to online teaching has negatively affected their wellbeing. Factors include a heavier workload (e.g. increased preparation time and marking), increased expectations, lack of institutional planning, and being overwhelmed by various technologies as the main reasons for this. Other reasons include working from home, e.g. feeling isolated, lack of proper work space, home schooling for their own children as well as the general stress generated by the pandemic.

***I have double the work to do than usual, so it means more responsibilities, dealing with emails, documenting things and also sending students homework and then downloading answers, and giving feedback – with colleagues we feel overworked and overwhelmed. (UK)***

***It's difficult to operate from home and compete for space/time/energy with spouse and child. Windows to produce video/audio materials don't often coincide with quiet periods and energy/concentration levels. (USA)***

Some teachers do mention, however, that the positive side of this is that they have become more creative and resourceful, especially with regards to designing materials for language learning.

***I've found myself being more creative with my lesson planning and materials. But everything takes much longer to prepare as it feels it needs to be so visual, clear and varying in pace. (Italy)***

These concerns are echoed by freelancers whose lifestyle had to change drastically as a result of the pandemic.

***The impact has been mostly physical and emotional more so than practical, but it is mainly because I've gone from a very active lifestyle visiting various clients in various cities to sitting in the same space with the same environment/equipment day after day. It's incredibly taxing and draining. (Japan)***

Increased workload – especially computer-based – and the steep learning curve transitioning to a new modality seem to have caused serious distress to some teachers, who repeatedly mention feeling inadequate, worried and exhausted. However, the silver lining for them seems to be collegial support and daily help from one another.

***Harsh effects on our psychology due to the workload...long hours in front of a PC and long hours of class preparation. And anxiety not to be able to have full control of the lesson as I used to but I'm grateful for the continuous, daily exchange of opinions I have with my colleagues. (Greece)***

***Mental health is the biggest issue for me right now. I'm absolutely exhausted and I feel like no matter what I do, it is never enough. Not enough for me, as I would like to give my students much more, for the school that is always demanding something new, and not enough for the parents that have no idea about what they're doing and they blame the school and teachers for that. (Brazil)***

Additionally, teachers mention that pressures and criticism from parents have added to this feeling of anxiety and stress. Admittedly, the role of parents has been repeatedly emerging in the data as interfering with teachers' experiences. However, considering the setting that online learning takes



place in, this is in a way understandable, as students are learning from home and so the parents have more access to and responsibility for providing the right conditions for students' learning.

***Parents should stop overwhelming teachers with complaints. (Brazil)***

***Parents complain about the time they spend helping their children with online learning and they also complain about the time their children spend online. (Greece)***

However, not all references to parents are negative and teachers seem to acknowledge that parents were not used to assuming such responsibilities and they were also stressed and overworked.

***The parents are stressed having to pay the school and having to help their kids at home. There is so much going on that everybody is overwhelmed and not thinking clearly. (Belgium)***

***Parents do not have the time to work with their kids. They are tired, unemployed, badly paid, have to work more hours, need time for themselves, not to mention problematic families. (Greece)***

All in all, there is evidence from some participants that their wellbeing may have been negatively affected as a result of the transition to online teaching. It is not clear, however, whether this stems from the switch of modality (from face-to-face to online) or the lack of adequate preparation, training and support. Perhaps above all, the pandemic itself generates both uncertainty and stress and, as a result, conclusions on the real causes of stress are difficult to draw from the current data.

Finally, an extra factor contributing to the above seems to be the state of persistent insecurity that some ELT sectors faced even before the pandemic (e.g. low wages, declining working conditions) which seems to have worsened during the crisis. This theme has been included in the section 'leadership' which can be found below.

## 6.4 Leadership

Leadership was a recurring theme generated by those who answered the qualitative question in part B. Participants were keen to highlight that there were significant issues mainly with regards to school authorities, ministries of education and school

systems. There were references to leadership on a micro-level too (managers, administrators etc) but these seemed to be less frequent.

More specifically, the respondents seem to have mixed feelings with regards to the effects of leadership on teachers' experiences during the first phase of the pandemic with many of them expressing a negative effect on teaching experiences and some acknowledging leaders' effort and support.

### 6.4.1 A state of unpreparedness

To begin with, there is important criticism about the lack of investment in adequate technology integration before Covid-19 with regards to pedagogy, infrastructure and staff training. This perceived inadequacy to cope with the demands of online teaching seems to have impacted negatively on teachers' experiences during the first months of the transition.

***My school should have been doing this 5-10 years ago. There has been no need to innovate as they were very comfortable, thriving and suited to the status quo. (UK)***

***Our institution had invested in providing the technology (LMS, etc.), but had not invested as much in faculty development, online curriculum development, or even in planning. (Canada)***

***It's so stressful, they just threw both us and children into online teaching, while at school even the use of mobile phones was forbidden. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)***

***Our school did not get organized, so the students and teachers did not know what to expect or how to divide their time. Other schools were much better organized. (Israel)***

***The management flaws that were bubbling and the school's setup have had a lot of light shed on it. It has made me want to leave my organisation...there was no contingency/emergency plan. (UK)***

Some of them even suggest that there have always been issues with leadership, but these have just been exacerbated during the pandemic.

***The problems that existed in f2f classes (large classes, unrealistic expectations, clueless leadership) have been exacerbated by the transition. (Israel)***

***Authorities were caught with their metaphorical pants down. (Malta)***

## 6.4.2 Management and support

Other issues emerging from the data are feelings of insecurity generated by the institution as well as unreasonable expectations regarding teachers' performance, technology provision and time. This seems to have caused stress, pressure and frustration in some of them.

***There has been a shift from emergency lessons and doing what we can to a push for delivering lessons of a certain standard despite none of the teaching staff having experience in online teaching. This is incredibly frustrating! (Italy)***

***At the beginning I was positive and I actually liked teaching online. But then my coordinator started to ask for live classes, which is impossible for me since I live in a rural area in México and I don't have a good internet, and I started to feel the pressure. (Mexico)***

***Schools have been putting a lot of pressure on teachers due to drop outs, it seems like it is the teacher's fault the reason why students aren't attending the lessons or dropping out of the course. It makes teachers stressed and even more anxious! (Brazil)***

***Time limits need to be respected regarding teaching time as well as preparation time. These limits were not respected during the transition, and continue not to be respected by my employer. (Greece).***

A segment in the data also refers to being closely monitored when teaching, either via recordings or entering the virtual classes without notice. This seems to add an extra layer of stress to how teachers feel.

