

**Interpretative  
Phenomenological Analysis of  
Learners' Responses  
to Emergency Remote Teaching  
During COVID 19 Confinement**  
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Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Learners' Responses  
to Emergency Remote Teaching During COVID-19 Confinement

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## Abstract

The wide scale implementation of online teaching and learning that was provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic, has never been seen before but, with the threat of war, natural disaster and disease overshadowing the present, it is plausible that it will be necessary again.

This study explores the stories of extra-curricular English language learners as they describe their lived experience of learning online as a result of national confinement measures and contact restrictions. The data is from ten adolescents who were studying English in a private academy in Catalonia. Learners with both positive and negative opinions about the online classes that were undertaken were interviewed, using an IPA approach. The CoI model (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000) was used as a foundation for the analysis of the interviews, which found that the learners' attitudes to online language learning were affected by several factors, relating to the teacher, the classes and indeed themselves.

It was concluded that, in order to foster a positive attitude to online classes, students must be provided with sufficient opportunities for interaction with both peers and teachers, without class interruption. However, online success is also contingent on learner motivation and the preferred learning style of the individual and, consequently how well they prepare themselves and their work environment for learning. The findings suggest that, to improve the online experience, efforts should be made by the teacher, in terms of the class design and execution, and the learner, by taking more responsibility for their learning by eliminating known distractions and taking advantage of unmonitored activities without losing focus.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Context of the Study

On the 14th March 2020, the Spanish authorities announced a national state of alarm and placed the country in lockdown, in an attempt to control the spread of COVID-19. With no idea how long these restrictions would last, many educational institutions made the decision to move their classes online so as to allow their course to continue with as little disruption to their students' learning as possible.

State and private schools throughout the country were also affected by the government closures. Each school dealt with the situation differently, offering varying degrees of contact and support throughout the period. For older students such as the participants in this study classes were generally not offered synchronously, as they were considered more independent and therefore able to work more autonomously. Towards the beginning of the lockdown in 2020, many students also experienced an immense workload provided by school teachers to compensate for the lack of face-to-face classes. In some cases, this made it difficult for the learners to devote time to extra-curricular activities such as English (Palau, Fuentes, Mogas and Cebrián 2021 p. 190).

Zoom became a popular video conferencing option due to the fact that it was easy to use, easy to access and provided a free plan, which included screen sharing and break out rooms, and allowed up to 100 participants for a 40-minute meeting. Following the lockdown period there was a range of reactions to distance learning demonstrated by the students. There were students who wanted to repeat the year as they felt they had not achieved the level of learning needed to progress to the next level, and others who took exams at the end of the course and achieved outstanding results. The question was raised as to why there was such disparity in how each learner was affected by the experience, even when a group of students experienced similar synchronous delivery and teaching philosophy.

## 1.2 Background Theory and Research

There is a long and complex history of the many developments and advancements concerning online learning, with "the use of Internet-related technology in education" first reaching mainstream consciousness over 25 years ago (Weller 2020, p. 11). The asynchronous courses that previously constituted many distant learning courses and largely consisted of prerecorded video presentations, PowerPoint presentations, online discussion



boards and email (Hrastinski, 2008), may seem far removed from the synchronous online classes that are now available.

The advent of synchronous online learning has come with advantages and challenges for teachers and students. Peachey (2017) suggests that advantages include more realistic visual communication (p. 142) and a wealth of tools, such as text chat and interactive whiteboards (pp. 144-145). The disadvantages discussed by Peachey (2017) include “a sense of isolation, the need for self-discipline, and developing technical literacy” (p. 142).

Chat features and collaborative tools, such as Google Docs and whiteboard features, are beneficial to learners, since they provide students with “opportunities to participate in the discussion, express opinions, and share knowledge” (Kuama and Intharaksa 2016). Additionally, chat functions can be used to send direct messages to the teacher, allowing confidential communication for the student or allowing individual feedback, thus avoiding disinclination to participate due to “the risk of public failure” (Harmer 2007, p.162). The use of certain web conferencing platforms also “permits the sharing of visual resources” (Anderson 2011, p. 177) such as videos and pre-prepared grammar and vocabulary presentations, and also allows access to other online resources which may not be available in a traditional classroom environment.

Despite the benefits of synchronous online learning, there are also potential problems associated with this method of class delivery. Kuama and Intharaksa (2016) discuss two important factors which can affect learners. Firstly, anxiety caused by unstable connection or other technological problems, which affect both the quality of the class experience and the ability of the learner to follow the session. This can also give rise to “poorly balanced group dynamics” (Lamy and Hampel 2007, p. 178), since problems with connection can hinder the student’s ability to communicate or can occupy valuable class time with requests for assistance. Secondly, a conflict in learning styles may, again, cause anxiety for the learner (Kuama and Intharaksa 2016, pp. 55-56). Examples may include a preference for face-to-face interaction with classmates, or having the teacher in close proximity to answer any queries. Learning preferences may also affect acquisition, in an online environment, if the student has issues with prolonged concentration, without appropriate monitoring. While discussing research into online communication, Lamy and Hampel (2007) acknowledge issues that may arise due to students and teacher being in different locations. “Personal work habits and multitasking” (p. 178) are common issues, as students can become easily distracted by emails, messages and other programmes open on their desktop, while participating in class. Additionally, issues may arise as the students are not located in the

relatively controlled environment of the academy and so “may be surrounded by activity, noise or family demands, impacting on the attention they are able to devote to task[s]” (Lamy and Hampel 2007, p. 178).

There are a number of unavoidable limitations, when students and teachers are not co-located. It is difficult to monitor work carried out in notebooks or course books during the class, therefore immediate error correction of written work may be difficult to administer. It is also impossible to monitor all students when using varying interaction patterns, such as pairs or groups, as students are divided into separate virtual rooms. This can be beneficial as it provides the opportunity for learner autonomy, allowing them to practise the “independent management of [their] learning” (Long and Doughty 2009), away from the teacher. Some learners, however, are easily distracted in such an unmonitored environment and find it difficult to maintain focus without the guidance of the teacher.

Dörnyei (2005) states that learners who are obligated to attend classes, rather than being internally motivated to learn, are less motivated by autonomy-supporting activities (p. 77). This could explain why some students may struggle to work effectively in these situations, and why performance might be better while being monitored.

Providing a variety of interaction patterns during the class is logistically easier for online classes, depending on the conferencing tools being used, since learners can be grouped or paired with different classmates, without having to physically move students around the classroom. It is also much less distracting for the learners, since only contributions from their partner or group can be heard, rather than everyone in the class (Harmer 2007, pp. 164-167). The ability to turn off student microphones is also a beneficial feature when learners are working individually. They can be turned on by the student when necessary, but online classes can provide the quiet environment required to focus on a task.

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

Research has shown that individual institutions decided to provide very different solutions to the online classes brought about by the mandatory confinement and contact restrictions of 2020 and 2021 (Maimaiti, Jia and Hew 2021; Palau et al. 2021 and Yates, Starkey, Egerton and Flueggen 2021). However, it was demonstrated by Maimaiti, Jia and Hew (2021), that even within one institution, the response from learners was varied, in terms of their attitude towards the classes and how well they performed as a result. Issues such as the threat of war (Rajab 2018) or natural disasters (Baytiyeh 2018) have previously provoked emergency solutions to education, including distance learning. It is also believed that Covid-19 will not be the last pandemic in our lifetime (Smith, J. 2021). These scenarios

could necessitate another large-scale move to online learning. If this is the case, it may prove beneficial to teachers to have a better understanding of what differentiated learners who developed positive attitudes to online learning, during 2020 and 2021, and those who did not. This information could provide an opportunity to anticipate challenges, which may affect individual learners or learners in general, with the aim of mitigating these obstacles in the future.

#### 1.4 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate what aspects of the online courses executed in 2020 and 2021 prompted the development of negative attitudes and what aspects prompted the development of positive attitudes, in respect to online language learning. As such, the study examines the participants' thoughts and opinions about their direct experience of the online classes during this period, to determine whether individual responses vary due to particular elements of the experience, the learners' personality or a combination of the two.

#### 1.5 Limitations and Controls

The researcher had access to learners from one academy in Barcelona, Catalonia. In this academy, ten students expressed opinions on the topic of the study and were willing to participate in an interview. Although this was a small sample, this issue should be compensated by the fact that the research followed a qualitative, phenomenological approach, using unstructured interviews, with the objective of eliciting a large quantity of data from each participant.

#### 1.6 Definitions of Key Terms

##### 1.6.1 Emergency remote teaching (ERT)

Emergency remote teaching is defined by Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond (2020) as "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances" (para. 14). In this study ERT is predominantly used to refer to online classes conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, although references are also made to ERT caused by war and natural disaster.

##### 1.6.2 Context collapse

Context collapse has been defined as "the flattening of multiple audiences into a single context" (Brandtzaeg and Lüders 2018). The term has largely been used in relation

to social media use. In this study, however, the term refers to the intrusion of home-life on the work context or vice versa as a result of teachers having to work from home.

### 1.6.3 Interaction

The term “interaction”, as used in this study, describes verbal communication between learners and the teacher or peers. This may be carried out in a one-to-one setting or in groups.

### 1.6.4 Online learning

In this dissertation, online learning or e-learning refers to learning that is carried out using the internet. This may include the use of videoconferencing platforms for simultaneous (synchronous) participation, or asynchronous contact, using discussion boards and email to share information and ideas.

### 1.6.5 Positive / negative attitude

A positive attitude, in the context of this study, relates to a student’s commitment and dedication to learning, despite the challenges presented by the new environment. In contrast, a negative attitude refers to a student’s disengagement or neglect of the responsibilities required to study in the online setting.

## 1.7 Summary

Following this introduction, this dissertation will have the following structure:

1. Chapter 2: Literature review
2. Chapter 3: Methodology
3. Chapter 4: Results and discussion
4. Chapter 5: Conclusion

## 2. Literature Review

The swift decision made by many academies, to move their classes online, may have avoided more interruption for the language students, but it created a less than ideal scenario, where both learner and teacher were forced to change to a new and unfamiliar environment and, together, learn how to effectively use the given platform and tools to carry out classes.

While many universities had been offering distance learning courses for years, the situation in which many learners found themselves during government-mandated closures was distinct, in that they had not elected to learn in this manner but, rather, were obligated to adjust, if they wished to continue studying. Additionally, learners and teachers would experience a steep learning curve in adapting to the new format, since little, or no time, was provided before the change. Hodges et al. (2020) acknowledge this by commenting that it would be impossible “to suddenly become an expert in online teaching and learning in this current situation, in which lead times range from a single day to a few weeks” (para. 13). This type of instruction, therefore, has been referred to using the term *emergency remote teaching* (ERT), which Hodges et al. (2020) define as “a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances” (para 14). Learners, having experienced two periods of online English classes delivered in this manner, have managed the change in different ways, with different levels of success, either perceived or proven with exam results, and different levels of comfort.

Considerable research has been carried out regarding impacts on learners in online classes, where the students have elected to study in this manner, but there is less research as to how students are affected by an ERT setting and what factors lead to a positive or negative learning experience. Research has found that, in traditional distance learning courses, there are key factors which can affect the success and effectiveness of the students’ learning experience, including the attitude of the teacher and their ability to exploit the technology, the learner’s technical competence (Selim 2007), consistent behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement with the class, collaboration with fellow students, staying motivated and sufficient social interaction (Sun 2014). Shin and Hickey (2021) found similar challenges during their study of tertiary students in New Jersey, who transferred to online learning after mass closures due to COVID-19. They found that the difficulties affecting this group also included staying motivated, opportunities for collaboration and social interaction. Additionally, participants identified disruptions in

learning, a lack of communication and feedback and the quality of the course design as factors which affected their experience.

This chapter will review learning theory, starting with common perspectives to learning in general and then focusing on theory related to online classes, specifically in relation to ERT. This chapter will also examine relevant published research in relation to ERT, and factors affecting learners who have studied online during the COVID-19 restrictions.

## 2.1 Learning Theories

There are three prominent schools of thought in terms of learning; behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism (Brown 2007; Anderson 2011; Picciano 2017). This being said, since it is widely agreed that distance learning requires the student to assume responsibility for their performance and results (Garrison 2017, pp. 15-16), and behaviourism is strongly focused on the relationship between stimuli and response, in addition to the idea that mental processes, which cannot be overtly observed, cannot be scientifically studied (Watson 1913), behaviourism is not deemed to be relevant in this study.

### 2.1.1 Cognitivism

It is with the topic of observable behaviour that the theory of cognitivism (Bruner 1961; Ausubel 1965; Piaget 1976; Vygotsky 1978) diverges heavily with behaviourism as “cognitive psychologists asserted that meaning, understanding, and knowing were significant data for psychological study” (Brown 2007, p. 22). Cognitivists “see learning as an internal process that involves memory, thinking, reflection, abstraction, motivation, and metacognition” (Anderson 2011, p. 21). Understanding how a learner perceives, integrates, processes and organises new information is very significant in the classroom, as the teacher can assist students in how they may best learn and what factors may affect the learning process.

