THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF ITALIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

by

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ABSTRACT

The use of technology and the Internet have spread rapidly in the last decades and have made it possible for people to learn foreign languages online. More recently, the unexpected shift from face-to-face (F2F) to emergency remote learning (ERL) during COVID-19 has increased attention on online and distance learning.

In this thesis, I aim to investigate the *effectiveness* of online foreign language (FL) learning, in particular of the Italian language. It was initially based on three research I posed to gain an understanding of students' perceptions of, and satisfaction with the effectiveness of learning Italian through the Internet and also to what extent they perceived they had acquired or improved their Italian. The investigation has been carried out through the analysis of some crucial factors involved in language learning, namely motivation, personality and autonomy, in order to outline the profile of a successful and satisfied potential online FL learner. My thesis covers the chronological period that started in 2018 and continued until 2022 and represented a time of change for humanity: the COVID-19 crisis. The sudden shift to ERL encouraged a reassessment of online learning and its effectiveness as a way to improve, rather than limit, education. Because the sudden pandemic situation turned learners from individuals who freely chose online learning to students who had to switch to distance education during the COVID-19 emergency, the study was divided into two sections: one "*before* COVID-19" and one "*during/after* COVID-19".

Consequently, in this investigation I explored a variety of methodological paths: from questionnaires and interviews with students and staff members in order to explore their perception of and satisfaction with their online learning experience and build an ideal profile of a successful online FL learner; to the writing of two literature reviews, one before and the

other on COVID-19 and education in order to capture and explore all the challenges and opportunities which came with the pandemic, and to prove that the move to online learning in time of crisis was considered emergency remote teaching/learning (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020), a separated concept from conventional online learning in terms of issues and challenges; finally, social media-based research around certain hashtags and tweets, in order to examine people's perception and feelings about the difference between online learning and ERL. Such a combination of multiple methods attempts to achieve a complete picture of a situation which might need a thorough investigation in terms of the elements which can serve as points of reference in the development of potential new learning and teaching models for the post COVID-19 era.

The results showed that all students who engaged in learning Italian online, both *before* and *during/after* COVID-19, perceived they had acquired the language and found the overall online FL process to have been satisfactory. However, students who experienced ERL and had promptly adapted to the online learning environment due to extenuating circumstances, would not repeat their online experience in the future. Instead, they would rather opt for F2F classes because they missed the on-campus experience. The results contribute to the related body of research by showing that the concept of *effectiveness* is intertwined with feelings that depend on extrinsic parameters, and a learner's satisfaction with the process of online FL learning might lie in needs and expectations other than academic achievements or learning outcomes, such as the need to experience on-campus life and feel a sense of academic community.

My findings also show that my initial speculations that online learning is not appropriate for everyone, and that students interested in learning an FL through technology would tend to

be more positive and satisfied about their online experience than others, have been backed by the evidence of this study.

This study is grounded on the premise that online learning, particularly in FL, makes education more accessible to learners around the world. In fact, even before the pandemic, an increasing number of universities and institutions were turning to blended and distance learning in order to increase participation. My findings and evidence can contribute to the development of possible models to enhance teaching in the post-pandemic era, helping institutions in the design of quality and more effective online FL courses to meet students' and teachers' needs and expectations.

Finally, my thesis fills a research gap in the area of online learning of Italian as an FL, as very little research about the effectiveness of online language learning, and particularly of Italian, currently exists.

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DEDICATION

Ai miei amati nonni,
fondamenta del mio passato,
pilastri della mia vita.

To my beloved grandparents,
foundations of my past,
pillars of my life.

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List of abbreviations

BYOD	Bring Your Own Device
DPA	Data Processing Agreement
ERL	Emergency Remote Learning
ERL/T	Emergency Remote Learning/Teaching
FL	Foreign Language
HE	Higher Education
L2	Second Language
OU	Open University
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
UoB	University of Birmingham

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"…there is one big thing happening that leaves me incredibly hopeful about the future, and that is the budding revolution in global online higher education. Nothing has more potential to lift more people out of poverty — by providing them an affordable education".

(Friedman, 2013)

Easy access to, and the provision of technology and the Internet have changed our lives in many ways. For instance, technology progress provided me with the opportunity to enrol on a distance PhD in 2018 and to find most of the resources I needed online. Tracing back my working experience, before embarking on this doctoral programme as a distance learner, I worked as a FL secondary teacher in Italy, and I was able to access a wide variety of technological and online tools to engage my students during F2F classes and online one-to-one tutoring. On account of my personal and professional experiences, I have witnessed the fact that technological progress has changed, and will continue to transform learning, teaching and education. In particular, I observed that students who engaged with online learning activities could form positive perceptions of their acquisition of or improvement in the Italian language in an online context, as well as retain a certain level of satisfaction about their online language learning experience, and therefore, its learning effectiveness, which according to the Sloan Consortium (2002) is concerned with ensuring that students engaged in online programmes "are provided with a high quality education" (Online Learning Consortium, n.d.) equivalent to the quality of traditional F2F programmes, and that "online learning outcomes meet or exceed institutional, industry, and/or community standards" (Moore, 2008, p. 100). The Sloan Consortium (2002) also implemented a framework in which student satisfaction and learning effectiveness were identified as two of the five pillars of quality in online education (along with faculty satisfaction, access, and cost effectiveness). In fact, students' perceived satisfaction and expectations positively affect, and can have substantial impacts on, the

effectiveness of online learning (Tran, 2022). Moreover, as Alqurashi (2019) suggested, students' satisfaction within online learning contexts can be used to evaluate online courses, and therefore, reflects the effectiveness of quality of such contexts.

Overall, students' attitudes and perspectives influenced their ideas about the effectiveness of online learning, which in this thesis is considered as their satisfaction with the learning experience and achievement of learning outcomes (Jung et al., 2002; Khatony et al., 2009; Maloney et al., 2011; Noesgaard & Ørngreen, 2015). I found evidence in Kauffman's (2015) review of factors that affect satisfaction with online learning, where he pointed out that "negative perceptions […] can lead to unfavourable learning outcomes" (p. 2). According to the author, learning outcomes are interpreted in terms of student performance and academic achievement, which can lead to negative feelings, such as frustration, when they are not accomplished (Berenson, Boyles & Weaver, 2008). Therefore, satisfaction can be considered "an underlying indicator of success" (Dziuban et al., 2015, p. 3) within the online learning experience, which depends on the fulfilment of students' needs (Martin & Bolliger, 2022) and is influenced by the expectations both students and educators hold about the student performance and learning outcomes. Shea et al. (2001) used students' perceptions of their learning progress to measure the effectiveness of online learning. In light of the above, I assessed the effectiveness of online learning through learners' reported satisfaction with their online learning experiences based on their individual perceived progress in Italian language proficiency.

Of course, my personal experience with technology and distance education was not enough to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of online FL learning, which needed a pragmatic investigation and the collection and comparison of data, for example by broadening the analysis to include not only student perceptions but also the views of all other actors involved (i.e., teachers and educators).