***Teachers feel constantly monitored as lessons can be recorded at all times or visited by an employer. (UK)***

***Stress from managers trying to micro manage the teaching environment online while we are all in lockdown has not been helpful. (New Zealand)***

As mentioned earlier, all this does not concern all the respondents as some of those who answered the qualitative question acknowledge both the pedagogical and technical support their institutions provided.

***Our academic managers have been wonderful and very supportive. In fact I think they are going through lots of pressure and given massive work to do. (UK)***

***I received a PC provided by my institution with all necessary software vpn etc. My personal equipment would make it much more difficult. (Cyprus)***

***I mostly self-organized my training via free webinars, but our school had Zoom sessions to answer some questions. (Portugal)***

Additionally, despite a relatively low representation of leaders (only 10.5% of the respondents were academic managers and language school owners), there are mentions of their own pressures, mainly generated by how ministries of education and governments have handled the crisis. Individual language school owners even report that they were not considered when decisions were made, and this created clashes between language schools' and state schools' timetables and workload.

***The ministry of education has left state school teachers to schedule their classes in the afternoon or early evening which has created conflicts with my classes and some of my students have to exit the platform to attend their physics or maths classes in their Greek school. (Language school owner, Greece)***

***State schools have been assigning students with so much work. We are an additional language school and we have pressures from parents and so we have decided to cancel the exams altogether. (Small school owner, Slovakia)***

***There was not enough guidance or support from the government, and this created chaos in our school. (School administrator, Spain)***

## 6.4.3 Persistent insecurity and precarious work conditions

Some teachers report that their health and financial security were not given adequate consideration during the handling of the crisis. These seem to largely depend on government leadership although mentions of individual institutions are made too. These concerns reflect perhaps the precarious work conditions that some ELT workers have traditionally faced (Walsh, 2019) and may not be a result of the shift to online teaching and the pandemic itself.



***There didn't seem to be a lot of thought and consideration for our physical health. We were asked to continue working right up until the government lockdown and we had to still take part in large physical meetings pre-lockdown even as the scale and danger of CV19 was clear. Also, the unceremonious 'sacking' the week before the furlough announcement was HEAVY psychologically. (UK)***

***Teachers were "temporarily" (but indefinitely) laid off on 12 March, and are now reliant on unemployment benefits, even as a certain amount of online teaching is expected. (Ireland)***

In some contexts (mainly in Latin America) teachers report extreme tough conditions, insecurity and lower wages due to the transition online but these seem to stem from the financial impact of the pandemic on the institution, not from the school management itself. In fact, there are mentions that some management maintained a very supportive attitude towards staff.

***Parents are sending letters to private schools asking for a 50% discount. Manager has told teachers that this will impact our salaries. Totally depressing. (Ecuador)***

***I was sick from March 6, until the 26th, and even if I presented my medical certificates, the schools didn't pay me for the sick days. English schools should be more supervised, teachers are disposable assets for them. (Brazil)***

***There is a very supportive attitude from the management in our Institution. (Brazil)***

A recurring theme in the data (5.2% of those who answered the question, 35 participants in total) concerns non-tenured teachers in Mexico, who report that the increased expectations, extremely low wages and lack of connectivity have made their job increasingly difficult during the pandemic. As mentioned earlier, these problems may have existed in this ELT context pre-pandemic and perhaps were exacerbated during it.

***Not tenured teachers in Mexico haven't been paid since January. How can I get a better cellphone or laptop or better internet to teach online?***

***In Mexico It's been a crazy experience – EFL teachers have to keep teaching to cover the content of the school year. They have to send evidence of their work to get paid. Not only lesson plans but actual proof that students are working online or that we are reaching out to students that don't have internet connection. We are not tenured and have no benefits, social security or health insurance and get paid 3 USD per hour.***

All in all, leadership is an area that generated mixed feelings among the language teachers who participated in this research, but the following considerations need to be taken into account before conclusions are made:

1. In line with the study's scope, the overwhelming majority of the respondents were teachers or trainers while school leaders were not as well represented. Considering that only 10.5% held a leadership position (e.g., academic managers, owners of language schools) and there were no more senior directors, educational authorities or decision makers in the sample, there might have been a wider range of views in this area if these voices had been more represented.
2. One should not underestimate the extraordinary demands that the massive scale of the Covid-19 outbreak and its sheer unpredictability have placed on leaders both on a macro level (e.g. educational authorities and systems) and micro level (e.g. managers, language school owners). For example, a report on language schools worldwide (Kiddle et al., 2020) shows that directors of studies worked significantly more hours during Covid-19 and their work involved more multitasking (e.g. tech troubleshooting for teachers and students, teaching due to lower student numbers and "reduced staffing") (p. 9).

For these reasons, this part of the report can be considered as a snapshot of how leadership might have affected language teachers' experiences at this particular moment in time, but more research is needed to inform deeper understandings on leadership and management during Covid-19, e.g. how did educational authorities support school leaders to manage the crisis? What pressures did school leaders encounter during the transition?

## 6.5 Students' learning experiences (from the teachers' perspective)

There are mixed feelings about students' learning experiences as a result of the shift to online instruction with some teachers expressing concerns about students' challenges learning remotely and others being positive about the potential. Two sub-themes emerged from the data, namely learning conditions and skills, and young learners and teenagers.

### 6.5.1 Learning conditions and skills

There are various contextual factors emerging from the data that, according to the teachers, seem to impact on students' online learning experiences; these include insufficient digital skills, lack of learner autonomy, ineffective study spaces, increased workload for students, and parents not providing adequate support in creating the conditions for learning from home. There are also those who argue that students miss the physical classroom and the presence of their learning community.