### 2.1.2 Constructivism

Towards the end of the twentieth century, two well-known cognitivists, Piaget (1976) and Vygotsky (1978), played an important part in the creation of constructivism. This view is distinguished by the belief that “people actively construct knowledge based on personal experiences and hypotheses of the environment” (Funk, Gerlach and Spaniel-Weise 2017, p. 29). Piaget believed that stages of development are biologically predetermined and that

a learner constructs knowledge through self-discovery, based on previous experience, or ideas known as “schema”. This notion is seen in many classrooms in cyclic syllabi, a prevalent approach in language course books, where the same topics are repeated every year, each time with more complexity. This format also corresponds with constructivist views on schema, as in each cycle of the structure, the learner is adding new information to existing schema and constructing more advanced knowledge of the topic. It could also be added that many course books only introduce certain structures when learners have reached the age where they are deemed to have developed the ability to learn the concept, which follows Piaget’s thinking on cognitive development stages.

### 2.1.3 Socio-cultural theory

Socio-cultural Theory (Vygotsky 1978) proposes that social interaction and collaboration are essential in creating knowledge and that the learning process is brought about by interaction with a teacher, parent or fellow student who knows more than the learner, referred to as the “more knowledgeable other” (MKO). An important concept developed by Vygotsky is the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD). This is “the distance between the level of actual development and the level of potential development when assisted by another (Long and Doughty 2009, p. 499). In other words, the ZPD is the area where a learner cannot yet successfully perform tasks, unless given support. This support is known as scaffolding (Bruner 1978). In the language classroom, this scaffolding may be viewed as support coming from the teacher but, likewise, a collaborative environment, where fellow learners work together, negotiate meaning and teach each other is considered to benefit all learners, not only those who are receiving scaffolding, but also those who are providing it since ““explanations” can involve a “working through” of ideas” with elaboration and explanation also resulting in “a “reorganisation and clarification” in the tutor’s mind” (Webb, cited in Galbraith and Winterbottom 2011, pp. 3-4). Classroom application of scaffolding and awareness of a learner’s ZPD can also allow the teacher to provide just enough support to encourage learning and development, with the aim that the student will progress to independent completion of the task. A key element here is that support allows learning and subsequently higher levels of development, which then expand the ZPD ,allowing the student to learn new concepts, again, with support. Unlike Piaget’s predetermined stages, Socio-cultural theory encourages the teacher to concentrate on individual students’ readiness to learn, not predetermined stages of readiness.

“The basic tenet of a socio-cultural approach to mind is that human mental functioning is inherently situated in social interactional, cultural, institutional and historical

context” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 86). The real life implications of this concept mean that, to create an effective learning environment, not only must the learner’s social interactions with the teacher and fellow students be considered, but there must also be recognition of how other aspects of their life may affect their learning perspective. This may include differences in teaching methods that the learners are accustomed to institutionally, attitudes of parents and friends towards the importance of language learning and the learner’s relationship with tools such as technology. Educators taking a socio-cultural approach should focus on providing opportunities for meaningful interaction to aid learning, which can subsequently lead to internalisation of concepts.

While socio-cultural learning theory is most obviously relevant in the classroom, it is also relevant to synchronous online learning environments, where opportunities for meaningful verbal interaction are practicable, using video conferencing. Even so, questions need to be considered. Is the quality and nature of the interaction the same if undertaken online? Are the teacher and students able to effectively utilise online tools to take advantage of opportunities for interaction, especially in the case of ERT? It may also be appropriate to consider socio-cultural theory in relation to online learning in the ERT setting, since, institutionally, many young people are accustomed to using technology to communicate and learn, both at home and at school, although perhaps not to the extent demanded by the sudden transfer to e-learning brought on by the pandemic. The online environment being sufficiently familiar to the students to avoid additional difficulties in the learning process is also a concern. As much as there is some correlation between socio-cultural viewpoints and the experience of students impacted by online classes, prompted by COVID-19 restrictions, it must also be acknowledged that historical and cultural factors may not sufficiently affect the group as a whole to support using this approach for this study.

#### 2.1.4 Community of Inquiry (CoI)

In relation to online learning, one of the more widely used frameworks is the Community of Inquiry. “The model of this Community of Inquiry assumes that learning occurs within the Community through the interaction of three core elements... cognitive presence [CP], social presence [SP], and teaching presence [TP]” (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000, p. 88) (see fig. 1 below). The concept was originally introduced by C.S. Peirce (1877) and John Dewey (1916), to present the environment of discussion and problem solving created by a group of individuals, or community, in the scientific field. In the twenty-first century the framework has been applied in the area of online learning, focusing, not on scientific problems, but on educational experiences. Although there has been some



discussion as to the suitability of the three presences, particularly with the idea of social presence, Garrison continues to defend its validity, admitting that “much work remains in refining and understanding SP within the Col framework but... it is an essential construct in a collaborative constructive approach to learning” (2012, p. 250).

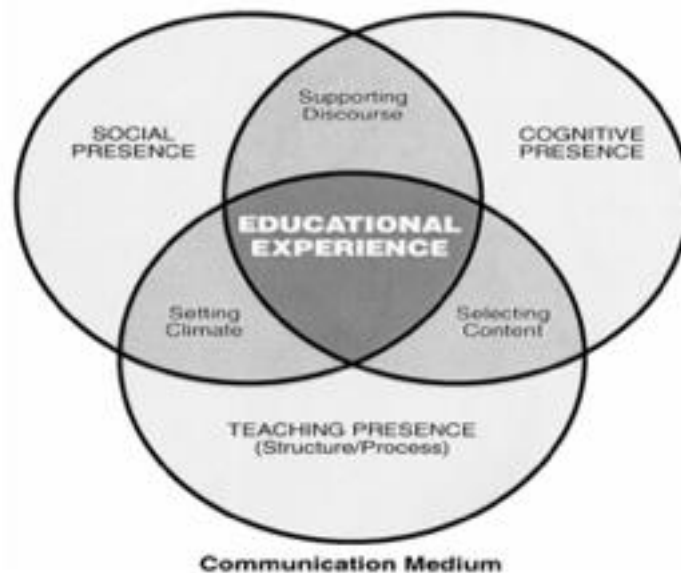


Figure 1. Community of Inquiry Model

The three presences can be characterised as below:

**Social Presence.** “The ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop interpersonal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities” (Garrison, 2009, p. 352).

**Cognitive Presence.** The extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical Community of Inquiry (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2001).

**Teaching Presence.** The design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realising personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes (Rourke, Garrison and Archer, 2001).

As mentioned, the approach is based on a collaborative, constructive learning viewpoint and, therefore, may be considered relevant to ERT courses in 2020 and 2021, since interaction and the social aspect to learning is a significant element to the experience, which may or may not have been well adapted to the online class environment in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, in an emergency scenario, which implies a lack of

preparation, it would be pertinent to examine whether teaching presence was adequate in terms of the design, facilitation and direction. The courses were, after all, carried out using a medium previously unfamiliar to the teacher and students. In relation to learner social and cognitive needs, the transfer to online classes may not have provided an optimum environment to reflect, and work with their fellow students. What affects may this have had on their learning and attitude?

## 2.2 Teacher-Related Aspects to Learning

As teachers “we are called upon to play many different roles in a language learning classroom (Harmer 2007, p. 108). This is true, in the traditional sense of a brick and mortar classroom, and also in an online setting. This section will focus on the roles which the teacher commonly plays in a synchronous online language course, such as those adopted by many academies, as a result of COVID restrictions in 2020 and 2021, and the effects teachers may have on learner attitudes in this setting.

### 2.2.1 Content design

In an ERT scenario, content design, although equally important, may not have been as refined and customised to the learners’ needs as expected in a traditional course, due to the demand for rapid adaptation, inexperience with the technology and constraints in terms of course materials. Hodges et al. (2020) suggests that learning experiences offered by teachers throughout this period would not have been “fully featured or necessarily well planned”, and there would have been “a high probability for suboptimal implementation” (para. 13). According to Kessler (2007), teacher attitude has an impact on their technological competence, largely due to the lack of formal professional development available. Teachers at the time of the study were required to seek out webinars and other such training to gain expertise, Therefore, the more motivated or conscientious individuals tended to search for and receive this instruction. Although this study was carried out in 2007, the situation caused by COVID in 2020 has many parallels, as there was little formal training available for many of the online platforms adopted for teaching at this time. Again, this forced teachers with the motivation and resources to do so, to look for online videos and webinars, in order to learn how to plan effective online classes and utilise the tools to deliver classes competently.

Many teachers aim to design a course with activities that provide exposure to authentic language, opportunities for interaction and sufficient variety to keep learners interested and motivated (Anderson 2011). ERT, an emergency response to the pandemic in March 2020, meant, in many cases, continuing the academic course with the designated

textbooks and materials for face-to-face classes and, as such, teachers may have felt an obligation to base the online curriculum on these materials as well. For this reason, it is possible that many online experiences began with the disadvantage of using materials which were not ideal, or perhaps, appropriate for online learning. The swift implementation of restrictions resulted in many teachers being thrown, rather unceremoniously, into the world of online classes. As many academies attempted to limit disruption to learners and recreate the classroom environment as much as possible, a quick transition to synchronous online classes was a popular choice. This, although understandable, may have created a situation whereby educators were left untrained and unfamiliar with the technology they were expected to use and, more than likely, also to resolve technical issues.

Putting all these issues aside, however, the world wide web is a treasure trove of resources and support for learners. Finkelstein (2006) gives numerous examples of effective and engaging tools that are available for synchronous online classes, “real-time polling, drawing, annotation, text chat, Web exploration, rich media, and visual, voice, and video tools” (p. 6). Appropriate use of these tools along with the predetermined course materials, should result in varied and interactive classes, rich with relatable and authentic language.

### 2.2.2 Facilitating discourse

Anderson (2011) emphasises the use of the word *discourse* in this component of teacher presence. Rather than *discussion* or *conversation*, *discourse* indicates the importance of carrying out social interaction, without obstructing cognitive processes (p. 350). Facilitation may involve ensuring that all students are included and participating, that the interaction stays on point, taking into consideration the cognitive goal, monitoring that there are no issues with misunderstanding that may distract the focus of the learners, whilst attempting to negotiate giving enough learner support to keep the discourse going, without controlling it.

Garrison (2017) suggests that “[m]anaging and monitoring discourse in an online learning environment is no less important than in facilitating face-to-face discussions” (p. 73). It may be true however that the task of facilitating in an online setting may be more difficult. Rugani and Grijalva (2020) suggest that “[i]n a remote setting, it’s much harder to “read the room” (p. 44) since paralinguistic cues could be more difficult to detect online. It may therefore be more difficult to gauge whether students are struggling with comprehension or to anticipate learners’ needs within the interaction. Peachey (2017) also recognises that certain elements of body language, essential for class management, such

as proximity, or moving closer to a distracted student to steer their focus back to the task, are impossible in an online scenario (p. 144).

Another complication affecting the teacher's ability to facilitate discourse is the extent to which students can communicate in groups in the online environment. While using videoconferencing programmes, group discussions can be difficult, as numerous students talking over each other is not conducive to clear communication. Some platforms have resolved this issue with 'breakout rooms', where pairs or groups can be sent to work together. Although this solves the problem of many learners wanting to speak at once, it is not possible for the teacher to monitor all groups at the same time. This may lead to learners taking advantage of unsupervised time with their friends, to talk about topics unrelated to the task at hand, in their native language, as was the case in the study carried out by Maimaiti, Jia and Hew (2021). It is therefore difficult to know whether students are able to focus on the cognitive task, or even whether they are interacting at all.

### 2.2.3 Direct instruction

Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer (2001) describe direction of cognitive and social processes as being one of the key roles of teacher presence. Garrison (2007) concurs that it is "very important to facilitate and yet not dominate the discourse" (p. 66), in other words, that the class should not be too teacher led, and learners should be given the opportunity to interact with the language and to attempt error correction alone or with peers. He goes on to add that "[a]s a subject matter expert, relevant information should be interjected and diagnoses of misconceptions are crucial to productive discourse". This claim acknowledges that the teacher also aids learning by imparting knowledge of the language and detecting and correcting errors where necessary. Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes and Garrison (2013) conclude that the correct level of direct instruction is also crucial to encourage participation on the part of the students. "Too much direct instruction will very quickly discourage participation and reduce proposing new ideas or solutions. Too little direct instruction risks moving to resolution and, like too much direction, will shut down participation and discourse" (p. 79).

## 2.3 Cognitive-Related Aspects to Learning

Cognitive presence considers how students move through the learning process – how they approach new problems, grow in understanding, and convey it to their learning community (Decker, 2016). This section looks at factors which may affect learners who

attend synchronous online language courses and how these learners may deal with this experience, in terms of their cognitive processes.

### 2.3.1 Technology

Synchronous online classes carried out in Catalonia in 2020 and 2021, due to the pandemic, were largely executed through videoconferencing platforms, such as Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Zoom. Classes realised online have the advantage of giving all class attendees simultaneous access to a wealth of relevant information, videos, tools and exercises. The variety of activities that are chosen for a class are an important aspect of teacher presence. However, the method and extent to which the learner interacts with the resources may be relevant to their cognitive processes. Anderson (2011) proposes that “[i]nformation should be presented in different modes to facilitate processing and transferring it to long-term memory. Where possible, textual, verbal, and visual information should be presented to encourage encoding” (p. 28). This variety of input, using text and images, is known as dual-coding theory (Piavio 1986) and aids the learner by simultaneously engaging verbal and non verbal cognitive systems which enhance learner recall and recognition. An online setting, where each student is looking at a screen with access to the internet, should provide an easy means of presenting information in various forms, including those suggested by Anderson above. Decker (2016) also recommends dual-coding strategies, along with other techniques, to encourage cognitive processes which are, arguably, better suited to online learning than the traditional classroom environment. She recommends assessment with immediate feedback, such as the polls available on Zoom. Brainstorming activities can be carried out using the whiteboard screen share function and by allowing students to annotate. Online discussion and writing activities can be carried out using Google Docs, to provide a collaborative context. There are numerous representations and activities for practising desired skills which can be provided, again, using the screen share function to allow access to a number of websites or previously created documents or slides.