As such, my reasons for analysing the effectiveness of learning an FL online, specifically Italian, was grounded on the premise that online learning, particularly in the FL area, makes education more accessible all over the world. This aspect is fundamental, as demonstrated by the fact that, even before the pandemic, a growing number of universities and institutions were turning to blended and distance learning in order to increase participation. In fact, the creation of fully online language courses (Blake, 2012) may help promote collaboration across many institutions and offers a wider choice of classes. Distance courses are flexible in terms of time and space and can be self-paced and individualised and tailored to each student. However, for the sake of clarity, it is important to acknowledge that online learning and distance learning, which are often perceived as being synonyms, are, in fact, different. In distance courses, students and instructors are physically separated, and students learn the material on their own, with no F2F interaction with their teachers or peers. As Holmberg (1989) suggested, the separation occurs in not only space but also time. When talking about online learning, we broadly refer to the use of online tools for learning, with two basic settings which differ in terms of time and place: asynchronous and synchronous. In fact, in asynchronous online learning students work at their own paces, and they do so independently of time and place (Fabriz et al., 2021; van der Keylen et al., 2020), whereas in synchronous online educational settings, communication occurs in real time with immediate feedback (Blau et al., 2017) from instructors and peers.

Over just a few years, the COVID-19 outbreak and the unexpected shift from in-person education to ERL have drawn attention to online and distance learning, which gave more significance and value to my proposed study on online FL learning, a few years before the COVID-19 emergency. In 2018, when I started my PhD, my key research objective was to explore why online learning was not suitable for everyone and what the characteristics outlining the profile of a successful and satisfied online FL learner were. With this in mind, I started my

study with the intention of supporting research with evidence which would lead to the development of high-quality and effective online FL courses and models to meet students' needs and expectations.

Once COVID-19 broke out, many countries started producing guidelines, and single universities and institutions took action on distance education, which increased the significance of my study. As a matter of fact, assisting institutions and faculties in designing quality online courses as a temporary alternative to physical classes has become even more of a priority both during the pandemic and afterwards. However, we were not prepared for such an educational change, and that is where my research finds applicability.

In the following paragraphs, I explain the theoretical background and rationale behind my research topic. Then, I list the research objective, the perspectives used in my study, the research questions and corresponding methodology and sample of participants, as well as the originality of my work and its contribution to the related body of literature. Finally, I outline the structure of the thesis.

1.1. Background and rationale

With the onset of the Internet and its expansion, the world has changed and continues to change significantly. The generation born in the current digital age, known as "digital natives" or the "Net-gen" (Prensky, 2001a), spontaneously and often superficially employ new technologies, such as "computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age" (p. 1), without being digitally literate to use them. In part 2 of his article series on "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants", Prensky (2021b) further added that digital natives struggle to concentrate, and they have a different attention span compared to the "older" generation of "digital immigrants". The capacity to pay attention *per se* is not lacking in this group of people, as we might think. Instead, in such an "information-

rich world" (Simon, 1971), the "wealth of information creates a poverty of attention" (p. 41) and consequently digital natives simply choose not to pay attention to what is not interesting to them. However, the importance of capturing these learners' attention might be limited by the "pedagogical inertia" (Citton, 2017) of teachers and educators towards technological innovation, which is the reason why they do not try to reach their students, and instead they "pretend that the Digital Native/Digital Immigrant issue does not exist, and continue to use their suddenly-much-less-effective traditional methods until they retire and the Digital Natives take over" (Prensky, 2001b, p. 6).

Yet, even before the impact of the COVID-19 emergency on education, digital and online tools, or, more generally speaking, Computer-mediated communication and Web-based language learning were recognised as capable of enhancing language learning, facilitating interaction between teachers and students, and boosting students' engagement through authentic materials and activities (Mahdi, 2014; Zeng & Takatuska, 2009; Son, 2007; Wang, 2006). Online tools such as MOOCs, Apps and Blogs expose users to authentic language environments, tasks and materials, especially through videos that portray a wide range of communicative situations and "help to promote comprehension" (Castrillo & Martin, 2016, p. 179).

Despite the fact that many higher education students started enrolling on online courses even before 2020, as shown for instance by the 2016 Online Learning Consortium (OLC)'s report, according to which 5.8 million (28%) of US students, statistically equal to one in four undergraduate students, enrolled on online courses in the United States, academic leaders and faculty members held some preconceptions (Sorokova, 2020) about the effectiveness of online education and "a majority of educators believed that it could never be as good as F2F learning" (Swan, 2003, p. 13). What does previous research tell us about online learning effectiveness? Swan (2003) examined the question in a paper where the literature on the learning effectiveness of asynchronous online environments was reviewed, demonstrating that

there were “no significant differences” in learning outcomes between online and F2F environments. Some other preliminary evidence seems to suggest that, with the correct technology and access, online learning can be more effective than traditional learning: for example, in an article published on the World Economic Forum, Li & Lalani (2020) stated that online students can retain 25-60% more material compared to only 8-10% from F2F learning settings, with 40-60% less time needed to learn. Essentially, despite the growth in popularity of online education, research did not entirely focus on the effectiveness of online learning until the pandemic broke out, when moving courses online was inevitable in order to avoid the disruption of education at all levels. However, until the Spring of 2020, the discourse on the quality of education through the use of the Internet, technology and online learning was surrounded by scepticism, which can be traced back to a dystopian view of the Internet, as opposed to the polarised utopian vision, which over time led all educational actors and stakeholders to contrasting and mixed perceptions about technologies and online learning. Virtual utopians see the rise of the Internet and technology as a revolutionary opportunity to increase participation and to promote equality (Yar, 2014) and the inclusion of students who cannot physically be in a classroom (Sahay, 2004). In Stiglitz (1999)’s words:

> “Today a child anywhere in the world who has Internet access has access to more knowledge than a child in the best schools of industrial countries did a quarter century ago. He or she is no longer isolated.” (p. 9)

Considering the recent situation of children and people isolated at home during the pandemic, the above quotation sounds familiar and current. Moreover, looking at progress and technological innovation in the latest decades, and at the opportunities given by the Internet during the lockdowns between 2020 and 2022, one might wonder how much worse the impact of COVID-19 on education and on the sense of isolation would have been if it had happened in the 1990s.

Conversely, the virtual dystopian view sees the Internet as a source of problems for modern society, rather than a solution (Yar, 2014). All the concepts around freedom, liberation and equality promoted by digital utopians are demolished by the pessimism which sees the internet as a danger to people's privacy and autonomy, as well as a risk of addiction to technology and alienation from others.

These two extreme positions needed to be reconciled (Rambe & Nel, 2015) by educators, creating a third mitigated perspective between "the multiple educational opportunities that technology presents […] (and) technology as an inherently evil, dehumanizing force that will lead inevitably to the destruction of mankind" (p. 2), to grant people a broad vision of the effectiveness and possibilities of online learning. My suggestion to improve the future of education is to synergically connect the two visions and bring together the valuable aspects of both sides: the utopian one which emphasises how online courses offer inclusive access to learning opportunities for students "who would otherwise have no chance to benefit from such provision" (Yar, 2014, p. 40), and the dystopian view, which is not specifically focused on education but cautions against the general social pitfalls of the digital reality and was listed by Yar as "the loss of privacy and autonomy, the alienation from others through technology and addiction, and exposure to risk and danger from the likes of online thieves, terrorists and paedophiles" (p. 58). Thus, this cautionary vision "enables resisting excessive optimism and preventing possible errors related to the failure to identify future risks" (Pinto et al., 2021, p. 2). As a result, considering both sides, I propose a perspective which pictures online learning and technology as a supplement to, not a replacement of education. Borrowing Citton's metaphor from his work *The Ecology of Attention* (2017) regarding MOOCs and applying it to online learning: "[it] cannot, however, substitute for presential teaching, any more than a video of a pizza (even high definition) can substitute for a real pizza in the eyes of a hungry person" (p. 99).

In fact, the COVID-19 crisis and the sudden shift to ERL encouraged a re-evaluation of online learning and its effectiveness, as a way to improve, rather than limit education.