**Adolescents in this country seem often less aware or confident when it comes to setting their own learning targets and priorities in their studies especially at times of distress. (Greece)**

**Their parents go up and down doing their chores without taking into account how important it is to let their kids learn and focus on what they do. (Greece)**

**Some students are already very stressed. They feel uncomfortable during the classes because they don't have a proper place at home. Their families listen to music, watch TV or observe them while they are in classes that's why they feel bad. (Argentina)**

**The students have said that they find online teaching impersonal and incomplete. The physical presence of people and close proximity of individuals can never be replaced. (Turkey)**

Also, a recurring concern in the data is that students take their online lessons less seriously or are unfamiliar with proper online etiquette (e.g. attending in their pyjamas or not turning off their mic), something that seems to interfere with both the learning and teaching experience.

**Most students don't distinguish between their private life and studies (they appear in pyjamas, unbrushed, sleepy). Sometimes students forget to switch off their microphones, so all participants can hear unwanted sounds. The quality of online teaching/learning has declined. (Russia)**

However, there are those who believe that students' experiences are largely affected by how well they have adapted to the new reality, pointing out that not all students are unengaged or less interested. Some even say that students who were reticent or less engaged in the face-to-face classroom are now showing a better level of involvement.

**Some of my students have adapted well and are keen to make the most of their online lessons – they may even prefer them – they are engaged and open and I am confident with them. Others just click through the lessons without engaging, therefore I feel unaware of their progress (if any). (Spain)**

**There are some students who were not so comfortable participating in classroom discussions and are now more engaged in online classes. (Cyprus)**

Some reasons for these disparities might be whether or not students had access to quality devices and good bandwidth as well as how supportive the environment they were learning from was. Teachers repeatedly highlight the role of parents, a factor that was beyond the scope of this research but may need more investigation, especially when it comes to young learners and teenagers learning from home.

### 6.5.2 Young Learners and Teenagers

The data showed some contradictions with regards to young learners switching to online learning. While the majority of educators who referred to this age group believe that it is difficult to engage them online, others report that young learners have responded surprisingly well to online activities when these are interactive.

**Personally, I was more afraid in the beginning of how to make the young learners engaged in an online lesson but surprisingly they tend to enjoy it more than all others perhaps because they are fond of interactive activities. (UAE)**

The data also reflects concerns about extended screen time, lack of age-appropriate materials, young learners' difficulty focusing on the online lesson, lack

of parental support, increased workload from their state schools as well as e-safety issues. E-safety is also a cause of concern when it comes to breakout rooms and whether they are safe to use with young learners.

***I don't feel able to continue my YL lessons. Young learners must be aided throughout by an adult; they need support and monitoring and I need resources to continue with this. (Italy)***

***Lots of Online Safety issues have arisen within families and they see online lessons as a source of discomfort in their household. (India)***

***Parents of younger students have to be engaged too. And this is not always their favourite thing. (Greece)***

***Some of my learners are too young to place into breakout rooms because you can't monitor them. (UK)***

Teachers also say that teenagers may cite technology problems to avoid attending or participating in the lesson, with teachers feeling unable to challenge them or find a solution to this.

***My teenagers say they have connection issues or that their camera and microphones don't work to avoid being asked questions. I have no means to check this and parents don't seem to help. (Israel)***

## 6.6 Opportunities

### 6.6.1 Attitudes towards technology, professional development and self-efficacy

Despite the issues mentioned above, the findings indicate that the transition provided opportunities to language teachers to step out of their comfort zones and upskill themselves. Educators showed remarkable determination to adapt to new teaching modalities through trial and error and in doing so they enhanced their digital literacies, self-efficacy, and future career prospects. They also highlighted that this experience changed their perceptions of technology and its potential in the language classroom. Perhaps more importantly, educators felt that the pandemic acted as a catalyst for professional development; for instance, it helped even those resistant to change and growth to reflect on their professional development and realise that they should have embraced digital learning long before the pandemic forced them to. It also encouraged them to want to evolve into 21st century educators.

***I never imagined that I would teach online. I thought that it was a reality far away from me. But all of a sudden I was getting prepared to teach online and enjoying the process. A new teacher was born. (Brazil)***

***Online teaching is something I can now add to my CV. (USA)***

Similarly, it helped those who were actively engaged with their professional development before the pandemic feel self-confident about their proactiveness and attitudes as teachers.

***I was prepared because I have taught online before and I have sought out PD opportunities and I had worked to prepare my students with digital skills but many of my colleagues were not as well-prepared for this shift. (Canada)***

Some of them said that in the long run the use of technology will save them time as they will be able to reuse or do things faster. They even started thinking about blending or flipping the classroom when lessons go back to the physical classroom, by getting students to accomplish certain tasks asynchronously (e.g. listening, vocabulary quizzes, videos) and using face-to-face instruction for interaction and active learning.

***I will continue to use asynchronous activities (including collaborative work, discussion forums etc) and do most synchronous activities in the f2f classroom. I believe that the blended approach if done well is the one that best optimizes both the online and f2f environments. (Spain)***

### 6.6.2 Supportive language teaching community

Several educators mentioned how the teaching community came together to support the transition. From work colleagues to online communities via social media and from publishers to teacher associations, the language teaching community was a source of professional development, resilience and inspiration for teachers during these troubled times.

***Overall, I was quite impressed and most grateful for every teaching material I have come across and have managed to introduce into my teaching. (Romania)***

***I really appreciate the contact with the publishers, and my colleagues from school and social media. They are my support network and I also learn about new resources and software from them. (Slovakia)***

However, some friction emerges in the data between those educators who moved online and those who are reported to be less engaged in the new teaching mode. Individual respondents (n=4) report that there has been a conscious effort from less tech-savvy state school teachers to discredit the work of language schools, leaving them considerably challenged and unappreciated.

***There is an ongoing campaign to discredit those who are teaching online as doing something worthless and that they only do so to collect tuition fees. This is just an attempt to hide their own lack of interest in teaching online as there are state school teachers who have never been involved in using any kind of technology in their classroom. (Greece)***

### 6.6.3 Looking ahead

Several educators make interesting references to the future of digital learning in ELT. They admit that both the use of technology and online learning are here to stay after the pandemic because educators are more confident and tech savvy.