Video conferencing platforms, used throughout the period of COVID confinement, provided a number of tools convenient for teaching and learning. The breakout room function, featured in the Zoom video conferencing platform, was designed to allow learners to interact, in pairs or groups, and allow focused communication. However the study by Maimaiti, Jia and Hew (2021) discovered that learners tended to turn to social talk and although “such social talk plays a useful role in promoting group cohesion, the informal chatting can often overshadow the actual course-related tasks” (p.12). The webcam was also useful to allow visual contact between the teacher and students, and between peers

during speaking exercises. The webcam also allowed the teacher to monitor the concentration of students and whether they were following the class. Maimaiti, Jia and Hew (2021) identified in their study that the use of the webcam also served to keep the learners focused and actively participating in the class, due to pressure provoked by the fact that the teacher and peers could see them (p. 9).

One problem that can have a great impact on learners is technical issues and problems with equipment. Due to the sudden transfer to online learning, many students may not have been suitably equipped with adequate internet speed, webcam, microphone or headset. Problems in this area can have a great effect on how well the students can follow the class. A study carried out by Aladsani (2021), who interviewed university professors in Saudi Arabia, confirmed that “some students struggled to maintain an Internet connection” (p. 13), Aladsani also claimed while citing Tamim (2018) that “In synchronous online sessions, technical issues related to Internet connections and voice quality are common weaknesses” (p.13).

### 2.3.2 Study environment

One aspect in which the online environment may be considered inferior is the possibility of distractions. This point will undoubtedly figure in the priorities of the teacher, in their bid to facilitate the class, but it is also, certainly, an influential force for the cognitive processes of many learners. The issue of distractions affecting distance learners more than face-to-face students may be for three reasons; The fact that the students are in their own home or office means that they are surrounded by their own possessions and other people or objects which, likely, would not be present to disrupt their focus in a classroom; Secondly, the temptation to have other tasks or windows open on one’s desktop is often irresistible. The learner may be attracted by the opportunity to multi-task, to check and reply to emails, to look at their calendar, complete other work, or, possibly, just play games. Lastly, and perhaps the reason that the first two explanations are possible, is that the teacher is not physically able to check for distractions or see what is happening outside of the scope of the webcam.

Research has found that distance students can be distracted by a variety of things such as mobile phones, social networking sites, newspapers, other learning applications, family members, television and even their own image on the webcam (Winter, Cotton, Gavin and Yorke 2010; Aladsani 2021; Maimaiti, Jia and Hew 2021). Lang (2017) suggests that one effective strategy to combat the issue of distraction is to “alternate intensive periods of focus with deliberately planned phases of reward time in which you indulge your desire for

distraction. He also cites Gagne and Rosen (2016), who propose that “having a more enjoyable time multitasking... may actually be what allows you to accomplish a set of low priority tasks that really just need to get done”. Therefore, being too regimented in avoiding all possible distractions for students may not be the most effective solution.

The suitability of the teacher’s working environment is also relevant for the success of the classes. The challenge of balancing work and personal life during COVID restrictions was a difficult one for many educators, as demonstrated by Kraft and Simon (2020), in their study of teachers in the USA. Between 30% and 51% of teachers in the research, depending on their years of experience, claimed that “caretaking responsibilities” made their job difficult (p. 6). In which case, distractions, particularly coming from other family members may not solely be a problem for the learners but the teachers as well. Research carried out by Taber and Whittaker (2020) discussed how context collapse, the intrusion of home-life on one’s work environment, was generally perceived to be embarrassing, but a forgivable and inevitable occurrence (00:02:20-00:02:34).

### 2.3.3 Motivation

As previously discussed, online learning tends to require the learner to assume a certain level of responsibility for their own learning and adopt a sense of autonomy. It has been claimed that this may be easier for learners who are intrinsically motivated, for example, those who find that language learning is “fun, engaging, challenging, or competence-enhancing” (Noels, cited in Dörnyei 2005, p. 77), than for students who “[pursue] learning primarily for extrinsic... reasons” (Dörnyei 2005, p. 77).

## 2.4 Socially-Related Aspects to Learning

The Col framework stresses the importance of social interaction and collaboration for learning and development and for the development of cognitive presence. Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2005), however, claim that social interaction and presence does not directly create cognitive presence, but “may create the condition for sharing and challenging ideas through critical discourse” (pp. 142-143). Anderson (2011) highlights that the learner should interact with their fellow students, with the teacher and with experts and that the learner should “collaborate, participate in shared cognition, form social networks and establish social presence” (p. 38). Research has also shown that social interaction improves the perception of students’ learning “by enhancing their knowledge of literacy and teaching and their critical thinking and problem-solving skills” (Hurst, Wallace and Nixon 2013).

Research about social presence in the CoI model has previously largely focused on discussion boards in asynchronous settings and chat-based systems in synchronous courses (Kreijns, Van Acker, Vermeulen and Van Buuren 2014), however Mitchell, Anderson, Laverie and Hass (2021) determined that synchronous video conferencing platforms enable “student-centered practices that can increase social presence and enhance students’ motivation, engagement, and perceived learning” (para. 1).

It was suggested in section 2.2.2 that paralinguistic cues may not be as obvious online, which might suggest a negative effect on social presence. Despite this, Garrison (2009) states that social presence is not restricted by online environments where learners cannot see each other, which indicates that synchronous online settings should not negatively affect social presence either. Finkelstein (2006) promotes the benefits of synchronous online learning for the learners’ ability to shape personality online. The fact that their fellow students can see them and hear them in real time allows them to humanise the course (p. 29). This may be especially advantageous for students in ERT situations, as they have not chosen to study online but have been obligated to do so, due to uncontrollable external circumstances. For successful social discourse to take place, it is often necessary for the community to be capable of candid discussion, of disagreeing or disputing ideas. This is unlikely to be possible, unless there is a sense of trust. It may be argued that trust is more easily built in a face-to-face situation so, to what extent might this be impacted in a synchronous online environment?

## 2.5 Conclusion

The COVID-19 crisis caused disruption to education for countless young people around the world, including many language learners, participating in extra-curricular classes in private academies. It would be imprudent to ignore the impact that these changes to studying could have had on these learners emotionally, socially and cognitively. It is understood that social interaction is important for learners, and even more so when they are forced to study online remotely. It is unconfirmed whether classes in this ERT scenario provided quality opportunities for interaction and whether the instructor and learner were capable of taking advantage of the technology to bring this about effectively. It is also uncertain whether the online classes provided a suitable cognitive environment and how this may have affected students’ learning and attitude. Establishing to what extent teaching, social and cognitive-related aspects affected the learners’ attitude and potentially, their performance could be beneficial in ensuring that educators are better prepared for a similar scenario, if it were to arise again.



## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approaches adopted for this research. Firstly, there will be a description of the context and the participants, to provide background information relevant to the study. Subsequently, the chapter will present the research questions and explain the rationale behind them. Next, the procedures and methods used to carry out the study will be identified, followed by the methods utilised for data analysis. The chapter will conclude with a review of trustworthiness and the ethical considerations relevant to the study.

### 3.2 Background Information

This study was carried out at a private language academy in Catalonia where, unlike schools, class groups are relatively small, with up to twelve learners in a group. Students attending the academy range from the age of five up to post-proficiency level learners. Most students are children or adolescents, with a small number of adults. From the age of ten, classes concentrate on preparing students for official Cambridge English exams. These courses therefore introduce or revisit vocabulary and grammar relevant for the specific level of exam which is being studied. These courses also focus heavily on practising exam-specific tasks related to the required receptive and productive skills, and exam techniques, such as reading for detail, effectively recognising paraphrasing of ideas and avoiding distractors, which are items of information provided to appear to be the correct answer, but are not.

Due to the focus on Cambridge exam preparation in many classes, this tends to be the principal motivation for students who are enrolled, in addition to obligation from parents and needing help to improve competence in English for classes at school. Course books are invariably used for classes at the academy, although many teachers supplement with additional materials for extra practice, or to provide more communicative activities, or resources which are more relevant to the demographic of the class.

Regular assessment is deemed important at this academy, especially for exam preparation groups. Therefore learners are tested at the end of each term, to evaluate how much of the vocabulary and grammar they have retained or assimilated. Additionally, the learners undergo mock Cambridge exams in March and June. The former is used to assess

whether the individual is likely to be able to reach the level of preparedness required for the exam and allows the students and parents to decide whether they will aim to sit the exam that year. The mock exam in June is generally used as a last practice, under test conditions, to prepare the individuals in exam strategies, such as timing, highlighting important information on the exam paper, planning written texts and transferring answers to the answer sheet. This last practice also serves to acclimatise the learners to the exam process and attempt to reduce nerves or stress on the day of the real exam.

In the classroom, more traditional teaching techniques tend to be employed, such as physical course books, physical flashcards, use of the whiteboard and CDs or USBs with a sound system for listening exercises.

### 3.3 Participants

The participants of this study are aged sixteen to eighteen and are all currently studying at B2 or C1 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). During the academic year 20/21 when the last series of restrictions forced extra-curricular activities online for the second time, the participants were studying to prepare for the Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET), B1 level, or First Certificate Exam (FCE), B2 level. All of the participants were studying at the academy where the researcher works as a teacher. None of the participants were actually being taught by the researcher in 2020 and 2021, when the online classes were executed, although seven of the ten participants had been students of the researcher in previous years. All of the participants were attending two classes a week, totalling three hours, and online classes retained the same timetable. Students are located throughout the city where the academy is based, within a range of 500 metres to 5km from the academy. Before asking for specific volunteers, students studying at B1 or B2 level at the time of the remote classes were asked, generally, if they felt positively or negatively about their perceptions of online classes. This was to ensure that the participants interviewed had experiences that were relevant to the research questions, and either thrived in the online classes, or found the online environment challenging.

### 3.4 Research Questions (RQs)

This section will detail the research questions which underpin this study and which are based on the CoI model consisting of teacher, cognitive and socially-related aspects to

learning. This section will also provide hypotheses and rationale for each of the research questions.

### Research question 1

To what extent did teacher-related factors affect PET and FCE level learners' attitudes to online language learning during Covid restrictions in Catalonia?

As discussed in section 2.2, the teaching presence in an online learning setting is considered to be key for an effective learning experience. It is therefore considered to be crucial, when prompting students to discuss their story of emergency remote learning, to ascertain the perceived impact that teacher actions or behaviour may have had on language acquisition and learner enjoyment.

### Hypothesis

Previous studies have revealed that, in many cases, content design for courses which were moved online due to COVID-19 was perceived to be inferior to the quality that would normally be provided by teachers in a classroom setting, due to insufficient time to adapt to the online environment (Trust and Whalen 2020; Khlaif, Salha and Kouraichi 2021). It is suspected that this may have affected the participants in this study, due to the teachers' inexperience with the platform and lack of time to tailor all course materials and activities to distance learning.

### Research question 2

To what extent did cognitive-related factors affect PET and FCE level learners' attitudes to online language learning during Covid restrictions in Catalonia?

Cognitive-related factors include elements such as how learners receive, internalise and remember the information. This question is considered essential to determine how participants perceive aspects of the online experience to have affected their learning, in contrast to face-to-face classes.

### Hypothesis

Research has shown that distractions at home, such as family members and other background noise, other websites or the television, are a significant obstacle to learning

during online courses (Faize and Nawaz 2020; Yates et al. 2021). Based on studies by Hazaymeh (2021) and Jaradat and Ajlouni (2021), technical problems and issues with internet connection are also factors which negatively affected distance learners during the pandemic. This may have impacted participants in this research to varying degrees, depending on the quality or speed of their internet service and the equipment being used to carry out the classes. Guilbaud, Martin and Polly's (2020) study identified numerous online resources and technologies which could be utilised by online teachers, including polls, Google Docs, online quizzes and YouTube, and determined a number of benefits for the learner, such as improved engagement and more student-focused classes. It is uncertain what resources the teachers in the current study used and how these impacted the learning experience of the participants, but it is tempting to assume that online resources, such as those above, would engage adolescent learners better than traditional methods.

### Research question 3

To what extent did socially-related factors affect PET and FCE level learners' attitudes to online language learning during Covid restrictions in Catalonia?

The importance of social interaction in the process of learning has been discussed in chapter 2. In particular, the influence of interaction on motivation and acquisition in learning settings has been highlighted. This question is considered to be significant in this study, as it is uncertain whether opportunities for communication, and the quality and means of communication in online classes, were adequate.

### Hypothesis

Based on research by Mykota (2017), online communication and interactivity are not inherent, natural abilities but actually require instruction and practice. Therefore, students who are new to learning through computer-mediated environments may not be proficient in these skills. The participants in this current study may not have possessed this technical proficiency at the beginning of the confinement, as they had not had previous experience of distance learning and how to effectively and comfortably communicate in that environment. However, due to the relatively small class groups, the learners may have been able to develop their social presence more quickly, as they had more opportunity to participate and interact with the teacher, the content and fellow students.