1.2. Aims and perspectives

In 2018, my PhD path started with questioning whether online/distance learning was as effective as classroom-based or F2F learning, as little was known about the effectiveness of online FL learning. At the time, people would have freely chosen to learn an FL online, which led me to wonder whether students' bias for studying online rather than in-person was driven by different internal variables from those involved in classroom-based learning. As no previous research had ever addressed this issue, the initial objective was to explore students' perceptions of and degree of satisfaction with the effectiveness of online learning, given the fact that this educational delivery mode might not be suitable for all students (Kauffman, 2015), and build an "ideal online FL learner" profile through the analysis of online learners' motivation, personality and autonomy in learning via Likert-scale questionnaires, in order to understand to what extent these three internal factors affect the online learning of Italian as an FL. The choice of this specific case study and to investigate Italian as an FL come from my personal experience as a teacher, where I observed my students' acquisition of, or improvement in, the Italian language online, and their level of satisfaction with the online language learning experience.

Identifying the characteristics of a successful and satisfied online learner can help universities design and promote effective online courses that meet the students' need and expectations (Dabbagh, 2007; Kauffman, 2015). The COVID-19 crisis exacerbated the dichotomy between online and traditional education because all students and educators were immediately forced to move to remote learning, sometimes without the appropriate digital readiness for this move online, which as a first step, led the public to view online education as "a poor substitute for the real thing" (Yandell, 2020, p. 263). At that point, my research perspectives were enhanced by

this unexpected emergency, which enabled me to expand the investigation around the effectiveness of online FL learning of Italian to include a new category of online students, those who *had to* adapt to a temporary modality of remote teaching during COVID-19 in order to avoid disruption. This “temporary shift in the delivery of education to an alternative delivery model in which all teaching is conducted online” (Hodges et al., 2020) which occurred in 2020 and in the following year, has been called ERL, and differs from online education “outside” the pandemic, but could still influence people’s perceptions about the effectiveness of online learning and the challenges, concerns and opportunities we all experienced. The aim of this thesis is to provide evidence of the effectiveness of online learning and the need to conceive new ways of implementing remote education which can be employed in parallel and within traditional teaching in the future. In other words, the present work prosecutes the beliefs of including technology and digital tools as a means of improving education, rather than as a replacement for our everyday teaching practice. The collection of common lived experiences of ERL from the point of view of higher education students and staff members through interviews demonstrated such evidence and, therefore, supported the research scope.

1.2.1. Research Questions

The following section explains the research questions examined in the thesis, which stemmed from a reflection on the effectiveness of FL learning in online contexts.

In the first section of the thesis, I am endorsing the idea that online learning can be effective when certain criteria related to personality traits, motivation and autonomy to learn the language online, inclination to technology and digital competence are met. I aim to show that some internal factors can also influence the decision to study an FL online, in addition to the perception of the effectiveness of online language learning. The *before* COVID-19 investigation, from 2018 to 2020, involved 36 participants engaged in learning Italian online consisted of two questionnaires: the questionnaire was divided into 4 parts: part I collected

general information about participants with both open-ended and closed questions; part II was made up of 20 questions to assess students' motivation in learning Italian online, based on a longer, 60-item L2 motivation questionnaire designed by Dörnyei (2009); part III was made up of 10 questions about personality using the ten-item Big Five personality inventory (Rammstedt & John, 2007); and part IV contained 13 questions about autonomy in learning.

The data from Part II to Part IV were collated and averaged through a Likert scale, a measurement system widely used in educational research and the social sciences, to convert the respondents' perspectives, opinions, behaviours and perceptions, expressed as subjective and qualitative traits, into objective and quantitative elements (Joshi et al., 2015).

The scale ranges from 1 to 5: 1- "strongly disagree", 2 - "disagree", 3 - "neither agree nor disagree", 4 - "agree" and 5 - "strongly agree".

After a few months, the participants were contacted again for a final questionnaire about their perception of learning Italian online and the progress they had made with the language. In this final questionnaire, further qualitative questions were asked to solicit feedback on closed questions, so that quantitative data could be produced in greater depth through qualitative data. All questionnaires were self-administered through survey software in accordance with the IT/Legal Services advice to ensure DPA compliance. Specifically, the online software used to collect and export data was Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool which allows staff members and students at the University of Birmingham (UoB) to create accounts in order to use this facility. The two questionnaires were thus easily created on the Qualtrics platform and distributed through anonymous survey links. The first questionnaire was shared via mailing lists, posts on social networks and websites, whereas the link to the follow-up questionnaire was delivered through e-mail. The results could be analysed through reports, creating diagrams for quantitative data and examining individual responses to open-ended questions.

In the second section, I examined the period *during* and soon *after* the pandemic and involved 22 undergraduate students enrolled in courses of Italian as an FL at the UoB. The participants were asked to complete the first questionnaire used in the *before* COVID-19 study, followed but group interviews on Zoom.

In the light of a research gap in the field of online learning of Italian as an FL, the initial goal of my study was to contribute to the research area by primarily investigating the question:

1) "to what extent do students perceive they have acquired or improved the Italian language in an online context?". Answering the above question provides a unique opportunity to contribute to a current topic, as events concerning the pandemic and the switch to online service providers in many sectors (e.g. education, work and public administration) showed how unexpected circumstances may give rise to changes and to the need for a re-examination of online education. Therefore, the aim of the above question had to be revisited by considering new challenges and problems brought about by new ways of learning and conceiving the educational setting, which include the online context not as a temporary and unconventional method of learning and teaching, but as an integral part of the emerging learning landscape. Hence, the final version of the study includes both a reflection on the questionnaire results and an analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on learning. Accordingly, the inductive approach, based on observing specific experiences in order to get a more general insight into the effectiveness of online FL learning both *before* and *during* COVID-19, was employed to answer question 1.

2) The second research question, "To what extent do these internal factors affect the learning of Italian as an FL in online contexts?", was investigated as follows:

2.1. The first factor examined was L2 Motivation: findings were collected in order to investigate the intrinsic/extrinsic motivation in online environments, as well as the "L2 Motivational Self System", a model proposed by Dörnyei (2009) according to which the learner is characterised

by three primary components of motivation when learning a L2: the Ideal L2 Self refers to the person we would like to become in speaking an L2, the Ought-to L2 Self refers to "the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to avoid possible negative outcomes" (Dörnyei, 2009, p.29), and L2 Learning Experience corresponds to the learning environment and situations in which the learner behaves. The L2 Motivational Self System had not been applied to online language contexts yet and was, therefore, an important area to be investigated.

The statements used in Part II of the first questionnaire were extrapolated from a questionnaire used in a 2008-2009 comparative survey project in Japan, China and Iran, conducted by Dörnyei himself with the support of on-site researchers (Taguchi et al., 2009). The original questionnaire consisted of 60 items grouped according to what they intended to measure (Ideal L2 self, Ought-to L2 self and family influence, interest in the language, cultural interest and instrumentality). I selected 20 statements, which I considered appropriate for the purpose of analysing intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and "L2 Motivational Self System" in online learning contexts, whilst avoiding long questionnaires and redundancy, which might have discouraged participants. The name of the language investigated was changed from "English" to "Italian", as the studies conducted by Dörnyei et al. were related to English as a Foreign Language.