***We will definitely have online classes after the pandemic. (UK)***

***I learnt how to teach groups online (previously I taught only 1-2-1 online). We will definitely have online classes (not all) after this lockdown is over. (Ukraine)***

***It's been a good chance to experiment with digital learning possibilities (e.g. automatic marking of quizzes) and I can continue with these elements after the Covid-19 closure. (Greece)***

However, some pointed out that more thorough work on quality digital learning needs to be applied especially in the form of teacher training and the pedagogical and technical preparedness of the institution. They believe that while there has been understanding during the crisis with regards to gaps or inadequacies, more sustainable digital teaching models will need to be applied post-pandemic.

***We've adapted at breakneck speed and put up with a lot to help our students, but once this is all over, change needs to be implemented, this can't just be brushed off and become a "remember that time..." conversation point. (Ireland)***

***Once all this is over schools have to invest in online teaching training. (Malta)***







# 7

## Summary and discussion

The findings of this research show that language educators worldwide exhibited remarkable resilience and innovation during the first phases of their shift to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). Through trial and error, they showed determination as they stepped out of their comfort zones and adapted to new teaching modalities.

***Overall it has been a positive experience as both teachers and students have shown a determination to carry on and succeed in a time of uncertainty. (Malta)***

In doing so they enabled continuity of language instruction, enhanced their digital literacies and 21st century skills, and boosted their self-efficacy and future career prospects. Interestingly, they highlight that this experience changed their perceptions of technology and its potential in the language classroom. It also helped them to reflect on their professional development and realise that they should have embraced digital learning long before the pandemic forced them to.

***Forced to push boundaries, we proved that it has always been possible but we were afraid to modernise. (UK)***

***It made me rethink my teaching habits. Teaching in a “real world” classroom can be made too comfortable and people may have a tendency to stop growing. (Brazil)***

Some of them have even started thinking about blending or flipping the classroom after the pandemic. For example, they are thinking of using the asynchronous mode to deliver certain content (e.g. listening, vocabulary quizzes, videos) and the face-to-face mode for interaction and active learning.

Despite the opportunities, this process was not without challenges for most teachers. To begin with, the overwhelming majority (91%) of the 1102 participants had never taught online before the

pandemic and 83% of them did not receive substantial training when they moved online. Considering the short time frame they had to transition online (less than a week for 61% of them), most either self-organised their own training via online webinars, peer support social media groups, and reading, or had less than 5 hours of formal training via their institution (mainly on how the technologies work). This inadequate preparation, along with the reportedly increased expectations from stakeholders (management, students, parents), seems to have affected language educators' experiences negatively.

***Schools expect great classes and materials but they seem to forget this situation is very stressful and new, and we are expected to have the same performance as before. (Brazil)***

***I don't think it's enough to have teachers go through online teaching on their own and expect understanding and being able to use it in the classroom. (UK)***

The literature seems to confirm that this was the case for many teachers over the first six months of ERT; educators who had never taught online before were asked almost overnight to 'become both designers and tutors' of online learning (Rapanta et al., 2020 p. 926), often without expert support and ongoing guidance (García & Weiss, 2020; Lee, 2020).

Given the lack of infrastructure and preparation for online instruction, many language educators resorted to 'quick fixes' using either the technological tools available at their institutions or the ones recommended via webinars and resources online (Moser et al., 2021; Thompson & Lodge, 2020). Indeed, the analysis of the data shows that teachers, despite the rapid switch to online modalities, adapted pretty fast to the platforms they used and had an impressive array of technological tools at their disposal (see Part A). However, this tools-oriented approach may not provide teachers with “pedagogical hints on how, when, and why to use

each of the tools” (Rapanta et al., 2020, p. 927) to assist language learning. For example, teachers may have had the technologies to create interactive vocabulary quizzes, but some were not entirely sure how to use them for students’ vocabulary development. There was also a perceived difficulty in using non-language-specific technologies for language purposes.

***There is no lack of tools, but most tools are NOT suitable for EFL/ESL contexts, nor lend themselves to formative assessment. (Israel)***

It should be noted however, that this emphasis on tools does not seem to have started during the pandemic but rather reflected institutional approaches before it. For example, evidence from this research shows that institutions had already invested in software and hardware provision without the necessary consideration of the pedagogical, curriculum and organisational adaptations that these technologies would require.

***Our institution had invested in providing the technology (LMS, etc.), but had not invested as much in faculty development, online curriculum development, or even in planning and of roles related to managing, developing, curating online platforms and content. (Canada)***

Other pedagogical concerns emerging throughout the analysis were related to student engagement. Teachers said that synchronous online classes became more teacher-centred and less engaging for the students. They also repeatedly mentioned students’ digital distractions and lack of engagement with the asynchronous materials.

***My classes became less interactive, sometimes even boring if compared to face-to-face. (Moldova)***

***I feel as if I have to do more talking and the lesson cannot be as student centred as I would like it to be. (Greece)***

***Not all of my learners do all the materials I send them. So they don’t practice the vocabulary or structures I have taught them (virtually) and therefore continuity is difficult. (Italy)***

Rapanta et al. (2020) argue that for online learning to be engaging, different pedagogical decisions in terms of instructional design need to apply but the

literature and the findings of this research show limited adaptations to instructional design during the shift from face-to-face to online modalities.

***There was no adaptation to how students can learn online. Students were just offered online classes as a solution to keep practicing English. (Brazil)***

This was in a way understandable because teachers and managers did not have background knowledge in online instructional design (Moser et al., 2021) and optimal adaptations would be unrealistic. As a result, many of them opted to use the materials and pedagogies that they would use anyway in their face-to-face classroom (Rapanta et al., 2020).

Worryingly, there is little evidence in the literature that digital learning specialists and researchers had significant participation in the decision making (Thompson & Lodge, 2020). The findings of this research also show that the majority of the respondents lacked ongoing specialised support, often due to overwhelming demand for and shortage of relevant expertise. For example, while they point out that they were supported with non-interactive class materials (PDFs, worksheets, PowerPoint presentations), technical troubleshooting, and peer training (often by colleagues or managers who were equally novice), they highlight that they lacked the support that professionals in online learning could provide.