## 3.5 Procedures and Methods

The aim of this study is to determine why learners were affected differently by the online classes, taught in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions, and why some students excelled or enjoyed the classes, whereas others struggled cognitively and motivationally. In order to ascertain how the participants managed the experience or different aspects of the experience, the study took a qualitative approach using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This approach focuses on how a group or individual makes sense of an experience or event. Interpretive phenomenology “holds that there is no access to brute data (i.e. data containing no presuppositions or preunderstandings)” (Given 2008, p. 461). For a phenomenological study, the research is “concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself” (Smith and Osborn 2003). To effectively carry out this approach, it was necessary that the students offered their perceptions, without being limited by closed questions or an overly structured interview. In this case, the interviews aimed to elicit information from the participants about what happened in their online classes, to determine what the experience was for each student, but, more importantly, the researcher encouraged the participants to talk about how different elements of the experience affected them emotionally or in their learning. The participants were selected because, as older adolescents with an intermediate or upper intermediate level of English, it was considered that the students would have the language skills, the self-awareness and the maturity to be able to explain their feelings and experience in enough detail to contribute effectively to this study.

A questionnaire was considered inappropriate for this study, as the researcher would need to make and rely on assumptions about the participants’ experience in order to create the questionnaire items. This needed to be avoided, to facilitate authentic narratives. An unstructured interview was judged to be the most suitable approach so as to allow the participants to share their story of their online experience. This would allow “maximum flexibility to follow the interviewee in unpredictable directions, with only minimal interference from the research agenda” (Dörnyei 2007, pp. 135-136). Berg (2001) acknowledges that unstructured interviews are an important tool when the interviewer does not know what questions need to be asked and must therefore “develop, adapt, and generate questions and follow-up probes” to stimulate open communication from the participant. To successfully carry out an unstructured interview it is indispensable that the interviewer has a good rapport with the interviewees (Dörnyei 2007, p. 136). This rapport had been, in some cases, developed while the researcher was teaching the learners in previous academic years. This

was highly beneficial, as additional time was not needed in these interviews to establish rapport or relax the participants so that they would feel comfortable enough to talk freely.

The interview schedule consisted of, firstly, a request for the participant to describe the online classes during COVID-19 restrictions. The purpose of this was to invite the student to give an open portrayal of what happened and how this impacted them. The interviewer then had prompts, that were used if needed, to encourage the participant to describe various aspects of the online classes, so as to create a comprehensive story of the event. An important aspect of the interview were follow up questions or probes which “use what the interviewee has said as a starting point to go further and to increase the richness and depth of the responses” (Dörnyei 2007, p. 138). These questions were asked, where necessary, to determine the learner’s perception of the events and what the experience meant to them, rather than a purely objective recount. This was not always necessary, since the students often communicated their feelings about different aspects of distance learning, either explicitly or through more subtle means, such as gestures, tone and other paralinguistic devices.

Nine of the interviews were carried out at the language academy and one was held online, using Zoom. The Zoom interview was carried out on a public holiday, at the same time as the student would have had class. This time and method was chosen by the participant because it was impossible for them to meet before or after their class, or travel to the academy at other times. The face-to-face interviews were held outside of normal class hours, mostly directly before or after classes, although some students who live or go to school in the vicinity could come at other times, if it was convenient for the participant and possible for the researcher. Interviews at the academy took place in a private classroom, with the door closed, to provide a safe space where other teachers or students would not enter and could not hear what was being said. Two students preferred to carry out the interview together, which was considered appropriate, as it would create a more comfortable, relaxed atmosphere for the participants, allowing them to hopefully speak more honestly about their experience. The negative side to this was attempting to prevent the two participants from interrupting each other when they were keen to communicate something. This could be addressed by the interviewer guiding the conversation back to an interrupted idea, if necessary.

At the beginning of the interview, all participants were reminded what the topic was and about the fact that they could stop and withdraw at any point. The interviews lasted between twenty five and ninety minutes. As the participants were currently studying at B2 or C1 level, it was anticipated that they would feel comfortable communicating in English.

However, all learners were offered the option to conduct the interviews in English or Spanish, to ensure that they were able to portray their ideas confidently. All participants completed the interviews in English, with some translation requested for distinct words, phrases or ideas. The interviews were audio recorded, with consent from the learners, to ensure that the interviewer was free to concentrate on actively listening to the participant and following up on relevant ideas, or probing for more information as necessary.

A pilot interview had been conducted previously with an individual, who did not attend this academy, but had a B1 level of English and had experience of studying online due to COVID-19 containment measures. The interview was carried out in their home, but under the same conditions as the other participants, in a quiet, relaxed space, where other people would not enter. This pilot gave some insight as to how to effectively execute an unstructured interview, highlighting the importance of keeping concise notes while actively listening, so as to be able to prompt later for further information without interrupting the flow of ideas from the interviewee.

### 3.6 Data Analysis Methods

The interviews were transcribed from the audio recordings, in order to carry out a thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling 2001). Attride-Stirling's tool for analysing qualitative data is a six step process to create a web of themes, starting from fundamental or *basic themes* found in the text. These are then classified under the umbrella of *organising themes*, which are again grouped under all-encompassing *global themes* (2001, pp. 387-398).

In this current study, the interview texts were initially coded using the underlying elements of the Col model, which form the framework of the three research questions: Teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence. Subsequently, the previously mentioned basic themes were created from the coded text by identifying common, significant ideas, and then refining them, to ensure they portrayed a full, complete concept, which sufficiently depicted different ways the same notion may have been communicated throughout the interviews. These basic themes were then sorted into groups and classified under an appropriate organising theme. The global themes were then characterised by summarising the concepts of the organising themes, in terms of the basic themes within them. Once all the themes had been established, the network was presented and refined again (appendix 4 and 5). At this point, the network could be used to analyse the data and create a picture of how emergency online learners were affected by online classes and

determine whether there were patterns as to why some individuals were impacted positively or negatively in terms of their learning experience.

### 3.7 Trustworthiness

While reliability and validity are concepts used to assess the quality of quantitative research, qualitative studies tend to be measured using trustworthiness. Bryman (2016) cites Guba and Lincoln when suggesting that one reason for this alternative principle of assessment is, that applying reliability and validity standards to qualitative research assumes “that a single absolute account of social reality is feasible” (p. 384). This section will explain how the four criteria, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba 1985) were applied to demonstrate trustworthiness in the current study.

#### Credibility

“The establishment of the credibility of findings entails both ensuring that research is carried out according to the canons of good practice and submitting research findings to the members of the social world who were studied for confirmation that the investigator has correctly understood that social world” (Bryman 2016, p. 384). The latter approach will be carried out by giving participants access to the study and its findings on completion. The former technique of demonstrating credibility was implemented in the following ways. Effort was made to eliminate personal biases during the interview process as much as possible, by avoiding leading questions and inviting the participants to talk freely about the topic with minimal interviewer input. Subsequent follow up questions were largely used for clarification or more information, based on what the participants had said previously. It is true, however, that some prompts, which aimed to elicit opinions on the elements related to the research questions, may have influenced the responses from the learners. In an attempt to limit this, any prompts used to inquire about a new concept were focused on what happened, rather than how the participant felt about something. For example, if the participant had not discussed their study space previously in the interview, the researcher asked “What is your study space like?” instead of “How did your study space affect your learning?” It was considered that the former question should elicit an objective description of the participants’ study space at home and encourage them to elaborate on their own, whereas the latter might lead to the participant providing a quick answer that may not be genuine. To further avoid bias, the themes, once organised and refined, were reviewed by a peer to confirm that this process had been completed effectively and neutrally.



When selecting the sample, learners within the age and level range were asked if they liked the online classes. All students who communicated that they did or didn't like the classes were invited to volunteer to take part in the study, all volunteers were subsequently interviewed and their data analysed. The researcher invited learners with strong positive or negative views on ERT to volunteer, as it was decided that these individuals would provide more detailed, in-depth data than those who did not care either way. After this stage, the researcher did not make any decisions about who would participate. As all volunteers were included, the researcher was not able to display bias in this stage of the selection process. The researcher does, however, acknowledge that, when asking for initial opinions about the online classes, the desire to study learners who felt strongly about the topic may have affected how the responses were received. It is therefore possible that learners were not as enthusiastic in their opinions as the researcher perceived.

It is also pertinent that the researcher was not teaching any of the participants during the courses of 2020 and 2021, when the classes moved online. This is significant in terms of credibility, since it was important to avoid any feelings of obligation on the participants' part, or desire to give inaccurate answers because they believed it was what the researcher wanted to hear, referred to as "social desirability bias" (Dörnyei 2007 p. 141). Dörnyei (2007) also warned that neutrality on behalf of the interviewer is not necessarily enough to prevent social desirability bias (p. 141). Therefore, in this current study, the interviewer attempted to encourage honest answers, with reassurance that the participants were talking in a safe space, and lighthearted encouragement that any negative opinions were equally as valid.

A reflective log (appendix 6) was kept to record any decisions or changes that were made in relation to methodology, the research questions or interview technique. Adjustments and refinements made during the creation of the thematic network and the subsequent analysis were also logged and presented (appendix 4 and 5) .

### Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), with regard to transferability it is not the responsibility of the researcher to "provide an *index* of transferability; it *is* his or her responsibility to provide the *data base* that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers" (p. 316). Sections 3.2 to 3.5 of this chapter therefore provide thick description of the context of the study, including background information about the participants themselves, the learning environment they come from and common elements of the transition to online learning experienced by the participants. Thorough descriptions of

the methods used in collecting the data and analysing it have also been provided, which will allow other researchers to decide whether these findings can be transferable to their context.

### Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that validity cannot exist without reliability, therefore it follows that a demonstration of credibility is sufficient to establish dependability (p. 316). The researcher in this study recognises that, when considering dependability, the unstructured interview method used may be considered problematic, as it is impossible to replicate. Although the first opening invitation for information can be used by other researchers, there is no way of knowing what opinions or experiences the participants may describe and, therefore, what direction the interview may take. Nonetheless, Bryman (2016) suggests that dependability can be demonstrated through peer auditing and, for this reason, the researcher should ensure “that complete records are kept of all phases of the research process—of problem formulation, selection of research participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, data analysis decisions, and so on—in an accessible manner” (p. 392). In the current study, the researcher has been diligent in documenting all decisions and changes in a reflective log. In addition, all notes and audio recordings from the interviews have been saved, as well as interview transcripts and the thematic network analysis process. Although a comprehensive audit has not been carried out, due to time constraints, records of the data analysis decisions have been reviewed by colleagues not affected by the study, to ensure that procedures were being followed correctly.

### Confirmability

Confirmability refers to neutrality of findings, which again can be reflected through auditing ,to ensure that the researcher has not selected the responses which would provide desired results. As highlighted above, the researcher has kept records of interview notes and audio recordings, as well as the process of creating the thematic network for analysis. These measures have been taken to ensure that it can be proven that the research was carried out accurately, systematically and without bias.

## 3.8 Ethics Considerations

The owner of the academy authorised access to students, as did their respective teachers. Firstly, the researcher asked all learners studying at the relevant levels about their general feelings towards the online classes, which they underwent in 2020 and 2021, and

invited those students with strong positive or negative feelings to participate in an interview to discuss their experience. The owner also approved subsequent interviews, on an individual basis, with students who consented to take part in the study. The participants of this study were aged between sixteen and eighteen, therefore, after gaining consent from the individuals to participate in the interviews, the parents were also asked for permission.

All participants were offered anonymity and complete confidentiality of their answers to ensure that their comments were not affected by fears that information may be shared with their teachers, parents or fellow students. Anonymity was ensured by not disclosing any names of participants in the study and also by anonymising teacher names and gender, to avoid identifying individuals from their comments. Participants were advised twice that they could withdraw from the process at any time, without any consequences, and that participation was completely voluntary; once at the outset when asking for volunteers and once at the beginning of each interview. All participants were offered private one-to-one interviews to avoid any feelings of embarrassment. However, participants who preferred to carry out the interview in pairs were also given this opportunity, to avoid feelings of anxiety or pressure.

The interviews were carried out over a period of 8 weeks, so as to avoid interfering with the participants' Christmas holidays. The data was then transcribed and collated before conducting the final analysis of results as presented in the next chapter.

## 4 Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected through ten unstructured interviews. In order to provide an accurate picture of the different themes that emerged, the chapter will review the data in three sections, corresponding with the topics of the three research questions.

### 4.2 Descriptive Analysis of the Sample

The information below provides the level and gender of each of the participants in this research, as well as background information regarding their performance during the two years when online classes occurred and the general opinion of the participants, as provided when asking for volunteers for this study.

Participant	Level studied in 20/21	Gender	Background	Attitude to online classes
A	FCE	MALE	Studied FCE for two years. After 20/21 course did not feel confident enough to sit the FCE exam and chose to carry out an intensive summer course before taking the exam in July 2021 and passed with a B.	Found learning online very difficult to deal with.
B	FCE	MALE	Studied at FCE level for courses 19/20 and 20/21. Did not feel confident enough to sit the official exam in summer 2021 and decided to continue studying FCE during the 21/22 course.	Preferred online classes.
C	FCE	MALE	Started studying FCE during 20/22 course. Did not feel ready to take the FCE exam in July 2021 and decided to continue studying for FCE during 21/22.	Preferred face to face classes.