2.2. Personality has been assessed by using the short version of the Big Five Model, abbreviated by Rammstedt and John (2007) to a 10-item version, consisting of 10 assertions that measure personality in less than a minute. In the BFI-10 version, each dimension (Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism) is associated with two items[1]. By using the literature review and previous studies on the application of the Big Five Model, I formulated the hypotheses to be tested (H1-H3 below). Firstly, openness to experience is seen as a typical trait of individuals who are willing to

[1] Scoring method will be detailed in Chapter Four: Results.

consider alternatives, intellectually curious, open-minded and open to new situations. Previous research demonstrated that people who scored highly in this trait have an inclination towards technology (Iahad, Miskon & Khan, 2014) and communication via online platforms and social networks (Ross et al., 2009). Therefore, I speculated that:

[H1] individuals with a high score in this trait would also have an aptitude for learning a foreign language online.

[H2] Neurotic individuals feel anxious, tense, insecure, unstable, have a superficial attitude towards learning and might give up when facing difficulties. In an online learning environment where people need to be self-motivated and independent in their own learning, with no concerns about others, I predicted that participants would score highly in neuroticism.

[H3] Extraverts are friendly and socially active and prefer the company of others, are talkative and in constant connection with the outside world. Introverts, conversely, "need less stimulation than extraverts" (Biedroń, 2011, p. 471) and more time alone. On these premises, I formulated the hypothesis that introverts would prefer an asynchronous online learning environment, where they can learn at their own pace, whereas extraverts would prefer the company of others, which is only feasible in synchronous online contexts.

Researchers have shown that there is a correlation between the personality trait of conscientiousness and academic achievement (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003; Noftle & Robins, 2007; O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007; Conrad & Patry, 2012 among others). For example, Komarraju, Karau & Schmeck (2009) showed that students who are extrinsically motivated (e.g. those who are driven by external rewards) are also conscientious. Accordingly, I postulated that the participants in my case study who had asserted they were studying Italian for academic purposes (some of them were students from OU or UoB, whilst others studied elsewhere) would score highly in conscientiousness. Of course, this hypothesis refers to students who studied Italian online before the outbreak of COVID-19. Therefore, they had intentionally decided to learn through the Internet. It was, therefore, crucial to compare the

results of the *before* COVID-19 case study with what happened soon after the pandemic outbreak, where students were forced to move to the online format and adapt to it. The outcomes, which are discussed in Chapter Six, provided considerable insight into the investigation of personality traits in the field of online FL learning.

2.3. The final factor investigated was autonomy. There is no definitive model or questionnaire to measure autonomy in learning, either in the classroom or online. Therefore, to measure learners' autonomy in online contexts, I took inspiration from a 45-item questionnaire developed by Broady in 1996 (as cited in Breeze, 2002) to assess the attitude towards autonomy of 46 British university students of French or German. The original questionnaire was divided into 8 parts (general readiness for self-directed learning; general attitudes to language learning without the presence of a teacher; explanation and supervision by a teacher; language learning activities; selection of content; setting objectives and self-assessment; and, lastly, attitudes towards external assessment). Broady's questionnaire was a starting point: I decided not to use it in its entirety because the statements mainly referred to classroom experience, and the role of the teacher was predominant throughout the questionnaire. Consequently, I thought it appropriate to develop a 13-item questionnaire, with statements inspired by the non-academic survey website www.askabox.fr[2], which used more appropriate questions to investigate learners' autonomy in online contexts.

Participants and their perspectives were considered in the final questionnaire (for the *before* pandemic section) and in the interviews (for the during/after COVID-19 section), where the perception of and satisfaction with their learning in online contexts were analysed through a series of open-ended questions intended to provide answers to quantitative questions, thus achieving a clear set of findings.

3) The research question associated with the final questionnaire and oral interviews was "what

[2] www.askabox.fr/liste-111693-TfchNzmAVT0.html

are the students' perception of and satisfaction with the effectiveness of learning Italian through the Internet?". The question was posed to respondents to provide their personal perception of and satisfaction with the online learning process, rather than collect objective answers in order to capture the extent to which students had acquired the language, for example via standardised tests. A quantitative technique, in the form of a standardised test, would only have measured participants' level of language, without showing the whole picture of their online learning process, for example their satisfaction with reaching their learning goals, or their perception of having acquired the language skill needed to perform the language in social contexts. For these reasons, I decided to include both quantitative and qualitative questions for the final questionnaire.

As I previously mentioned, the unexpected shift to ERL could have influenced people's perceptions about the effectiveness of online learning, which has been an alternative option to F2F learning for many years even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

A comprehensive analysis should, therefore, include a focus on people's perceptions of the differences between online learning and ERL, which I addressed through a social media analysis in order to interpret the feelings and opinions of users on Twitter hashtags during the pandemic.

In light of the above, the main objectives of the mining and feelings analysis of Twitter hashtags about online learning during COVID-19 were as follows:

4) Examining to what extent users perceive a difference between the concepts of online learning and ERL.
5) Classifying the users' opinions and perceptions of ERL as either positive, negative or neutral.
6) Investigating the equivalent term to ERL used in Italy, namely "didattica a distanza", and which perceptions and feelings it causes.

The final objective of the present thesis is to identify new patterns and contribute to the emerging theories of online FL learning and distance education.

1.2.2. Contribution to knowledge

The study fills a research gap in the field of online learning of Italian as an FL, as very little research has been done to explore the effectiveness of online language learning, particularly in Italian Studies, from the perspective of students' satisfaction with their learning and perception of their learning success, as well as by detecting the characteristics which contribute to their online FL success. Therefore, in the present study I contribute to research about online learning of Italian as an FL in the period before and after COVID-19, but the findings mostly apply to the general field of FL. In fact, the pandemic has demonstrated the opportunity that technology and online tools provide in education and many other sectors (working from home, digital public administration and e-governance). However, a proactive discussion on online education before the COVID-19 crisis could have produced more effective responses to the emergency, for example by identifying factors that could ensure a positive online learning experience or knowing how to design effective online courses. On the contrary, the general lack of preparation resulted in uncertain and unsteady moves to online learning in order to avoid disruption to education. Recalling the time of the sudden worldwide lockdowns, when we had to stay at home and education moved online, using technology and online learning tools was not immediately perceived as familiar to everyone. This is a mistake we need to avoid in the future by investigating how to implement effective online courses and ways to help students fulfil their educational needs and feel satisfied with their online learning experience. In a way, the contribution of my thesis is to raise awareness of the significance of distance learning, technology and digital tools, all included under the umbrella term of online learning, and on how to avoid future disruption in the education system. The investigation of the effectiveness of online FL learning can serve this purpose by providing an understanding of the value given

by technology and online provision to education, as well as delineating, through the analysis of motivation, personality and autonomy, the characteristics of the potential successful and satisfied online FL learner, which can lead to the implementation of high-quality and effective online FL teaching models to meet students' needs and expectations.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

My research covers the period between 2018 and 2022 and is structured in two sections: the first section, corresponding to the *before* COVID-19 years, concerns an investigation from 2018 to 2020. In the second section, from 2020 to the present year (2023), I analysed the period *during* and soon *after* the pandemic.

Chapter Two is a review of the existing literature on the factors involved in, and which might influence, the process of online L2/FL learning. The analysis starts from the idea of the learner whom Ushioda (2009) defined as a "person-in-context": an individual portrayed as alone and independent in their learning, where internal variables (e.g. motivation, personality and autonomy in learning) come into play in the acquisition of an FL. The review of literature begins with the examination of previous research about motivation, personality traits and autonomy in classroom-based environments and then develops towards the online contexts.

Chapter Three defines the methodological approach chosen to conduct the research for both the *before* and *after* COVID-19 sections. The process of data collection and management for the period covered, including storage, access and disposal of data, as well as the ethical approval process are also described.