***The principal is trying to learn and then he teaches and helps us. (Ukraine)***

***The one-to-one specialist is for technical support, not for teaching. (UK)***

This suggests that both the decision making about the implementation of online learning and the ongoing teacher support may need to take a more pedagogically informed approach in the future.

In terms of learner autonomy, the findings of this research show that language teachers realised that autonomy is not a byproduct of moving online. Students may be fluent users of technology, but this does not mean that they know how to learn online.

***I feel that moving things online, although it should make the learner less dependent on the instructor, actually puts more stress on the instructor interacting with each individual student. (Australia)***

***The coronavirus outbreak and spread made me realize that not all my students have basic knowledge on how to use technology. (Mexico)***

Indeed, the literature confirms that students need training and support to develop the cognitive, digital and intellectual skills that will enable them to take ownership of their digital learning (Carrier et al., 2017; McRae, 2020). However, it would seem rather unreasonable to place this responsibility on the teachers, considering that 83% of them were not adequately trained before moving online, and they received limited ongoing specialised support after they had settled online. Another area of concern was a relative lack of access to reliable technology (bandwidth and devices), especially for students. Teachers were clear in highlighting that this disrupted the teaching experience and measures should be taken to ensure better technological provision. While this was widely recognised as a temporary issue (e.g. bandwidth infrastructure could not handle the sudden increase in demand for fast internet; a household was not prepared to respond to bandwidth and devices needs for all members working/learning from home), for some teachers – especially in places with low connectivity – the reasons reflected existing digital divides mostly associated with poverty and location.

***Not all students have computers or internet at home. Sometimes their parents don't have enough income to eat. (India)***

***I live in a rural area in Mexico and I don't have a good internet. (Mexico)***

Indeed, while the findings of this research did not show major issues of access to technology, research on the impact of Covid-19 on digital inequalities points out that certain groups were more likely to be digitally excluded than others; common factors included region (rural vs. urban areas) and socioeconomic status (UK Parliament, 2020; eLearning Africa & EdTech Hub, 2020).

Moving on to teaching experiences specific to language teaching, most participants seem to perceive the lack of physical proximity and embodiment as obstacles to teaching a language effectively. Teachers believe that language teaching is a communicative act that is considerably aided by the physical proximity and kinaesthetic features afforded in the face-to-face classroom. They fear that lack of this affordance can affect authenticity, communication and bonding among class members.

***Learning and teaching a language is not only based on speaking, listening and watching but also on a direct contact i.e face-to-face teaching includes aspects that cannot be underestimated. Your face through a camera is not you. (Italy)***

***There is no technology that will ever replace the teacher-student contact in the classroom. Face expressions, laughs and natural interaction. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)***

These perceptions correlate with Hazaea et al.'s (2021) EFL participants, who also believed that the online modality during ERT lacked the authenticity and communication opportunities that form the basis of contemporary ELT approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Learning. It could be argued, however, that while there are certain pedagogical applications that can be facilitated by embodiment (e.g. kinaesthetic activities, Total Physical Response, mingling), authenticity and communication are not necessarily byproducts of physical proximity. Because face-to-face educators are accustomed to identifying engagement through embodiment, online modalities are often viewed as less engaging. However, White (2020) warns that this perception is false: just because someone is looking at you doesn't mean that they are paying attention or that they are engaged with their learning. Rapanta et al. (2020, p. 930) recommend that rather than trying to replicate "the behavioural cues we are used to in face-to-face classrooms", teachers should take advantage of the interaction patterns that are afforded online. Essentially, instead of trying to compensate for the loss of physical proximity, there should be more focus on how presence can support learning (White, 2020). Indeed, long before the pandemic, Garrison et al. (2000) had emphasised the role of presence in online learning, pointing out that it is the social, cognitive and teaching presences that facilitate learning, not necessarily the physical one.

Another obstacle to teachers' experiences was a perceived lack of language-specific materials and resources as well as the their participants' difficulty in coping without them.

***It is not easy to find the appropriate language materials and adjust them to the needs of online language students. (Greece)***

This correlates with Moser et al. (2021), who point out that much of the pandemic-related resources and technologies were rather generic and not specifically developed to support language development.



Without high-quality relevant examples of lessons and tools, language educators were rather less likely to rely on best practices.

Perceptions on the teaching of different language skills also emerged. The qualitative analysis of the data (Part B) indicates that teachers find listening and speaking the most difficult skills to teach online mainly due to problematic sound and compromised interaction patterns.

***It's very difficult to develop speaking and listening in a zoom connection with 12 students, noises, Wi-Fi pauses, and audio or camera problems. (Argentina)***

However, it was highlighted that reading and writing are the most difficult skills to assess online; this is because students can easily check vocabulary or even copy chunks from the internet and pass them off as their own and as a result assessing these skills can be less straightforward.

In general, assessment (both formative and summative) seems to be posing significant challenges for language teachers who fear that search engines and translation software can give a false impression of students' learning. These concerns relate both to exams and ongoing evaluation of students' performance.

***Assessment is the hardest piece of this puzzle. Academic dishonesty, plagiarism, translation have all occurred in just the first 2 months already. (Canada)***

***The speed with which students can retrieve info online promotes false feedback with a severe effect on remedial work. (Greece)***

The data captures feelings of uncertainty regarding assessment guidelines, criteria and standardisation procedures specific to online modalities, with most teachers admitting that they have been asked to use the same criteria they used for face-to-face assessment. While there is some evidence that institutions were experimenting with more online-friendly assessment solutions (see section on Assessment), the majority of the participants were keen to highlight that they were not in a position to assess whether students' learning needs and curricular aims had been met. Clearly, this is a serious concern. If we accept that assessment is the "bridge between teaching and learning" (Ofsted, 2021, n.p.) then, moving forward, education systems may need to identify it as the next priority. This will enable teachers to better evaluate both their

teaching practices and students' learning and as a result, make informed decisions about instruction and curriculum planning.