D	FCE	MALE	Started studying FCE during 20/22 course. Did not feel ready to take the FCE exam in July 2021 and decided to continue studying for FCE during 21/22.	Found learning online very difficult to deal with.
E	PET	MALE	Was studying for PET during 20/21 course achieved 79% in the end of year mock exam but decided not to take the official exam.	Preferred learning face to face but enjoyed online learning very much.
F	PET	FEMALE	Was studying for PET during 20/21 course achieved 86% in the end of year mock exam but decided not to take the official exam.	Liked learning online very much.
G	FCE	FEMALE	Had studied at the academy previously and returned at the start of the 20/21 course. Sat the official FCE exam in July 2021 and passed.	Liked online classes a lot but missed the social aspect.
H	FCE	FEMALE	Was studying for the FCE during the 20/21 course but attendance was low so decided to continue studying for the FCE during 21/22.	Preferred face to face classes and had severe issues with attendance while learning online.
I	FCE	FEMALE	Was studying for the PET during the 19/20 course, sat the exam in July 2020 and passed with an A. During the 20/21 course was studying for FCE, sat the exam in July 2021 and passed with an A.	Much preferred face to face classes due to the social aspect.
J	FCE	MALE	Was studying for the PET during the 19/20 course, sat the exam in July 2020 and passed. During the 20/21 course was studying for FCE, sat the exam in July 2021 and passed with a B.	Liked online classes due to comfort of working from home.

## 4.3 Analysis and Discussion

### 4.3.1 RQ1: To what extent did teacher-related factors affect PET and FCE level learners' attitudes to online language learning during Covid restrictions in Catalonia?

The participants discussed four key areas where the teacher had an impact on the online learning experience: The teacher's attitude, class design, attention and the teacher as a subject matter expert.

#### 4.3.1.1 Attitude

Participant B suggested that learners were negatively affected by an obvious lack of enthusiasm on the part of the teacher, which tended to be common in teachers who showed little enthusiasm before the COVID- 19 confinement.

With covid and restrictions, It has increased because if a lot of teachers don't care anything in class in presencial class, imagine at home,

Three of the participants communicated that a positive impression of the class was achieved when the teacher was passionate enough to create effective online lessons.

I think like in online classes uh teachers have to do more work. Depends on they to do, to have a good learning" (Participant C).

- they is no interest in make better the classes. Yeah. And teachers who just didn't make the effort (Participant B).
- How did that affect your learning? (Interviewer)
- no learning (Participant B).

So I can feel if the teacher is teaching and they like it, but when they're teaching and they're not passionate about, like giving their moments to other people (Participant I).

Interviewee H discussed situations where their teachers found it difficult to balance work and home life during the COVID confinement which resulted in resentment.

some teachers have their mobile phones

Another teacher had his boyfriend was coming home. And he passed. I mean, it was like, hello..., he was left there with with a dog... And he was trying to interrupt us and we were like, are you a teacher or are you the boyfriend's teacher?

#### 4.3.1.2 The teacher as a subject matter expert

Participants A and I felt secure in the fact that explanations given by the teacher were superior to information provided by learning materials and online tools, such as dictionaries and translators.

It was kind of you translate it and it is like, I didn't remember the words later but if [teacher], because sometimes [teacher] said it or the teacher with examples more formal, informal like vocabulary

Everything that they say is not just specific instructions or grammar, not just the book, like it's the person teaching us, or if I say something that doesn't sound natural in English, even though it's grammatically correct [teacher] always says don't say that.

However interviewees B and J also argued that these explanations given by the teacher were easier to understand in face to face classes, due to eye contact and other paralinguistic gestures, which make the communication more engaging, which, therefore ,negatively affected their learning online.

And if you have any doubts, they are not going to explain as the same way they are going to explain you in face to face classes.

But explain something to the class is better presencial classes because you can use things such as eye contact on presencial classes.

#### 4.3.1.3 Attention

Participant C argued that hybrid classes were not an effective solution to the confinement period, as online students tended not to receive the same level of attention as the in-person students and some learners were therefore left feeling neglected.

In school, I do semi presencial... This is the worst thing that can you do... normally the teacher have more attention for the people that are in the class than not for the people that are in home.

Most of the interviewees discussed how one to one communication with the teacher was more difficult online and all agreed that this was disruptive for their learning.

to say, sorry, [teacher], I don't understand is it was like to cut the lesson (Participant A).

but you are not enough confident to to to say, Hey, I don't understand it, because if you do that, if you do that, all the class is going to stay like waiting for you (Participant B).

Participant J suggested that students are more engaged in face to face classes because the teacher is more interactive.

everyone is listening to the explanation and the teacher is interacting more with the students.

#### 4.3.1.4 Class design

Many of the students mentioned how unsatisfactory their school response to COVID restrictions was. Being provided with large quantities of work and being expected to work completely autonomously was overwhelming and not beneficial to their learning during this period.

they don't give us an explanation of what do we have to do? So it was like, Yes, I have this homework. And I have to look online because I don't know it (Participant H).

And there was so much homework. And coping with the situation and doing it sometimes it was too much (Participant I).



Interviewees also discussed how demotivated they were, due to the reduction in interactive activities online compared to face to face, which they deemed to have a negative affect on both motivation and learning.

I will put a video and you make me these activities, and bye bye (Participant B).

If you want the attention of the students you have to do the the class more interactive (Participant C).

#### 4.3.1.5 Discussion

The attitude of the teacher is a key factor which affects students' motivation levels and learning. Teachers who lack enthusiasm in face to face classes also tend to lack the required enthusiasm to carry out the professional development to become competent enough to design and carry out effective online classes, as suggested by Kessler (2007).

As demonstrated by Kraft and Simon (2020 p. 6), working from home during COVID-19 restrictions led to teachers struggling to balance aspects of their personal lives, such as partners and children during classes. Context collapse is an issue, which affected many people working from home during the confinement period (Taber and Whittaker 2020). Since the negative impact of these occurrences was only expressed by one participant in the study, this may indicate that, as claimed by Taber and Whittaker (2020), these infringements on the professional environment tend to be accepted and forgiven.

Students recognise the value of the teacher as a subject matter expert, even when compared to easily accessible online tools, such as translators and dictionaries. This positive impact on learning, provided by direct instruction, is supported by Garrison's (2007) suggestion that relevant explanations of lexis and grammatical structures should be provided by the teacher, as well as correction of errors which affect comprehension or communication. However, the teacher may not be able to communicate this information as effectively online, due to lack of paralinguistic cues as suggested by Rugani and Grijalva (2020) who claim it is more difficult to "read the room" (p. 44) and detect issues in comprehension.

Learners were affected by the difficulty in communicating with the teacher online compared to in a face to face class. This is, again, due to the teacher's inability to move closer to the student to answer a quick question or doubt without interrupting the rest of the class, as discussed by Peachey (2017 p. 144).

Participants expressed that the online classes were lacking in sufficient interactive opportunities, and highlighted that “suboptimal implementation” (Hodges et al. 2020, para. 13) was a negatively impacting factor, caused by teachers being unprepared for the difference in students’ needs and being unfamiliar with the technology.

#### **4.3.2 RQ2: To what extent did cognitive-related factors affect PET and FCE level learners' attitudes to online language learning during Covid restrictions in Catalonia?**

Participants discussed how the equipment, online tools and materials affected the learning process during online classes. Other key factors that affected the interviewees were motivation, distractions, the study space at home and working with peers.

##### **4.3.2.1 Equipment**

Most of the participants stated that their learning had been disrupted by technical issues. Problems with Wifi and equipment, particularly the microphone and camera, affected both the learners with the issues and the others in the class, who had to wait or who were unable to communicate with their peers.

the teacher tell uh... explaining something if the connection are bad, Uh you're probably not going to listen (Participant C).

spend five minutes trying for their connection to be back [they] wasn't as concentrated to the class because she was... trying to get them in while she was talking to us (Participant I).

It was also acknowledged by four participants that technical issues could be used as an excuse not to participate actively in the class and that less motivated students were less likely to rectify technical issues for this reason.

I have to say that a lot of times the connection is a excuse. I have uh, I don't want to do class I had a bad connection (Participant B).

one day the Wifi another the microphone, another the camera, you have the biggest bad luck someone could ever have, and you can see that people who weren't as interested always had problems (Participant I).

Many participants admitted that having the microphone and camera turned on can encourage learners to be present and participating, but that having it turned off affected participation negatively

in the middle of the class start “ hey” and the name of the other, you going to play minecraft?” yeah but you can’t do this if the teacher don’t or won’t to stay on mute (Participant B)

there's people that just turn off their cameras and their microphones, and it's very difficult to communicate in that way (Participant I)

#### 4.3.2.2 Materials and online tools

The participants generally considered the online materials and activities to be relatively similar to those in face to face classes. However, those materials that were adapted for online use were deemed to be more attractive and more engaging.

was so visual, for example, I've got [teacher] when we, when we were talking about difficult words, for example, of the vocabulary um um [they] did with a presentation (Participant E).

so materials was the book and was better online because she can share and show exactly the exercise we want to do (Participant J)

Two interviewees suggested that videos were useful. However, not all the information could be remembered.

I want to have the book, but the book have to like to have goals that you can put on the internet to see videos of for example, the British man that explains you the grammar (Participant B).

Yeah, it's a little bit, but not that much like you watch a movie that is 10 minutes long. You can't remember all the information that they give you, but yeah, it helps (Participant G)

Learners felt more engaged when using the whiteboard and chat function and suggested that the tools aided learning by providing visual presentations of grammar and spelling.

I got very confused with the letters and [teacher] for example. [He/she] didn't say a b c. He write it and then I say, OK, and I write it down in my book (Participant B).

like something that's up on the screen, so to put notes Yes, you could write what you what you put (Participant E).

#### 4.3.2.3 Working with peers

Participants discussed how interacting with peers was productive and aided learning.

you can also help each other (Participant A).

I enjoy it when I learn English to be with other people who also don't know English as good as, like the teacher (Participant I).

Participants agreed that Breakout rooms were a positive tool, which allowed authentic and focused interaction with peers. However, interviewees acknowledged that many students did not take advantage of these opportunities to communicate in English and tended to speak in Spanish or Catalan whenever the teacher was not monitoring.

- Were you talking in English? Is my first question (Interviewer).
- No, no, no... Only if the teacher comes for example well [teacher] goes jumping (Participant B).

I think that you can go better with the partners in the breakout rooms because you don't have any any noise and you focus a lot in the rooms (Participant J).

Participant I acknowledged that the learning experience online was lacking, as they were not able to share and listen to different points of views with peers.

I always like to... be with other people like comparing your opinions (Participant I).

#### 4.3.2.4 Distractions

All of the interviewees admitted that there were many distractions at home, which would not affect learners in the classroom.

too many things that attract your attention rather than the class (Participant A).

I have a brother and sister at 3[pm], one's playing music the other was talking to a friend on the phone (Participant I)

And it felt weird like, i don't want the camera like oh my god my face is right here (Participant F).

Many participants acknowledged that they were less likely to allow themselves to be distracted if they had to have their microphone turned on and knew that the teacher was going to ask them a question.

And all the time were asking you to you so if you you catch the phone probably you less one time and then if she ask you (Participant C).

because if you disconcentrate they will say you something (Participant E).

The notion that some short periods of distraction are inevitable was discussed by three participants.

if you are in class and someone said something that is funny, I mean, there are times that the teacher laughs too no? It's not as like military, all the people, quiet and the teacher talking. So you can say something to your friend and then you work (Participant B).

a thing that i do in class is to catch my scissors... But like for one minute and then I and I can focus again (Participant C).

Participants' study space varied in terms of comfort and suitability, which affected how well they were able to work.

a big room so bedroom, so I would say it was more comfortable about the space because you can leave your, I don't know, pencil case there your book there. So about the space it was kind of better (Participant A).

the lamp, sometimes didn't work and sometimes turn off... also, you know that part of the lamp that cover the light, they haven't got... when I was doing the exercise. It was very difficult because the light blind me a lot (Participant E).

Participants A, C and I discussed how working from home did not feel like a working environment.

but it was not natural. You did not feel like you were in the class. You can stop, go to the bathroom, go to take a cup of coffee. Yeah, it was comfortable, but in my case, it was not the perfect ambient to be focussed on the class (Participant A).

#### 4.3.2.5 Motivation

Participants G and I suggested that enjoyment of the subject was a key factor in their high motivation levels.

Because I don't know, it's like I like English and I want to learn English even if I say if i do it online it does not affect me that much.

And I guess it is for the teacher to be able to keep like the students like motivated and try to make them like English. Yeah, it's hard in person, imagine for people who don't, like English

Some participants discussed how lack of motivation and concentration was exacerbated by learning online.

que no aprendia nada porque no estaba atento [I didn't learn anything because I wasn't concentrating]... So I prefer on presencial class. Maybe I can have a friend and I can talk to him or something. It's a distraction, too, but you attend more in class (Participant D).

there always was like the typical one who has the camera off because he was playing (Participant A),

Participant G also admitted that the fact that their parents were paying for the classes was a motivating factor.

what I thought is that your parents paying for you to come here and to learn so you cannot miss classes.

Participant I suggested that there was less participation from less motivated learners in online classes.

no one said, I felt so bad because sometimes it was like very simple things that I knew they knew because they were my friends, and they're like... It was not because they didn't know what it was because they weren't as interested or no one was making them do it.

#### 4.3.2.6 Discussion

The various references to the importance of working with peers confirm the prime tenet of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. The online experience, without this element, was predominantly found by the interviewees to be lacking, as they recognised the benefits of sharing opinions and helping each other, which was also confirmed by Anderson (2011, p. 38).