Chapter Four pertains to the *before* COVID-19 section, and the results of the questionnaires on the three factors, namely motivation, personality and autonomy, as well as the perception of students on the effectivenness of online learning of Italian as an FL are presented and discussed.

Section Two on online learning during COVID-19 starts with Chapter Five, a supplementary literature review that intended to reveal all the pedagogical challenges and opportunities brought by the pandemic, particularly the perceived advantages and disadvantages of ERL and how it affected education, as well as detecting research gaps which appeared to be correlated with the misconception around the term ERL, often perceived as synonymous with online learning, remote learning or distance learning. This false assumption led many stakeholders (e.g. students, parents and teachers) to perceive online learning as ineffective. A definition of the term “emergency remote learning” during the pandemic is provided, in order to differentiate it from that of online learning. Then, documents and reports issued by the European Union and its agencies around ERL and online learning are listed, followed by academic studies and research on ERL during COVID-19 both in secondary and higher education. All findings provided support for the formulation of questionnaires and interview questions addressed to the UoB undergraduate students in Chapter Seven of the thesis.

Chapter Six focuses on the perception and feelings of Twitter users, among which EdTech experts and educators, around the differences between online learning and ERL through a social-media content analysis of tweets and hashtags related to the two terms from all over the world. Moreover, the investigation focuses on the term “didattica a distanza”, mostly perceived as the Italian equivalent of the term ERL. The overall aim of this section is, therefore, to measure public perceptions and the proliferation of new terms and concepts about online learning in an emergency situation, and to investigate the extent to which the emerging hashtag #EmergencyRemoteLearning was associated with certain feelings and whether users perceived a difference between online learning and ERL. I also identified and compared the terminology used in Italy during the pandemic.

Chapter Seven contains details about how I gathered and analysed interviews from students of Italian as an FL and staff members from UoB who had to move to teaching online during the

pandemic and explores how this sudden change has conditioned their learning and teaching as well as their beliefs about online learning. The same questionnaires used in Chapter Four to assess motivation, personality and autonomy in learning were administered to the students of Italian at UoB interviewed, analysed and compared to the results from the period *before* COVID-19.

Chapter Eight contains all findings and evidence from previous chapters and connects them under the “umbrella” of the research questions and objectives and the main idea hereby presented: the *effectiveness* of online FL learning and its value as a complementary component in education.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Crucial factors in Online Language Learning

According to Brown (2007), learning a language is a very challenging task because “your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the first language into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical, intellectual, and emotional response, are necessary to successfully send and receive messages in a second language” (p. 1). Vocabulary and grammar are part of the process, but there are other elements involved, such as self-confidence, anxiety, a positive or negative attitude towards the FL, the role of the teacher and of peers, to mention but a few. Thus, it is important to consider both internal and external factors which influence the process of learning (Brown, 2007; Ellis, 1994), where external factors dealt with the coursebook, course design and curriculum, social and affective variables (Mirhadizadeh, 2016) within the classroom, whereas internal factors refer to variables which come from inside the individual - above all motivation – and learners are conceived as individuals with their own identities and personalities. In the context of online learning, it is not possible to consider the same factors involved in language learning within a classroom, where the role of the teacher is crucial to driving the L2 acquisition.

There are certain factors that are crucial in online language learning, whether they occur in a self-directed (Knowles, 1975; Garrison, 2003) e-learning setting, where students take charge of their own learning, usually with mutual guidance from helpers (teacher, mentor, peer, tutor)[3], or in a self-paced environment, where learners are more autonomous and study at their own pace (Rhode, 2009). Little research (Alberth, 2011) has attempted to identify critical factors in

[3] Knowles (1975) describes self-directed learning as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating their learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18).

online language learning. Alberth proposed “six critical success factors […] of online learning in general, and online language learning in particular” (p. 18) which include students’ characteristics[4]. In fact, despite experiencing the same learning environments and teachers, students may react differently, as every individual has their own learning style and learning preferences which may affect their perception of online learning and its effectiveness (Alberth, 2011).

Considering the idea of the learner as an individual, a “person-in-context” (Ushioda, 2009) with their own personality and identity, the aim of this chapter is to determine and analyse some internal factors which influence the process of learning a language online, where the learner is essentially alone and independent in their learning, and the process of acquiring a foreign language is, consequently, influenced by individual and internal variables, which I will consider to be motivation, personality, and autonomy in learning.

This chapter is organised as follows: the first section examines motivation in L2/FL in previous research both in classroom-based and online learning, with the latter context not having received much critical attention. The second section looks at personality traits, some fundamental theories on personality and introduces the Big Five Personality (BFP) Model which will be used for the questionnaire in the case study about personality in online language contexts, where the literature is still poor. The third section analyses autonomy in learning, with a focus on the definition of this concept, and on the difficulty of defining and assessing learner autonomy, especially in the field of online language learning.

2.2. L2/FL Motivation and demotivation in language learning

Human beings act, live and strive consciously and unconsciously. Every choice, action and effort people make are "moved" by the “desire or willingness to do something” (The Oxford

[4] The others are instructional design (pedagogy), provision of support for both instructors and students, teacher characteristics, technology and language skills characteristics.

Online Dictionary on Motivation, 2014). In L2 learning, this “something” is motivation, the basic factor which provokes interest and persistence. In fact, motivation comes from the Latin verb "movere" which means "to move" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2010). There are, of course, other factors involved in L2 learning, but they all presuppose motivation (Dörnyei, 2005). Human behaviour expresses itself in so many directions and with complex magnitude, that motivation cannot be limited to just one meaning, but it has been said that “given motivation, anyone can learn a language” (Corder, 1973 cited in Skehan, 1989). This interpretation of the concept of L2 motivation is limited to the historical period where it was first developed and, consequently, can be accepted as a general meaning which does not consider other variables. Gardner and Lambert (1972) define L2 motivation as the *desire* to learn a second language, whether for utilitarian purposes (instrumental motivation) or to better integrate within the culture of the target language community to become a part of that society (integrative motivation). Nowadays, as the use of technology and the Internet have spread rapidly, the world has changed and continues to change significantly and the study of second languages, especially English as a global language (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2010), is essential among speakers who do not share the same language. Thus, motivation in learning a second language is driven by communication purposes instead of a simple interest in coming closer the target language community.

L2 Motivation research has gone through three historical phases (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011) which are:

- The social psychological period (1959-1990), originated through the work of Gardner and his students and associates, in a bilingual context in Canada. According to Gardner et. al, (1972), language learning has a social nature, the so-called *integrative motive*, which is characterised by “a positive disposition toward the L2 group and the desire to interact with, and even become similar to, valued members of that community” (Dörnyei 1997, p. 262).

- The cognitive-situated period (during the 1990s) characterised by a focus on the learner and the role of the teacher within the classroom and in the learning context instead of concentrating on the community and the social context.

- The process-oriented period (during the 2000s), inspired by the work of Dörnyei, Ushioda, and their associates in Europe. L2 motivation is now seen in terms of dynamicity and ongoing (short-term and long-term) changes. In this new way of conceiving motivation, Dörnyei & Ottó (1998) developed a process model in which L2 motivation is divided into three stages: the preactional stage, the actional stage and the postactional stage, thus stressing the dynamic character of motivation.

It is worth saying that a fourth period is emerging in L2 motivation research: its approach is not as linear and predictable (Guerrero, 2015) as the previous ones, because it takes into account the learner as a dynamic "person-in-context" (Ushioda, 2009) in a globalised world, where learning a second language, in particular English as a lingua franca, is seen as a basic educational skill (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) rather than a cultural and social interest towards the target-language group. The learner is a unique, dynamic individual with different personality traits and, therefore, cannot be limited to abstract binomial dichotomies (such as motivated/unmotivated student). Moreover, as Ushioda argues, the learner is a real person in a specific context, thus motivation and identity are shaped by the living context.