An age group that emerged as raising additional concerns for language teachers was that of young learners. While pupils seem to have shown surprising resilience and adaptability, teachers felt that their progression relied significantly on adult support. Ofsted (2021) reports that, even when online instruction is in pupils' mother tongue, it still requires significant parental involvement because pupils have not yet developed sufficient reading skills to effectively access written content online. However, this reliance on parental support, apart from the practical difficulties it created for teachers (i.e., parents did not always have the time or skills to provide support), interfered with assessment as well. For example, teachers were not sure how much help students were getting from parents in completing work and what the impact of this would be on students' real learning.

***Younger students are heavily helped by parents for their work. What will we actually assess? The students or the parents? (Greece)***

Concerns were also raised about young learners' e-safety, extended screen time and lack of age-appropriate materials, all of which indicate the need for a more contextualised and age-appropriate approach to online learning for young learners.

Finally, teachers' wellbeing during ERT seems to be a real concern for some respondents. The rapid move to online teaching and the steep learning curve – often without significant specialised support – have increased many teachers' workload and levels of stress. Additionally, increased expectations and criticism from either the institution or the parents are reported as causing a variety of negative emotions to teachers (anxiety, stress, sadness, inadequacy).

***I'm absolutely exhausted and I feel like no matter what I do, it is never enough. (Brazil)***

According to Ofsted (2021, n.p.) teacher wellbeing seems to be "an ongoing, if not increasing, challenge" and it may need to take a more central role in future decision-making interventions. MacIntyre et al. (2020) also recommend that it should be included in language teacher educational programmes as a fundamental professional competence. It should be noted, however, that there is evidence in this research that wellbeing issues

associated with increased teachers' workload may become less severe as teachers develop their experience and online skills. Teachers also suggest that the use of technology may actually save them time in the future as they will be reusing the materials and software.

In conclusion, ERT proved to be a transformative experience for language teachers, affording innovative opportunities and daunting challenges. Covid-19 seems to have served as a catalyst for them to explore instructional alternatives, experiment with new techniques and reflect on their teaching practices. It is hoped that the lessons learned during this creative phase will inform more robust and pedagogically sustainable approaches to online teaching in the future.





# 8

## Conclusions, recommendations and directions

Despite the overwhelming challenges that language teachers experienced during Covid-19, this research report has shown that the pandemic has been an extraordinary time for learning and growth for language education. Teachers, but also trainers, managers, and students, have exhibited remarkable determination, adaptability and resilience as they have been forced to adapt to new modes of teaching.

When the effects of the pandemic eventually decline, face-to-face language instruction is likely to reassume the most dominant role in language education. However, it is critical that the lessons learned during the crisis are not forgotten but are used to re-think and re-envision language teaching, learning, and assessment. This section will therefore focus on recommendations and directions in two main areas:

First, there is clear evidence in this report and elsewhere (Gacs et al., 2020) that online and blended language learning will endure after the pandemic. However, it would be wrong to assume that what has been improvised or learned ‘on the job’ during Covid-19 was necessarily pedagogically sound for online language instruction. Arguably, if we want to move towards high-quality online learning, we need to become less reliant on emergency practices, and start developing more informed and solid approaches which for the purpose of this report will be referred to as *Sustainable Online Language Education* (SOLE).

Additionally, there are some indications that the world may be entering a new phase in which pandemics will become a major and constant threat. For example, scientists stress that climate change may directly influence the environmental conditions that allow viruses to flourish (Beyer et al., 2021) and highlight the need to tackle environmental issues, both as a means of saving the planet and for addressing the threat of more pandemics in the future (Moore, 2021). It is therefore important that language education has solid foundations in place to

ensure an effective response to any such future crisis.

The following subsections explore how informal and formal teacher education as well as student digital literacies and assessment can contribute to achieving these goals.

### 8.1 In-service professional development and teacher support

Despite teachers’ remarkable professional growth during Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), this research has shown that teaching languages online is not the same as teaching languages face-to-face and that teachers need a new set of skills and approaches to teach effectively online. As Compton (2009) warned long before the pandemic, “The assumption that a teacher who is good at teaching in a face-to-face class can easily jump in and teach in this new medium is a common myth” (p. 75). These skills go beyond technical competences to include community building, as well as multimodal socialisation, participation, and collaboration skills for language teaching.

Indeed, many of the challenges teachers faced during Covid-19 teaching (e.g. perceived lack of authenticity, difficulty engaging students in communicative language practice) would be easier to address if they had a better understanding of how and when to create opportunities for interaction online, how to check students’ learning despite the lack of visual clues, how to create a coherent and connected online community and how to evaluate the affordances and constraints of various technologies and resources.

Understandably, over the first phases of ERT, much of the professional development (PD) that occurred was aimed at helping teachers to become familiar with the technologies and platforms available. However, for language teaching to move away from ERT to more robust online and blended/ hybrid education



models, a more comprehensive and language-specific approach to PD is required. Such PD presupposes the development of teachers' digital literacies but places less emphasis on how tools work and more on their pedagogical use for language teaching. More specifically, teachers and managers should have a good understanding of:

- how the use of technology can mediate or enhance online language teaching objectives;
- how principles of online learning can inform the instructional design of language courses and materials;
- how meaningful interaction can be facilitated in synchronous and asynchronous modalities;
- how learner-centred and collaborative language learning can be promoted in online or blended/hybrid environments.

In terms of support mechanisms, the findings of this research indicate that many different innovative approaches arose over the first phases of Covid-19 teaching; these mechanisms now need to be maintained, reinforced and systematised:

*Institutionally organised mechanisms:* assigning buddies, team teaching, tech support, drop-in sessions, WhatsApp groups, teacher and peer online observations.

*Collegial support:* collaborating with teachers working in the same school by sharing materials and resources; getting together to exchange ideas, discuss techniques and learn from each other.

*Communities of practice:* webinars and conferences freely available online (e.g., British Council TeachingEnglish); knowledge communities on social media (e.g. Facebook groups, discussions on Twitter); learning technologies special interest groups (e.g. IATEFL LTSIG, BALEAP TELSIG).