Technical issues was also a recurring theme for most of the participants interviewed. Many comments discussed the fact that it could be disruptive, not only for the student with bad internet connection, but also for the rest of the class, who would often have to wait for the teacher to explain what was missed. Technical issues, especially with the internet and audio equipment, seems to be a universal problem, as identified by Aladsani (2021 p. 13)

Comments made by participants suggested that the breakout rooms were a useful tool for more focused communication in pairs. However, the lack of monitoring allowed them to resort to Spanish or Catalan and social talk, which may have negatively impacted on learning (Maimaiti, Jia and Hew 2021, p. 12). This same study also identified that learners

having the camera turned on had a positive impact on their levels of concentration and whether they actively participated in the class (p. 9).

Anderson's (2011) claim that the learning process is aided by information being presented in different modes to encourage coding (p. 28) is supported by the opinions of the participants, who agreed that use of the whiteboard and chat tool to present information visually and textually, as well as verbally by the teacher, affected their learning experience positively. Decker's (2016) suggestions of techniques, such as students' annotation on the online whiteboard and screen share function, was also supported by comments from the interviewees to an extent, as they found annotation activities engaging, and also deemed the use of screen sharing for online adapted learning materials, websites and presentations beneficial to learning. However, the fact that only one participant discussed annotation and two interviewees mentioned the screen share function suggests that these tools could have been utilised more to benefit the learning process. Videos, on the other hand, which provide visual and verbal input, were not deemed to be overly useful by one participant, since not all of the information could be remembered.

Participants described their home study spaces, which varied in terms of suitability, and discussed a wide range of distractions present in online classes, including the mobile phone, social media, family, games and even their own image on the webcam (Winter, Cotton, Gavin and Yorke 2010; Aladsani 2021; Maimaiti, Jia and Hew 2021). However, interviewee responses indicated that, when students know that the teacher is attentive, they are less inclined to allow distractions to affect their concentration. Therefore, although, as Peachey discussed, the teacher cannot move closer to the distracted student to redirect focus (2017 p. 144), they are still able to monitor and engage the students with consistent interaction and concentration checking. Three participants explicitly referenced how brief moments of distraction in the class are inevitable and that attempting to prevent them entirely is not a beneficial solution for the learners (Lang 2017). The participants who expressed that distractions were a real problem in terms of their ability to perform during the classes were both male, while the participants who suggested that distractions could be managed if necessary were both female.

Comments which emerged concerning motivation suggest that enjoying the subject was an important factor in relation to keeping learners on task and focused on English throughout the confinement period, as supported by Dörnyei (2005, p. 77). Motivation also appeared to affect the learners' level of participation. While Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes and Garrison (2013) suggested that a suitable level of direct instruction can promote participation, (p. 79) the interviewees claim that, despite the best efforts of the teacher to



include learners, those who were not interested in English as a subject or motivated to take part simply did not participate.

#### **4.3.3 RQ3: To what extent did socially-related factors affect PET and FCE level learners' attitudes to online language learning during Covid restrictions in Catalonia?**

Social contact and interaction was a theme that was repeatedly discussed throughout the interviews. Participants also mentioned how feelings of insecurity could affect their performance during face to face and online classes.

##### **4.3.3.1 Social contact with peers**

Three participants commented that online classes were colder and more distant.

it's like more robotical, it's not as human (Participant A)

Many participants acknowledged that online classes made communication with peers difficult.

here we are face-to-face and it's easier to communicate (Participant E)

because just like for me communicating without looking like being in person is like, it's very hard for me (Participant I).

Participant C suggested that interaction is natural and important to keep students engaged.

human beings are sociable since we exist

If you want the attention of the students you have to do the the class more interactive

Three participants discussed how a lack of interaction affected students emotionally.

as a punishment they make me to be alone I'm going to be depressed and I I'm not going to am not going to have any interest or do anything (Participant B),

It's like you are alone, and I mean, you don't enjoy it as much (Participant F).

#### 4.3.3.2 Self-consciousness

Interviewee F discussed how online classes made them feel less under pressure when giving feedback

I think that's what I like more in like online classes for the pressure and because of I'm really insecure person,

Participant H also suggested that having the camera on may be difficult for learners lacking in confidence.

I don't have to put off the camera because I listen, I'm listening to you, but a lot of people for because they are more, they are not confident like that. They are shyness

#### 4.3.3.3 Discussion

The idea that online classes were colder and less human was communicated by three of the interviewees, which contradicts Finkelstein's (2006) suggestion that synchronous learning is a "huge leap" towards humanising the experience (p. 29).

Consistent comments related to interaction with peers during the online classes suggest that social interaction is not only natural, but an absence of opportunities to communicate with fellow learners had negative effects on the state of mind of the participants. It is, therefore, all the more significant that a number of interviewees expressed how difficult it was to communicate with peers during online classes, due to insufficient use of breakout rooms to work in groups and the obvious reluctance to interrupt a class to speak to peers, where a brief, whispered comment would have been possible in the classroom. Both of these points were also found by Maimaiti, Jia and Hew (2021).

Two female interviewees discussed the topic of feeling self-conscious during classes. One participant expressed that she felt in the spotlight when giving answers in face to face classes but that this was greatly reduced in an online setting. The other interviewee however suggested that even the camera in online classes was uncomfortable for less confident learners, as indicated by Maimaiti, Jia and Hew (2021).

## 4.4 Conclusion

The data presented here suggests that teachers impacted the learning experience of the participants in how effectively they planned and executed the classes. The teacher also plays an important part as the subject matter expert, but participants believe that they are unable to access the teacher's knowledge as easily, in online classes, as in-person. Cognitively speaking, the online classes were superior since they provided easier access to different modes of input. However, these benefits of online learning were overshadowed by inadequate opportunity for interaction with peers, and difficulties arising from loss of internet connection, or other technical issues. Participants were also affected, to varying degrees, by the suitability of their study space at home and how motivated they were to begin with. In regards to the social aspect to the learning experience, two main concerns emerged: the first being lack of social interaction with peers, which affected almost all of the participants. Secondly, students experienced pressure when selected to answer questions in class, which one participant claimed was less prominent in online classes, whereas another stated that the camera was still a source of discomfort for some learners.

## 5 Conclusion

This chapter begins with a summary of the findings, which were established in chapter 4, which is then followed by the pedagogical implications. Subsequently, the limitations of the study are identified, and the chapter concludes with recommendations of future related research which could be conducted.

### 5.1 Summary

#### 5.1.1 RQ1: To what extent did teacher-related factors affect PET and FCE level learners' attitudes to online language learning during Covid restrictions in Catalonia?

This study has found that direct instruction, was an influencing factor in the participants' experience, in that the participants value the input of the teacher as a subject matter expert, but transfer of knowledge is impeded by the videoconferencing environment, which makes it very difficult for learners to subtly ask for help, without disrupting the class.

It was also found that course design was a critical aspect in which the teacher can impact the learners' experience of online learning. The study indicates that online classes require adequate provision of engaging and interactive activities to encourage the students to stay focused, and it suggests that this requires a certain amount of effort and skill on the part of the teacher for effective execution.

#### 5.1.2 RQ2: To what extent did cognitive-related factors affect PET and FCE level learners' attitudes to online language learning during Covid restrictions in Catalonia?

The study found that technical issues were almost universally disruptive, and that the learners' study space varied in terms of how appropriate it was as a setting for learning. Nevertheless, online adapted materials and other online tools were beneficial to the students' cognitive processes, since the virtual whiteboard and chat function allowed visual presentations of information, breakout rooms encouraged focused communication with peers and videos provided some engaging input. It was also found that working with peers was cognitively beneficial for the learners, as they helped each other, shared ideas and learnt through teaching.

Most prominently, the study determined that distractions were a key inhibiting factor in online courses. Every participant admitted that the temptation of distractions at home was stronger than in the classroom, while the interviewees who struggled most with this were male. However, the study also found that, consistent monitoring from the teacher, and the requirement to have the camera and microphone switched on, could curb the temptations. Those learners who were able to regain their focus more easily, despite the temptations at

home, did so because their motivations for learning were intrinsic, they enjoyed English and were interested in learning the language.

### 5.1.3 RQ3: To what extent did socially-related factors affect PET and FCE level learners' attitudes to online language learning during Covid restrictions in Catalonia?

The study found that learners perceived social contact and interaction to be critical for their emotional well-being and, consequently, a lack of interactive opportunities, that would normally be present naturally in a face to face class provoked a negative attitude towards online learning.

The study also revealed that more self-conscious learners may thrive in the online environment, as working from home behind the screen is seen to provide a safe space to learn and share answers, whereas the classroom is considered to put the learners in the spotlight, where the teacher and peers scrutinise responses for errors. It was also found, however, that, for some self-conscious learners, the webcam made them feel just as uncomfortable in their own home.

## 5.2 Pedagogical Implications

This study identifies three key implications for teachers and learners navigating the challenges of online learning during a crisis.

Training for teachers could encourage better use of the tools available on videoconferencing platforms. This training could include how the use of the private chat function, reaction buttons and breakout rooms can be used to enable easier one-to-one communication between the learner and the teacher. Use of these tools could also allow feedback sessions to be less public and, therefore, less stressful for students. Additionally, it would be useful to train educators in the use of breakout rooms, screen share and white board annotation tools to provide interactive and engaging activities to promote cognition through peer communication, and also to “help promote an individual’s sense of connection with other online students” (Maimaiti, Jia and Hew 2021, p. 15).

Teachers should bear in mind that extrinsically motivated students may struggle more with “autonomy supporting activities” (Dörnyei 2005, p. 77) and, therefore, be more susceptible to distraction. Close monitoring by the teacher can mitigate the issue, as can consistent use of the webcam and microphone. Learners could be encouraged to use the camera in class, by starting the course with an inclusive group discussion about the importance of webcams for the benefit of all class members, in an effort to foster understanding and accountability on behalf of the individual learner. Self-conscious learners

and learners who are distracted by their own image could use an avatar. Alternatively, they could be encouraged to use the option of hiding their own video so that the teacher is still able to monitor that they are working, and other students are still able to have visual contact with their partner during exercises.

This study has also found that students should take responsibility for their own learning, and make the effort to avoid sources of distraction during classes, and endeavour to work productively while not being directly monitored by the teacher.

### 5.3 Limitations of Research Results

This study examined a small, very specific sample, consisting of ten Catalan / Spanish learners of English, aged between sixteen and eighteen and studying at PET or FCE level (B1 or B2 according to the CEFR). Convenience sampling was used for this research, as all of the participants studied at the same private language academy and communicated that they had either liked or disliked the online classes conducted in 2020 and 2021. Consequently the study does not include data from participants who considered their opinions to be neutral.

Despite these limitations, the phenomenological approach of the research allowed the participants to share detailed observations and opinions about their experience of attending online classes. This freedom led to the participants providing an in-depth view of their story.

### 5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

It would be challenging to replicate this study, as a considerable amount of time has now past since the event, and it may be difficult for interviewees to accurately remember their thoughts and opinions about online learning during confinement. The research could be carried out with a focus on online learning under normal conditions, using samples with different ages, from different geographical locations or with different economic backgrounds, but the learning conditions would not be comparable to students who experienced temporary online classes due to the pandemic. It would, therefore, be recommended to, alternatively, carry out a meta-analytic study on the research that has been carried out in relation to ERT to summarise the findings across numerous studies using meta-analytic techniques.

It may be interesting to conduct a study of online learners using stimulated recall, which would involve recreating the environment being investigated, to observe unconscious behaviours that may be provoked by the type of online classes carried out during COVID-

19 restrictions, rather than relying on the students' memory and self-awareness to provide these details in interview.

## 5.5 Reflections

This study has highlighted, for me, how differently the last two years, living with the pandemic, has affected people. I went into this dissertation, with little understanding of how anyone could do anything but celebrate the opportunity to work and study from the comfort of their own home. Having the opportunity to listen to these stories has given me insight into just how diverse our students' needs and attitudes are and how important it is to keep this in mind with every class we plan.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Participant / Parent Consent Form

I am [interviewer], one of the teachers at Cambridge English Centre. I am carrying out a Postgraduate research project for the final year of the Master's in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). This study aims to investigate what elements of the online learning experience affected students and how this impacted the learning process.

A total of ten students will participate in this study. You have been invited to participate because you carried out online language classes at Cambridge English Centre during the COVID restrictions of 2020/2021 and have expressed either positive or negative opinions about online learning.

If you agree to participate, you will take part in an interview with me either in the academy or online which will take approximately one hour. It is your choice if you want to participate or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be identified by a pseudonym and any information about you will have your name and identifying factors removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

Please ask a parent to sign below to confirm that they also give consent for you to participate in the interview.

I consent to my child participating in an interview with [interviewer]

Doy mi consentimiento para que mi hijo participe en una entrevista con [interviewer]

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(firma)



## Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Hi. Thank you for agreeing to help me with this project. As you know, I'm [name] and I want to find out what students thought about the online classes we did earlier this year and last year. I'd like you to tell me about your experience, good or bad. And don't worry, nothing you say will be shared with other teachers, it will all be confidential.

The interview should take 30 to 60 minutes and you can withdraw at any time. Are you still happy to participate in the interview?

- Tell me about your experience of the online classes during 2020 and 2021.

(I will let the learner continue for as long as possible, using the prompts below as necessary to guide the narrative to cover my research questions)

Prompts:

- What did the teacher do during the online classes?
- What was your study space at home like when you were doing the online classes?
- What materials did you use during the online classes?
- What technology did you use during the online classes?