> I mean a focus on real persons, rather than on learners as theoretical abstractions; a focus on the agency of the individual person as a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, a person with goals, motives and intentions; a focus on the interaction between this self-reflective intentional agent, and the fluid and complex system of social relations, activities, experiences and multiple micro and macro-contexts in which the person is embedded, moves, and is inherently part of. My argument is that we need to take a relational (rather than linear) view of these multiple contextual elements, and view motivation as

> an organic process that emerges through this complex system of interrelations. (Ushioda, 2009, p. 220)

Another aspect of this socio-dynamic period is represented by the "L2 Motivational Self System" proposed by Dörnyei. According to this approach, the learner is characterised by three components: the *Ideal L2 Self* (the person we would like to become in speaking an L2), *Ought-to L2 Self* (traits and qualities a learner should have to better perform and avoid negative outcomes), *L2 Learning Experience*, corresponding to the learning environment and situations in which the learner behaves (Dörnyei, 2009).

Finally, another concept enclosed in the socio-dynamic period is the "complex dynamic system", described through the curious movement of the "double pendulum" to better point out the complexity and the unpredictability of the behaviour of an individual. Each learner differs from the others as a unique human being with specific traits, and this is the basis of the concept of "individual differences (ID)" proposed by Skehan (1989) and resumed by Dörnyei (2005). In this perspective, L2 motivation is dynamic and non-linear both in terms of the individual and the language (Larsen-Freeman, 1997).

The major classification and definition of motivation in learning are enclosed in the self-determination theory (SDT) developed by Deci & Ryan (1985), according to whom motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic, based on the goals and reasons that motivate the learner. Intrinsic motivation comes from the "inside" and is driven by personal interest or pleasure in learning a language (Vallerand, 1997), whereas extrinsic motivation is affected by rewards such as good grades, passing an exam (Dörnyei, 1994), or intangible outcomes (e.g. praise). Intrinsic motivation is also "related to the individual's identity and sense of well-being" (Ng & Ng, 2015). Intrinsically motivated students achieve better language outcomes than extrinsically motivated learners (Ryan, Connell, & Plant, 1990), but learners' motivation is, in general, a combination

of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and external rewards may influence intrinsic motivation (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

According to Ryan & Deci (2002), SDT is based on three innate psychological needs: autonomy “refers to being the perceived origin or source of one’s own behaviour” (p. 8), competence “refers to feeling effective in one’s ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one’s capacities” (p. 7), and relatedness “refers to feeling connected to others” (p. 7). When the environment conditions are able to satisfy these needs, the student will feel intrinsically motivated.

There is a “downside” in motivation, which "concerns specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivation basis of a behaviour intention or an ongoing action" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 143). This phenomenon is called demotivation and can be described as a temporary – but not complete - loss of motivation caused by external factors. The challenge is to increase motivation again, otherwise demotivation will develop in amotivation (Dörnyei, 2001), the total absence of motivation. Demotivation has had limited attention in studies on L2 motivation (Chambers, 1993; Oxford, 1998; Ushioda, 1998; Dörnyei, 1998), and consequently there is not much research in this area. As well as what motivates learners, it is also important to establish the demotivating factors in a L2 environment. Previous studies conducted by Chambers (1993) and Oxford (1998) point to the importance of teacher and communication as demotivating factors. Dörnyei (2001) conducted a qualitative study on demotivation, focusing on students who had been recognised as being demotivated by teachers and peers. In his findings, the teacher was the most recurring cause of demotivation, followed by reduced self-confidence (generally related to the teacher and to interaction with the group members). Other aspects included a negative attitude towards the L2 and its being compulsory in the curriculum, as well as the interference of another foreign language and the coursebook. In schools and F2F contexts, the role of the teacher is therefore considered as predominant in motivating and

demotivating L2 learning, but there are also internal factors such as reduced self-confidence, anxiety, negative attitude towards the FL which can play an active role in demotivation. Even if these factors vary according to the individual, they may influence students' demotivation in learning a foreign language. Rudnai (1996) conducted interviews with 15 demotivated secondary students studying English as a Foreign Language in Hungary. She concluded that the most demotivating factors were in the learners (e.g. their lack of self-confidence as a result of negative past experiences).

In a study conducted among 65 Japanese university students, Ikeno (2002) found several motivating and demotivating factors involved in EFL learning, and some of them were related to learners' personalities, such as the lack of a sense of control over what one is learning and feelings of inferiority about one's ability in English.

Especially in an online setting, where the teacher is not physically present (and sometimes not even required), L2 motivation is supposed to increase or decrease according to other factors pertaining to the learner, related to individual aspects such as personality or autonomy in learning.

Therefore, this study provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of internal factors that contribute to motivate and demotivate students when learning a foreign language.

2.2.1. Motivation in online language learning

We have seen that motivation has been extensively debated in FL research arena for decades, but previous work mainly focused on F2F and physical classroom settings. However, when it comes to online language learning before COVID-19, few researchers have addressed the question to what extent motivation affects the learning of an FL in online learning settings, although motivating students in online environments is challenging and may require a set of

different strategies from the ones that teachers would use in a F2F lesson (Yengin et al., 2010; Hartnett et al., 2011). This issue needed further examination. In particular, the discussion around online FL motivation should include an investigation among people who arbitrarily decided to study a foreign language online and of the types of motivation which were involved.

As for previous research on L2 Motivation within F2F learning, SDT has been used as a theoretical basis by several studies addressing online learning (Hartnett et al., 2011; Rienties et al., 2012; Xie, DeBacker, & Ferguson, 2006). The results of comparative studies between online and on-campus students indicated that online students are more intrinsically motivated (Huett et al. 2008; Shroff & Vogel 2009; Wighting et al. 2008), however this comes with higher dropout rates (Park & Choi 2009).

Hartnett et al. (2011) do not completely agree with this conclusion, which sees intrinsic motivation as the only one involved in online FL learning, as “it does not represent the whole picture” (p .32). Conversely, they argue that the two types of motivation can co-exist in online contexts, and their idea is supported by two case studies in which participants reported “moderate to high levels of multiple types of extrinsic motivation”, in contrast with previous research. Hartnett (2015) suggests that instructors in online courses should be cognisant of their influence on learners’ motivation when designing learning activities. They also need to identify tasks and activities and link them to clear learning objectives “to help learners understand how the activity can aid in the realisation of personal goals, aspirations and interests, both in the short and longer term” (p. 96). Finally, “ongoing communication with learners” is important in order to build “strong relationships with and between learners” (p. 96) and, consequently, maintain interest and motivation.

A student receiving a vast quantity of coursework to go through alone is not very engaged if not supported properly. There are ways of keeping students engaged in an online course, for instance assessments to pass at the end of each unit in order to proceed with the course, or a

final certificate of attendance which lists all the language items successfully achieved. These are some ways of supplying autonomy support within the language learning context that may motivate and self-determine the student at the same time. Moreover, the lack of actual social interaction can create a sense of isolation which does not normally occur in a general F2F setting. In order to overcome this feeling of isolation (Paulus & Scherff, 2008), instructors and students may think of possible solutions such as forming an online learning community where they can share information as well as meet and exchange different views.