## 8.2 Teacher preparation programmes

Interestingly, the literature seems to suggest that many of the pedagogical inadequacies that have been exposed during ERT may reflect a broader gap in the way language education has been approaching digital learning for years. For example, nearly two decades ago, Kessler (2005, as cited in Compton, 2009) found that most language teachers seemed to gain their digital learning knowledge from informal rather than formal instruction; according to Hubbard (2008) the reason for this was a shortage of specialised digital language learning teacher educators and modules in teacher preparation programmes.

This report overwhelmingly confirmed that qualified language teachers are graduating from teacher preparation programmes with little or no knowledge of how to use technology for language teaching. This suggests that language education systems will need to identify digital language learning as a key priority in both teacher preparation and certification programmes. More specifically, in order to enable a more pedagogically informed approach to digital and online learning:

- undergraduate, postgraduate and teacher certification programmes need to integrate specialised modules into their courses;
- colleges and universities should develop certification programmes in Technology Enhanced Learning and Sustainable Online Language Education (SOLE) so that schools and institutions can hire teachers with this specific set of knowledge and skills.

In order for these courses to provide meaningful learning outcomes, it is essential that they are designed and taught by teacher educators with extensive theoretical and practical expertise in digital language learning, rather than those who are just proficient with technology. During the pandemic, perhaps unsurprisingly, this void was filled by self-proclaimed experts in digital learning, technology vendors, or companies offering opinion-based, rather than evidence-based, digital solutions (Rapanta et al., 2020; Thompson & Lodge, 2020). However, if we wish to better prepare the next generation of language teachers, digital language learning must become a prominent element of teacher preparation programmes.

## 8.3 Students' digital literacies

Many of the challenges that teachers shared in this study seem to stem from students' limited digital literacies, including difficulty assessing the credibility of online content, synthesising online information into their own original argument, managing digital distractions and dealing with e-safety issues in a resilient way.

Despite popular assumptions, digital literacies do not just refer to the skills for using computers but to new functional, sociocultural and transformational literacies that allow people to effectively navigate an increasingly multimodal and digital world; for example, the ability and mindset to:

- participate and collaborate online and understand different genres and codes of digital interaction;
- create and critique digital content whilst respecting copyright and authorship;

- understand the reputational implications of digital identity and being resilient to potential risks;
- assess source reliability as well as analyse and interpret information in various digital forms (e.g., text, image, sound, video).

(Mavridi, 2020)

Various digital literacy frameworks have been developed over the last decade (see Dudeney et al., 2013; Jisc, 2015; Mavridi, 2020; Sharpe & Beetham, 2010), all of which group together essential literacies for students along with guidance on how they can be integrated in the classroom. For example, Dudeney et al. (2013) provide a wealth of practical activities specific to language learning while Mavridi (2020) proposes a variation of Task-Based Language Teaching (Richards and Rodgers, 2001) as a useful approach for embedding digital literacies into the language classroom.

To conclude, as online and blended learning relies on the ability to read, listen, view, comprehend and critique complex information online, embedding these literacies into language education is becoming increasingly important. Like every innovation, this will require a systematic approach involving the grouping and cooperation of various stakeholders in language education: policy makers, academic managers and teacher educators as well as the teachers themselves.

## 8.4 Online assessment

While the assessment approaches that emerged from this study were interim measures and institutions may have moved on to more online-friendly solutions, the major challenges that teachers were faced with in this area need close attention. In particular, institutions found it difficult to administer exams that maintained the academic integrity of the assessment by preventing cheating and ensuring effective invigilation. Seemingly, those struggling the most were institutions whose assessment relied exclusively on exams rather than those who had already employed formative and alternative ways of assessment.

There is an urgent need for assessment guidelines, criteria, and standardisation procedures - specific to online modalities - to be re-thought, designed and implemented. The literature suggests that project based language learning or integrated performance assessments may be more suitable for online modalities than traditional achievement tests (Link & Li, 2018); however, this does not mean that more innovative forms of testing, such as open-book tests, cannot be explored and implemented. To achieve all this, it is imperative that language institutions be supported by the concerted effort of experts in assessment, digital learning and quality assurance. This will ensure that the assessment will reflect the online pedagogy of the course in a fair, consistent and accurate way.

To sum up, this research report brought language teachers' voices to the fore and explored their teaching experiences during Covid-19. In doing so, it shed light on the opportunities and challenges that occurred during the transition to online modalities and discussed what can be learned in light of this. ERT proved to be a transformative experience for language teachers, with the potential of acting as a stepping stone to more pedagogically sound online and digital instruction in the future. Hopefully, language education will not settle for emergency solutions but will instead draw on the lessons learned from this creative period to move forward. This should involve a more comprehensive dialogue around both research and practice that will require the active participation of all language education stakeholders, including the teachers themselves.







# 9

## Limitations

Although the large sample size (n=1102) had the obvious advantage of providing more data to work with, a limitation of this study was the uneven distribution of the population with regards to geographical representation. Almost half of the respondents were based in Europe (n=546) and more than a quarter were based in South America (n=302). North America, Asia, Africa, and Australia were less represented. More equal representation might have altered the findings, especially if there had been better representation from parts of the world with low connectivity.

Another limitation concerns the theme of leadership. As already mentioned, the findings of this research (see section 6.4) showed that leadership was an area that generated mixed feelings among teachers, especially with regards to preparedness, management of the crisis and staff support. However, these findings mainly reflect the perspective of the teachers as there were not enough school leaders' voices to compare the

findings with. Although this was beyond the scope of the study, it can be argued that the results might have been more balanced if academic managers, administrators or language school owners were more represented.

Finally, there is some disparity with regards to the methodological analysis between the quantitative and qualitative parts of this study. More specifically, while the qualitative analysis (Part B) offered in-depth insight into teachers' experiences and perceptions, the quantitative analysis (Part A) was mainly descriptive. A more in-depth statistical analysis of this part, e.g. correlation analysis (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2016), would have enabled the researcher to evaluate the relationship between two or more variables, such as the correlation between those who self-organised their own training and their satisfaction from their teaching experiences. This was beyond the scope of this research but, on reflection, it could have offered a more thorough understanding of teaching experiences.