(For each prompt I will follow up with more probing questions)

### Appendix 3: Participant F interview transcript

**I = Interviewer**

**P = Participant F**

I: Okay. Okay. Thank you so much for coming, Laura. So I'm [interviewer]. I'm a teacher here and I'm doing a study into like what you guys thought of the online classes that we did for for COVID. OK? And the interview should last between 30 minutes and an hour.

P: OK.

I: Everything is confidential. I'm not going to tell anyone any details.

P: OK don't worry.

I: And any time you want to leave, you can finish and you can go. OK? Are you still happy to do the interview?

P: Yes.

I: Excellent. OK, thank you. OK. Laura, tell me about your experience of the online classes

P: At first it was like, really strange because I never made like online an online class with anyone or either an online call. I never, never, never. And it was really strange. And but well then after doing it some, after doing like doing some a lot of times I get practise in it and I really felt comfortable and I really enjoy it. And I, I don't know, like one month of doing online classes, I felt like it was more easy to to concentrate and to make my things uh than in presencial classes.

I: OK. And OK, so you said that you were more comfortable? Can you give me any examples of what was better for the online classes than?

P: Yes. For example, I talk a lot with my partners at school but in home I was alone, so I can't talk to anyone and I can concentrate about what the teacher was saying, and I felt like I was learning more faster than having someone next to me because I get distracted a lot. I think it was more easy to me.

I: OK, OK. And OK, so you you said you get distracted a lot. Were there any other distractions either in the classroom or online?

P: The only distraction that I had online was my phone. At first I just look it a lot, talk on Whatsapp, and then I and then I realised that that was not a good thing. So when I sat in online class I put my my phone away, and I get it away at home, and then I can concentrate, I can do it well.

I: OK, excellent. So you knew that it was a problem and you just like, put it somewhere else.

P: Yes

I: OK, great. OK. And so you said also that it was easier to to concentrate. Was that only because of not being able to chat or was there any other reasons?

P: I think it could be too that I was in my home, in my room where I normally used to work and study and think about my things. And in school is different because it's like a really big class with a lot of people, everyone's talking. I don't know, in my home, it's like I feel more like if I feel better with myself, I feel like I don't know. No one is saying things about me. I don't know if you, you get it. Um like, in a school is more I feel more the pressure of the teachers looking, and asking me do you get it and in the online classes, they are like talking to everyone and that makes me feel better with myself.

I: Oh, excellent. OK. OK. Um, what, what do you think it is about the online classes that takes away that pressure of the teacher?

P: Yeah, I think one of the things is that the teacher's looking at you all the time and in the screens looking at the screen and feel that he or she is looking to everyone and not only you. And I think that's really good because if it's looking to me, I feel like if I was doing something wrong, I get nervous and I'm like, Oh my God, what I'm doing wrong? And in the online classes feel like a if if they weren't teaching to everyone else, not only me. And I think it's I don't know if I feel like it's more. Yeah, I feel like if I wasn't supposed to do everything good, if I get wrong something, there is no problem and no one is looking at me. And my partner's not saying, Oh, did you get it right? You know, so it's like, it's just about me and nobody else.

I: alright. OK, so it's like about the teacher and the eye contact and also your classmates.

P: Yes.

I: OK.

P: Because when you made activities, the other persons were always like, Did you get it right? And it's like, oh my God, no

I: Yeah, OK. OK, OK. And... Tell me more about your study space.

P: OK, I'm in my home. Um, when I arrive home, I normally sit it in my desk and I start studying, making homework, put my own music. I feel like it's my time. And in the class, I feel like it's not only my time it's everyone else time. So when I'm trying to make a class online, I feel like if the class was more, like, more concentrate on me but not with pressure, you know? Like if he was very they were trying to teach me but not only to prove what I can do just for learning things and that's it. Sí, I that's I think it's because when I do my homework, that's what I feel, that I am learning, not that I'm trying to do it perfect because a teacher is going to ask me, no. Because when we do homework at my school, we, uh, the teacher corrects it on the blackboard and that's it. No one asks you if you get it right. That's more, it's different. So yeah, I think that's one of my best things. And the other one, I think it's because it's not only my room it's my house in general, there is no one running outdoors and it's everything in silence. No one's going to enter to bother me. And yeah, I feel, um, with normally my parents were not home, because they were working, but my little sister, she, uh, yes, she was. And I feel good because I knew what she was doing every time, and I wasn't worried about what she were- what she's doing now. Is she crying? Is she good? I don't know, because she's only six years old, and maybe sometimes like I feel like I don't know. I feel like that, I know what she's doing, and that feels good to me.

I: Oh, good. OK, so you weren't, you weren't worrying about that while you were doing the classes.

P: I know that, she was well and she was making her own classes, sometimes she didn't do a lot because she's little, but sometimes she did it, and I feel like, I don't know, I feel like if I was the teacher and I was trying to teach her how to do online classes, and that makes me feel really good.

I: Oh, so like, did you help her with her classes sometimes?

P: Yeah.

I: Oh, OK. OK, what about what about your teacher and what did your teacher do in the online classes?

P: It depends on the teacher but normally they look at the screen and that really relax me as I told you before. But one thing that I like, too, is that when he or she ask you, the people normally are making their things, for example, in the classroom normal, in the presential classes, the teacher makes us some exercise to do and then it's time to stop and you stop and look at that person that is making exercise in the in the blackboard and everyone see what she or he writes in the blackboard and see if it's wrong or good. I was like, nooo, but in the online classes you only have to say what you think, and that's it and maybe no one- and maybe someone is making their own exercise because they didn't finish and they're not really listening to you. So you don't have to worry a lot it's just to see that if you get it or not. And that's really good because when I go to the blackboard and everyone's looking at me, I feel like if I had to do you right or someone is going to tell me that I'm stupid or something, it's like oh no I can't. I mean, it's really like, it's a lot of pressure on me and the teacher next to you. Oh, I. Oh, so no, I prefer to do it online like that's one of my favourite things that the pressure that you feel, it's really different in presential classes than online and another thing that I feel different of the teachers making classes online is that they don't ask so much things as in class because in class they are looking at you and if you- if they see you, I don't know, distracted a little bit. They're going to ask you something for you get wrong and everyone is going to look at you. But in the online classes, they're more like concentrated. I don't know what, but they're not looking at everyone at the same time, and I think that's good because I'm not- I maybe I sometimes I get distracted like everyone and I don't have to worry about oh my god, [he's/she's] going to ask me. I feel it's good. I think that was. Yeah, I think that's what I like more in, like, online classes for the pressure and because of I'm really insecure person. I'm always thinking about I'm going to get it wrong and I'm gonna can't do it and things like that. And in online classes I feel like I'm better with myself, and I more confident with myself, so yeah, I don't know, I think that's a really good point. And I think that when I'm more confident with myself without thinking, I'm going to get it wrong, everyone is going to think that I'm stupid, I can do it better than what I was thinking about it, because if I get it, I think I'm going to get it wrong and everyone is going to think that i am stupid. I will get it wrong because I just get like, my head goes boom. And I don't know what to do, but I, no it's better when I think I can do this and I do it. Sometimes I get it wrong. But unless I try, you know, so it's like when I go to the blackboard, I think, no, I can, and then I get it wrong. And I thought, Oh my God, I think that I could do it better. If I was

this, I just wasn't thinking about what, what others were gonna say about me. I don't know, it's what I feel.

I: Oh, OK. And do you feel this pressure here at [Academy name] and at school?

P: What what?

I: Do you feel this pressure here and at school the same?

P: Oh no, because in a school there, I think it's it has to be with the number of people too because here we are less persons and the teachers are not just asking us a lot, they make a lot of exercise to make with each other and see. Because if you make an exercise with someone, as you same age, not the teacher, who knows what are you doing because, you know, [he/she] knows, [he/she] is teaching you. Bit if you're making with somebody that is learning too, you know that she can get wrong too as same as you so you don't feel that thing that oh my god. No, no, no. So if she gets it wrong and you get it right, you feel like, OK. And you explain to her why did she be wrong. And that, I feel that that helps me to learn about my errors, too, because if I explain the other one what she did wrong, I can get what I did wrong too in some exercise. But in class we don't do that, it's everything about the teacher and ask and no one else. And maybe we make up working groups, sometimes a presentation, for example, but it's not the same because it's not an exercise about we're studying, and that's a presentation that we have to make a powerpoint and search information online. So it can't be wrong. So it's like when it's someone of my same age, explain me something I feel I can get it more easily than when it's one that know already tries to explain me. It's more difficult to me to get it. I don't know why, but it's just. I feel it. And that's why I like more study here because we do a lot of things without, um persons, the same age as I, and it's more- it's not that thing that you're going to fail in general because they are they they they're learning too. Yeah, they are not going to judge you and you do something wrong because they do too. So it's just I think it's good when you say to the other one, I get this wrong and they say, me too. It's like, "Oh my god really?" Thank you, so you don't feel that stupid, it's like you feel more, I don't know you feel that you're not the only one person in the world that gets wrong the things everyone gets wrong sometimes, but this doesn't have to be bad. And yeah, I think, yeah, that's the difference between here and the school.

I: Okay. So you said that here you do, you do work with a partner or you do work in groups and that you like that? Is that what you're saying?

P: Yes

I: OK. And online as well? Did you work in groups or in pairs?

P: A lot. Yes. in here Yes, because we made like I how you just say it was like, I don't know how you. Oh my god, how was this called? Well, like the teacher here in the school didn't make us that, but here makes us put in pairs or in groups in like

I: Breakout room?

P: Yes that. And you talk there with your partner, and it's just the same that we do here. I don't care about doing this here, it's the same, but in the school, when we were online and we didn't make any project in partners or in groups because we, I don't know. They didn't do that with the breakout rooms I don't know why but they didn't do it. So I would think that the works that we have to do, our presentations had to be alone. And that was, I mean, I don't really care being alone, but it's just I don't like that a lot. I prefer to be with someone that says your point of view of something.. So if you want to get it wrong, helps you and everything than being alone. So that's the school I the feel of the, what I don't like of my classes that everything was alone. Here, I prefer being because you make things in groups too. So it's the same. I don't care that part

I: And um working in groups, and how did that affect your learning, do you think? was it good?

P: I think it was good because of that, that when someone of my same age, or a similar explained it it something I feel like I'm getting it more than an older person. Well, it depends, of course, but normally I think it's just like getting more easily when someone of my similar age to explain you something.

I: Brilliant and OK, So like talking about the breakout rooms. Was there anything else about the like, about Zoom, about the technology that was good or bad?

P: Oh oh yeah. One of the things that had, that has happened to me in here where we were in a breakout room, once a boy in my class die. Always, always, when we do breakout rooms, they go out. And so I was there trying to talk to him, and then he puff! Disappeared. Then the teacher is asking what happened? Where did you go and he always say the Wifi, the Wifi. I was like oh my god, that was the only bad thing, but normally the people don't do that. it was the only him that always did that., like oh my god

I: And you don't think it was the Wifi no?

P: No.

I: Oh no. And was that like, was that quite disruptive for you?

I: I feel like, if I was making something wrong, and then I talked to [name], and he is in the same class as me, and he told me that that that he did the thing with him and with everyone else. OK, I didn't feel like it was my fault, but at first yes when he goes out, I was like, Oh what i did? what did I say? I knew that he did this with everyone, so I now I don't care. Yeah, he does, because I know that he's going to do that, and I think that really likes me, maybe it's not a good thing, but for instance, yes, because it's really funny when someone gets the micro on and starts hearing some kind of video, or her mother talking, you know, it's like it's really good because sometimes the class is boring and it brings some like happiness to the class. It makes you laugh a little bit and you're like, Oh my God. And if that happens to you, it's not funny, but it is. So yeah, and then it's just sometimes can make the class funnier?

I: Oh, good, because did you have um? Is it important to you to have those little moments of just switching off or laughing about something?

P: Because when our class is the same all the time, it's just too boring. And in some point I'm going to get um, I'm not going to be concentrating about what the teacher is saying because I can't be concentrate about everything all the time. If there is explanation and there are activities, it's good. But if the whole entire hour its explanation that's just oh my god something that we do,

I: It's very intense, isn't it?

P: Yes.

I: Yeah.

P: And I have some comments or some things that other people, it's just to make you feel caught a little bit and relax. And yeah, I think it's necessary to have a little bit of laughs in this class because if you don't, it's going to be really boring and you're not going to concentrate so.



I: And so, yes, you say that the like having a bit of like variety, something different in the class is really important. Do you think you had that in your classes online last year? Was there enough variety to keep you interested?

P: Yes. Yeah, I think so, because everything was different. The teachers teach different and the students talk different. You feel like the students when they are on an online class they explained themselves differently because I think not everyone, but some of them feel slightly more comfortable in their houses and they talk more or they explain more and some people that normal in the classroom gets nervous when the teacher asked you something, in the online classes, you see them and they didn't look like they were nervous. So I don't know. I think that in some point being on your own house or in your place. Where you feel more comfortable makes you feel more braver and more like you have the control of everything and you feel more sure about myself and you get it right without being nervous.

I: Oh, good, because that was a little bit how you felt, right? So you think other people in the class were the same?