Furthermore, language instructors can stimulate and foster learners' motivation and online interaction through the introduction of different tools, tasks and technological assistance in an online learning environment. The roles of foreign language teachers are redefined as moderators and guides (Meskill & Ranglova, 2000). In the context of my study, I found that the feeling of isolation and lack of interaction emerged as motivational issues perceived by students both in the study conducted before the pandemic and in the interviews carried out during the pandemic. Thus, this study will contribute not only to the literature on L2 Motivation to study a foreign language online but will also provide useful educational strategies and ideas to tackle the challenges of motivating students who perceive a sense of isolation and a lack of social interaction in online environments. In order to significantly contribute to the existing literature, the study on L2 online Motivation before COVID-19 tried to overcome the previous research limitations of focusing only on intrinsic motivation (Hartnett, 2016) by exploring "the complex, multifaceted, situation-dependent nature of motivation in online contexts" (p. 23) with the inclusion of three elements: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and "L2 Motivational Self System".

2.3. Personality

Personality and learning style play a significant role in learning a language, as they are linked to motivation (Biggs, 1978; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Nolen 1988; Schiefele, 1996), the main factor in the L2 acquisition process.

This connection between motivation and personality in SLA is mentioned by Crozier (1997), who suggested that motivation can be seen as a personality trait itself. In fact, highly motivated learners work harder and with greater persistence on tasks that are considered difficult to perform (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1995). As the psychologist Catherine Cox (1926) stated, “high but not the highest intelligence, combined with the greatest degree of persistence, will achieve greater eminence than the highest degree of intelligence with somewhat less persistence” (p. 187, cited by Simonton, 1987: 138). In 1996, Csikszentmihalyi and his co-investigators at the University of Chicago conducted “The Creativity in Later Life project”, a series of in-depth interviews with people over 60 years of age who had made profoundly noteworthy contributions to the natural and social sciences, the arts and humanities, as well as to the world of business, media and politics. They concluded that individuals who achieve success have high levels of motivation, discipline, perseverance, autonomy and self-confidence (See Mockros and Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

2.4. Theories on personality

Personality is a human characteristic that applies a causal impact upon conduct. The individual follows up on, or acclimatises to the environment, yet his or her conduct is not the result of environmental forces (Crozier, 1997). In the field of L2 research, many researchers have studied personality and its correlation with SLA through two main theories: the field dependence/independence (FDI) model and the extroversion/introversion dichotomy. After a description of both theories and their impact in FL learning, the section will proceed with the review of the Big Five Personality theory, the taxonomy which I have chosen to use for the

quantitative analysis of the present work, due to its reliability in measuring personality traits and their correlation with FL learning (Biedroń, 2011) and academic achievement.

2.4.1. Field dependence/independence

The field dependence/independence model proposed by Witkin et al. (1972) identifies two cognitive styles that are entirely distinct and different. The field-dependent person has been described as warm, affectionate, tactful and more socially outgoing and effective in personal relationships than the field-independent person (Witkin & Goodenough, 1976). The latter, by contrast, is more autonomous and less dependent on other people in terms of interest and empathy, and tends to isolationalism (Witkin et al., 1972, pp. 174-175). In the context of this theoretical approach, Grace M. H. Gayle (1981) analysed the relationship between personality and motivation in the acquisition of a second language in a bilingual context. The results showed that in a bilingual context "students who exhibit an extremely field dependent cognitive style are significantly more integratively oriented towards the learning of a second language than students who exhibit an extremely field-independent cognitive style" (Grace M. H. Gayle, 1981). This is on the grounds that bilingual situations expect students be a part of the aggregate field and students characterised by extreme field reliance build up a solid integrative orientation, while field-independent students do not. The question remains: how do personality and motivation affect language learning in a different context?

Within a classroom, the role of the teacher and the relationship with peers cooperate in defining motivation and learning success. The teacher can differentiate teaching practices according to every single pupil, therefore personality and motivation can be directed in a productive way. Field-dependent students work well in teams and are good at interpersonal relationships, thus they can succeed in a classroom-based context. On the other hand, field-independent learners rely less on the teacher and other students, but they are more likely to succeed academically

(Bean, 1990). In terms of the relationship between field-independence and language learning success, several studies have been conducted (Zhang, 2004; Khodadady & Zeylani, 2012; Farsi et al., 2014; Naraghipour & Baghestani, 2018), and the findings showed that Field Independent students are better FL learners.

2.4.2. Extroversion vs Introversion

Second-language teachers within a classroom have always faced the challenge of motivating and engaging students in learning activities. The main and simplest classification made is between reserved and outgoing students.

A clear and precise definition of the two personalities was given by Eysenck in 1965:

> The typical extravert is sociable, likes parties, has many friends, needs to have people to talk to, and does not like reading or studying by himself. He craves excitement, takes chances, often sticks his neck out, acts on the spur of the moment, and is generally an impulsive individual. He is fond of practical jokes, always has a ready answer, and generally likes change; he is carefree, easy-going, optimistic, and likes "to laugh and be merry." He prefers to keep moving and doing things, tends to be aggressive and lose his temper quickly; altogether his feelings are not kept under tight control, and he is not always a reliable person.
>
> The typical introvert is a quiet retiring sort of person, introspective, fond of books rather than people; he is reserved and distant except to intimate friends. He tends to plan ahead, "looks before he leaps," and distrusts the impulse of the moment. He does not like excitement, takes matters of everyday life with proper seriousness, and likes a well-ordered mode of life. He keeps his feelings under close control, seldom behaves in an aggressive manner, and does not lose his temper easily. He is reliable, somewhat pessimistic, and places great value on ethical standards.

This dichotomy is certainly not rigid, since every individual can possess traits of both categories and, therefore, be considered ambivert (Cohen & Schmidt, 1979). The above descriptions suggest that extroverts are social but impulsive, which led researchers to the hypothesis that they could be more successful language learners because they are better at using language

for interpersonal communication and engage in oral and practice activities (Naiman et al., 1978; McDonough, 1981; Ellis, 1994). Nonetheless, their impulsiveness can distract them from studying (Eysenck, 1957). Yet, as argued by Kayaoğlu (2013), it is “a mistake to equate success only with speaking and to assess second-language achievement solely on the basis of observable oral production, ignoring the comprehension and internal mechanism in language learning” (p. 823). Another mistake is to assume that being quiet and reserved is the equivalent of a negative trait. On the contrary, introverts possess good study methods and cognitive academic abilities (Ellis, 1994) which may lead to better academic achievement (Entwistle & Entwistle, 1970).

Chastain (1975) and Rossier (1976) found a positive correlation between extroverted personality and language learning success. On the other hand, Smart et al. (1970), Swain & Burnaby (1976), Genesee & Hamayan (1980) and Strong (1983) did not find any significant relationships between extroversion/introversion and second language learning success. According to Kezwer (1987), the controversy of these results depends on: “the personality measures used; the language proficiency measures employed; and the conduct of the language classes under investigation” (p. 48), thus more controlled studies need to be performed. With regards to this weak evidence, Skehan (1989) suggested a change in the “research design decisions” for future studies (p. 104). Personality traits and academic achievement should be investigated in relation to socio-contextual variables of the learners and the learning environment (Dörnyei, 2009). For instance, Wankowski (1973) made an interesting contribution to this field of research by associating extroversion/introversion with age. He argues that, depending on the age of the learners and the learning tasks used by the teachers, some students may be more successful than others. He also found in his studies that, prior to puberty extroverts tend to achieve learning success, whereas after puberty introversion seems to be a positive characteristic in succeeding.