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# Appendix

## Questionnaire

### Language teaching experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic

#### Consent form

You are invited to participate in this online survey because you work in language education as a teacher, lecturer or teacher trainer (EFL, ESL, ELT, EAP, EAL or other foreign languages). You may be working in Primary, Secondary, Further or Higher Education, a language school/ institution or be a freelancer. You teach at least a class of students/ trainees. This survey is not for one-to-one teaching.

If you have moved any of your face-to-face classes online (synchronous, asynchronous or a combination of both) in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, this survey will look at the effects this switch is having on your teaching experiences. If you have not moved your teaching online, please do not take the survey.

#### Please note:

The survey will only take 5-10 minutes to complete.

You will be asked questions about your teaching experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. There are no right or wrong answers and you can withdraw at any time if you are not comfortable answering any of the questions.

Your participation will remain completely anonymous and data will be analysed by the researcher named at the end of this form. The researcher will not be able to identify who submitted the form and the location it was submitted from.

You are kindly requested to not include any details that may identify you (email, name, name of institution, association etc).

The data will be stored securely and used only for the purposes related to remote teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic by the researcher.

This is part of a bigger research project and it will help to inform understandings about the effects of switching to remote/online delivery and the perceived impact on educators' teaching experiences.

1. I have read the guidelines and agree to take part in the survey \*

Column 1

Please, tick the box to continue

## Section 1

2. In which country are you teaching/ training now?\*

\*Please, note that 'teaching' and 'training' are used interchangeably throughout the survey

3. Which of the following best describes your main teaching job?\*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Primary school or secondary school
- Higher or further education
- Language school or institution
- I'm a freelance teacher/ trainer
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. What language do you teach?\*

*Mark only one oval.*

- English
- French
- Spanish
- German
- Chinese
- Italian
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

5. If you teach English, please choose from the fields below (tick all that apply)

*Tick all that apply.*

EFL/ ESL

EAP

ESP

EAL

Other: \_\_\_\_\_



6. How long have you been teaching overall?\*

Mark only one oval.

- Less than two years  
 2-5 years  
 6-10  
 11-20  
 More than 20 years

7. Have you moved any of your face-to-face classes online as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic? Do you teach classes of more than one student? If your answer is 'no' to any of these questions, please choose 'no' and submit the form.\*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes  
 No

8. How long have you been teaching remotely/online?\*

Mark only one oval.

- One week or less  
 2-4 weeks  
 1-6 months  
 7-11 months  
 1-3 years  
 4-5 years  
 More than 5 years  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

9. What is the average size of your online classes at the moment?\*

Mark only one oval.

- 2-5 students  
 6-10 students  
 11-18 students  
 19-25 students  
 More than 25 students

10. What age groups are your classes (tick all that apply)\*

Tick all that apply.

- Young learners  
 Teenagers  
 Young adults (18-22 year-olds)  
 Adults

## Section 2

11. What preparation time did you have to transition your face-to-face class(es) online?\*

Mark only one oval.

- Less than a week  
 1-2 weeks  
 3-4 weeks  
 1-2 months  
 More than 2 months  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

12. What mode are you teaching?\*

Mark only one oval.

- Synchronous classes (live classes)  
 Asynchronous teaching (input and resources are posted online and students send their work back)  
 Both synchronous and asynchronous  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Did you receive training in remote/online teaching before you moved your classes online?\*

Please, choose the option that best describes the training you received

Mark only one oval.

- Self-organised training through webinars, videos and articles available online  
 Less than 5 hours training provided by my institution  
 Substantial training provided by my institution  
 Informal training by a colleague  
 No training received  
 I didn't need training  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Which of the following technologies do you use with your classes? (tick all that apply)\*

Tick all that apply.

- Video conferencing platform such as Zoom, Collaborate, Skype  
 Learning Management System such as Blackboard, Moodle, Google Classroom  
 Forums for asynchronous written discussions (not in real time)

- Collaborative documents for writing such as Google docs or OneNote
- Videos made by yourself
- Videos made by others (YouTube etc or made by colleagues)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

15. Please, rate your internet connection\*

Mark only one oval.

- Very good
- Good
- Neutral
- Poor
- Very poor

16. Please, rate your personal computer (laptop or desktop)\*

If you teach from a mobile device please tick 'other' and provide details if you wish

Mark only one oval.

- Very good
- Good
- Neutral
- Poor
- Very poor
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

17. Please rate your students' connection\*

Mark only one oval.

- Very good
- Good
- Neutral
- Poor
- Very poor

18. Please rate your students' personal computer (laptop or desktop)\*

If most of your students use their mobile devices for learning, please tick 'other' and provide details if you wish

Mark only one oval.

- Very good
- Good
- Neutral
- Poor

- Very poor
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

19. What ongoing support is available from your institution to deliver remote/ online teaching? (tick all that apply)\*

If you are a freelancer, please tick N/A

Tick all that apply.

- One to one support from a digital learning specialist
- Online staff training
- Online materials (not interactive)
- Online materials (interactive)
- I don't know
- There is no ongoing support
- N/A
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

20. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your experience teaching online?\*

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

---

Very poor            Excellent

---

21. If you rated your current experience 9 or below, what can be done to improve your teaching experience? (tick all that apply)

Tick all that apply.

- More training on how to use various technologies
- More training on online teaching approaches and techniques
- Better internet and equipment
- Fewer students in the classroom
- Lighter workload
- I don't know
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

22. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your students' engagement learning online?\*

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

---

Very poor            Excellent

---

23. If you rated students' engagement 9 or below, what can be done to improve their engagement online? (tick all that apply)

*Tick all that apply.*

- Better internet and equipment
- More teacher training on how to engage students online
- Fewer students in the classroom
- More support from parents
- I don't know
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

24. On a scale of 1-10, how easy will it be to ensure continuity/ integrity of the assessment of students' learning?\*

*Mark only one oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Very difficult ○○○○○○○○○○ Very easy

25. Can you explain why? (optional)

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Section 3: This is the final section of the survey (Optional)

26. Would you like to add anything else about the effects of the Covid-19 school closure on your teaching experiences? If so, please use the space below. Your response can be as long or short as you want.

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