P: Yes, I can feel it when I have some for, I have a friend that is really, really shy and she's always worrying about what others say, what she's going to feel. As me, but more. At the online classes, I told her that she was doing really good because she was a little bit nervous, but not as class. In class she was like even shaking sometimes. And in the online classes at first, she was nervous. But then she started to explain the things and I don't know she started to talk and other things. And then I text to her in Whatsapp, you really just did it really good in the class. Yeah, it was really good to see her comfortable with herself and be sure about what she was saying. And yeah, she's really, she's really, she's pretty clever and she normally helps me doing homework and I don't know why she's that unsure about herself because I wish I was like, her. I can't read out loud or, you know, I normally get wrong in maths. But she always gets right. So I don't know why she's so nervous when someone else asked her to talk. It's that she's not getting it right. You know, I don't know. But I don't know if she gets nervous, though. And when I saw her there, it was like, Oh my God, it was really good to see her like that.

I: And now that you're back in school, has she got more confidence or is she shy again?

P: Is more uh, is shyer than in the online classes, but it isn't that shy. At first, well, no, no, not really. At first when we are before we're making online classes, she didn't speak loud. She was always like... and nobody heard her. When the teachers told her, "Okay, can you talk louder?" She gets really nervous and she oooh, no, come on. And then, of course, the

presentations are like her nightmare because it's horrible. But now she is trying her best to now speak that loud and know she's talking louder and now it's not really louder but you can hear her, so it's fine. Yeah, she's trying her best to make it finally stop being that shy and have that insecure that she has. And because of all her friends and his friends, everyone is telling her that not being that shy because it's not. It's not worthless. You don't have to be that shy because no one is going to tell you you're getting wrong and no one's going to say, Oh my god you're stupid. And I always made, uh, told her that thing that don't worry about they're gonna say, when I worry a lot. That doesn't matter, but I do the thing and that's it. So, yeah, but I'm really proud that she's trying to to feel more confident and more confident with herself, and I'm trying to.

I: Oh good

P: Yeah, I think that even help me to feel more comfortable with myself because I saw her trying every day to speak a little bit louder every day, and I think that's a thing that surprised me because when I didn't know her because she's new like four years ago, I don't know. I don't even try. And I was just thinking about everything in my head feeling that my head was going to explode, but I didn't try to stop it. I was just like, I'm like this, I can't change it but then I saw her trying it, and I feel like I had to try too. As if she does, I can do it too. So I think that she really helped me like that, and that's one thing that helps me, her and me at the online classes, that we felt changing that. Because in my class a lot of people don't concentrate and in online classes are making their own things. And you can see them on the screen making, I don't know, whatever they want and you feel like no one is listening to you. I don't care if I get it wrong, no one's going to notice. So I think that makes us feel more comfortable with ourselves.

I: Yeah. Oh, that's great. That's really great. OK. OK, so going back, you talked about how, yes. If it's just the teacher talking to you for the whole class, it's very easy just to get really bored and then disconnect and get distracted in the in the English classes online here. Did your teacher do different types of exercises or was it quite like that?

P: No. We did a lot things normally in partners, but there was some things in groups too. And it was really interactive. But one thing that gets there with everyone is that's, where you are in the break out room, then the teacher and sometimes you're like, Oh my god, it's like nooo. Because it's maybe I'm speaking, you know, and it's in partners and teachers enters just when you have to talk. So that's the thing that you. But then when the teachers go out and you start laughing with the other one. I think that just makes me feel more comfortable with the people in here because i made more friends and we, I can start talking more to other

ones. Because then when the teacher enters to that breaking out room we always cover up each other and when the teacher go out... And I knew a girl that always told me, "you did it good, don't worry", because she saw me, like if I was really nervous about that, the teacher, I was like noo but then the girl that was with we said "don't worry, you did it good". thank you! So, yeah, I think that is another another good point. But at the same time, I'm good because I can talk to other people, like if I work here I didn't do it. So yeah, I think it was good. It were, um, us versus the teacher, so we felt good and I feel that it was the when I start when I started talking to a girl in my class that I never had told before, and that was the teacher. And with that of the teacher entering we felt more comfortable with each other and we started talking. And yeah, now, we're not friends, friends. oh my god sorry [participant's mobile rang]

I: Oh, fine. Fine. I but

P: Yeah, it's like almost a really friend... Oh, can I can I?

I: Yes, of course you can, yes.

[private telephone conversation]

I: OK so you're better friends because you had those moments with like, no teacher, no one else and you could just talk.

P: Yes. And the teacher wasn't there like watching us, as us saying. I don't know if when we finished our activity maybe we start talking, not in English, sorry. Talking about the things in school and that. And the teacher is not there saying "in English". But you feel more comfortable sometimes and it makes you feel better with that person and that makes us feel like you can talk to her or him. And yeah, I think that's a good point, too.

I: Oh, that's really cool. OK. Um, what about? Oh, OK. So what materials were you using? Like, what kind of, were you using a book or like what websites or like, what was it?

P: Um, I was using like the notebook, and I like the same as the school, the book and the notebook, but I knew one of my friends, that she have an iPad and she made the meetings there, and she writes in the iPad. Oh, I haven't an ipad. Because... no, so this Christmas I wish for one maybe I have it I don't know I. Well, I know she makes, she takes some notes in there, because sometimes I ask you to pass me something, and she passed me the photo of the iPad with the resume. I would like a summary of the things and I was like, Oh, thank

you. Yeah, so yeah, it's a good thing. And I told my parents I wanted that for Christmas, for study of course, so I hope that they give that to me for Christmas, I really need it, not only for studying but.. Yes. So yes, but in in my in my case, I just, do it the same as school with the same things and with a computer in front of me in the meeting class. And in, in my table, the notebook, the book and the pencil case, and that's it.

I: OK, so it wasn't it wasn't any different really from the the classes, the presencial classes to online.

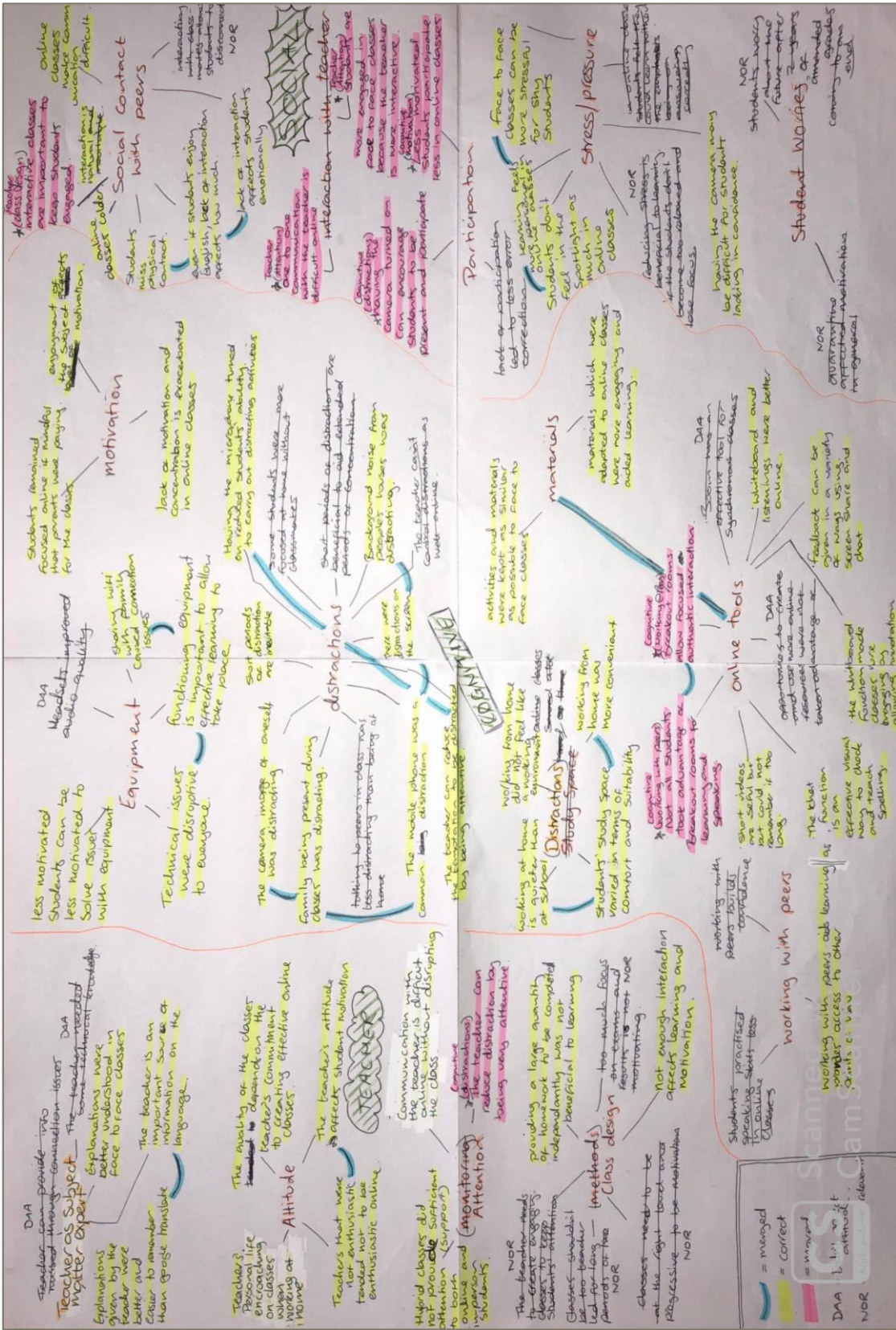
P: No, in the in talking about material, no, for me. It was the same for other persons like the iPad, no, for me it was the same. So, yeah, it didn't change. Sometimes it was better because if i, at first that I had my phone, I get a picture of the screen and then I copy on my notebook or just have it in the folder, for remembering. And at school, I don't have the phone, so I can't take a photo of the screen of the blackboard in that case. And if I get disconnected, as some morning because of something, and I get lost, then it's really hard to read to get it up again because the teacher is talking and talking and writing and writing, and it's like, no, I can't. I can't. And that's one of my of my favourite things too, that the teacher in presencial classes, it's talking and writing talking and writing all the time, all the time, and you have to be like this all the time. I mean, the online classes the teacher share the screen with the summary or something about the thing that we were talking. And then they they teach us the thing about that. It's about that summary and you only have to look up the summary at that's it, and you can be listening and then copy. And not listening *and* copy, because it's really difficult sometimes. And if you just ask for a rubber, for example, then you say, what? What happen? Oh my god So yeah, I think that's that's a really good point, too of the of the online classes.

I: Oh Brilliant. OK. OK. OK. I think that's that's all the kind of questions that I have. Is there anything else the that you want to tell me that that you thought made classes a lot easier or more difficult online? Or do you like or dislike anything else that comes to mind?

P: No, I don't think. I think I say it all, yeah.

I: OK, that's been really, really helpful, [name], thank you so much.

# Appendix 4: Refined Thematic Network



Appendix 5: Finalised Thematic Network

<b>Basic theme</b>	<b>Organising theme</b>	<b>Global theme</b>
Teachers' enthusiasm for their job was related to their enthusiasm executing classes	Attitude	Teaching-related aspects to learning
Passionate teachers created more engaging online classes		
It was difficult for some teachers to balance home-life and classes		
Explanations given by the teacher were better than information provided by online tools	The teacher as a subject matter expert	
Explanations were easier to understand in a face to face setting		
Online students didn't receive sufficient attention in hybrid classes	Attention	
Communication with teacher is difficult online		
The teacher is more engaging in face to face classes		
Asynchronous response from schools was not satisfactory	Class design	
There was not enough interactive activities in the class		

Basic theme	Organising theme	Global theme
Technical problems were disruptive	Equipment	Cognitive-related aspects to learning
Less motivated students did not rectify technical issues		
Having the microphone and camera turned on affected participation levels		
Materials adapted for online use were more engaging	Materials and online tools	
Short videos were useful to an extent		
Online tools made classes more engaging		
Working with peers aided learning	Working with peers	
Breakout rooms allowed productive interaction		
Sharing points of view is important in class		
There were a lot more distractions online than in the classroom	Distractions	
Learners were less likely to get distracted if they thought the teacher would notice		
Short periods of distraction is inevitable		
Study spaces varied in how suitable they were		
Working from home did not feel like a working environment		
Enjoyment is a key motivator	Motivation	
Lack of motivation was worsened by learning online		
Parents paying for classes was a motivator to concentrate		
Less motivated learners participated less in online class		

<b>Basic Theme</b>	<b>Organising theme</b>	<b>Global theme</b>
Online classes were colder than face to face classes	Social contact with peers	Social-related aspects to learning
Online classes made communication between peers difficult		
Interaction is natural		
Interaction is beneficial to student engagement		
Lack of interaction in class affects the learners emotionally		
Online classes make learners feel less in the spotlight when answering questions	Self-consciousness	
Having the camera in online classes is difficult for learners lacking in confidence		



## Appendix 6: Excerpt from Reflective Log

Interview with participant D -

### **What could have been better?**

Interview was short.

Felt like I had to start with prompts quite early.

Participant kept circling back to distractions

Didn't expand on opinions as much as I'd hoped

### **What went well?**

Answers seemed genuine

Talked to some extent about all the areas related to RQs

Research questions seem appropriate from what participant has said

interview was participant led, don't feel like questions skewed opinions or responses.

### **What to do differently next time**

Try to wait longer when there are pauses to see if participant will say anything else

Try to elicit more information about how this affected learning /attitude

Keep notes more organised to probe in the right directions