These ambivalent findings, where both extroversion and introversion may - or may not - have a positive correlation with L2 learning, cause an ambiguous situation (Dörnyei, 2009) that needs to be further investigated. So, how can we make use of the above-mentioned studies on extroversion/introversion in FL/SL learning? I suggest that, in a more contextual setting such as the online environment, research can be more relevant and conclusive, because the main variables involved in the process of learning are the ones within the learner as an individual. Therefore, all these approaches will be considered as foundations of personality in FL learning to be further extended with regard to online contexts.

2.4.3. Big Five Personality (BFP) Model

Eysenck & Eysenck (1985) included the contrast *extraversion*/*introversion* as one of three principal personality dimensions, together with *neuroticism and emotionality*/*emotional stability*, and *psychoticism and toughmindedness*/*tender-mindedness*. The first two dimensions remained in a following model called the Big Five Personality Model, a very useful model to analyse the correlation between personality traits and academic performance. The BFP model is a simplification of the work started in 1936 by Allport & Odbert, who suggested several adjectives to describe an individual's behaviour, and reduced to 16 factors by Cattell & Eber in 1950. Goldberg (1992), Costa & McCrae (1992) gave the model its final framework of 5 adjectives/traits, followed by further consolidating studies by McCrae & Costa in 2003, who also developed an assessment instrument, the so-called "NEO-P", to make the model applicable.

The model includes 5 primary personality traits, which are: extraversion (or surgency), agreeableness (versus antagonism), conscientiousness (or will to achieve), neuroticism (versus emotional stability) and openness to experience (or intellect). Dörnyei (2005) describes the five factors as follows:

- *Openness to experience*: high scorers are imaginative, curious, flexible, creative, moved by art, novelty seeking, original and untraditional; low scorers are conservative, conventional, down-to-earth, unartistic and practical.

- *Conscientiousness*: high scorers are systematic, meticulous, efficient, organised, reliable, responsible, hard-working, persevering and self-disciplined; low scorers are unreliable, aimless, careless, disorganised, late, lazy, negligent and weak-willed.

- *Extraversion–introversion*: high scorers are sociable, gregarious, active, assertive, passionate and talkative; low scorers are passive, quiet, reserved, withdrawn, sober, aloof and restrained.

- *Agreeableness*: high scorers are friendly, good-natured, likeable, kind, forgiving, trusting, cooperative, modest and generous; low scorers are cold, cynical, rude, unpleasant, critical, antagonistic, suspicious, vengeful, irritable and uncooperative.

- *Neuroticism–Emotional stability*: high scorers are worrying, anxious, insecure, depressed, self-conscious, moody, emotional and unstable; low scorers are calm, relaxed, unemotional, hardy, comfortable, content, even tempered and self-satisfied.

Out of these predictors, conscientiousness has been shown to be related to academic achievement (Noftle & Robins, 2007; O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007). Moreover, some studies showed a correlation between openness and success in learning a foreign language (Dörnyei, 2005; Biedroń, 2010). Dewaele & Furnham (2000) used the BFP model and found that extraversion has a positive correlation with L2 oral fluency, particularly in stressful situations. These, with previous other studies using the BFP model and their findings, can help us to understand the relationship between personality and foreign language aptitude and the implication of personality factors in second language learning (Biedroń, 2011), especially their correlation with individual cognitive abilities and learning styles. Köseoğlu (2016) investigated

personality traits and learning styles in 202 university students who completed the BFP questionnaire to predict how personality traits interact with all four learning styles: synthesis-analysis, methodical study, fact retention and elaborative processing. The results showed that conscientiousness and agreeableness correlated positively with all four learning styles, whereas neuroticism had a negative relationship with all four learning styles.

The BFP Model seems a useful tool to measure personality traits for quantitative analysis, because it is considered as “the most dominant model of personality structure in current literature” (Conrad & Patry, 2012) and has been confirmed as relatively stable (Biedroń, 2011) and more validated than other tests (Alkış & Temizel, 2018). To use the model in practice, Costa & McCrae developed a personality inventory called the “NEO PI-R” to assess each Big Five personality trait. They are subdivided into six facets, which means 30 traits represented by 8 items each, for a total of 240 items. The length of this inventory made it impractical for many research applications, consequently Costa & McCrae (1992) provided a shorter version of the 240 item-questionnaire, called 60-item NEO-FFI. An even shorter 44-item inventory called Big Five Inventory (BFI) was created by John & Srivastava (1999) to give an “efficient and easily understood” (p. 29) alternative measure of the Big Five.

Another advantage of the Big Five model and structure is that the words and the natural language used to describe the factors are easy to understand. Out of all the questionnaires related to the BFP Model, the Big Five Inventory seems to be the most efficient as it takes up less administration time and the descriptors are shorter and better understandable (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998), thereby avoiding ambiguity or multiple meaning in favour of brevity and simplicity (John & Srivastava, 1999). The BFP Model offers a simple system for “research that intends to apply personality factors as independent, background variables, […] that still captures a considerable proportion of the variance” Dörnyei (2005).

Table 1, below, shows the “NEO-PI-R” proposed by Costa & McCrae (1992), with a description of all 5 primary traits, and 6 subcategories (called facets) for each of them. It represents a self-reported test based on the 5-point Likert-type scale, where participants respond to every statement on a scale from 1 to 5 (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”).

Dimensions and facets	**Description and sample items (in italics)**
Neuroticism • Anxiety • Angry Hostility • Depression • Self-consciousness • Impulsiveness • Vulnerability	This scale covers emotional adjustment and stability at one end of the spectrum, and maladjustment and neuroticism at the other. • *I am easily frightened.* • *I often get angry at the way people treat me.* • *Sometimes I feel completely worthless.* • *At times I had been so ashamed I just wanted to hide.* • *I have trouble resisting my cravings.* • *When I’m under a great deal stress, sometimes I feel like I’m going to pieces.*

Extraversion • Warmth • Gregariousness • Assertiveness • Activity • Excitement-Seeking • Positive Emotions	This scale reflects extraversion at one extreme and introversion at the other. • *I really like most people I meet.* • *I like to have a lot of people around me.* • *I am dominant, forceful, and assertive.* • *I usually seem to be in a hurry.* • *I like to be where the action is.* • *Sometimes I bubble with happiness.*
Openness to Experience • Fantasy • Aesthetics • Feelings	This scale taps an openness to new experiences, thoughts, and processes at one end, and a rejection of such at the other end. • *I have an active fantasy life.* • *I am intrigued by the patterns I find in art and nature.*

• Actions • Ideas • Values	• *How I feel about things is important to me.* • *I often try new and foreign foods.* • *I have a lot of intellectual curiosity.* • *I consider myself broad-minded and tolerant of other peoples' lifestyles.*
Agreeableness • Trust • Straightforwardness • Altruism • Compliance • Modesty • Tender-Mindedness	This scale represents a type of 'easy-going' at one end and 'hard-headed' at the other end. • *I believe that most people are basically well- intentioned.* • *I would hate to be thought of as a hypocrite.* • *I try to be courteous to everyone I meet.* • *I hesitate to express my anger even when it's justified.* • *I tried to be humble.* • *We can never do too much for the poor and elderly.*

Conscientiousness • Competence • Order • Dutifulness • Achievement Striving • Self-Discipline • Deliberation	This scale reflects a complex trait sometimes called 'Will to Achieve' or 'Character,' reflecting a high desire at one end and a lower desire at the other. • *I pride myself on my sound judgment.* • *I never seem to be able to get organized. (Reversed score)* • *When I make a commitment, I can always be counted on to follow through.* • *I've worked hard to accomplish my goals.* • *I am a productive person who always gets the job done.* • *I always consider the consequences before I take action.*

Table 1, above, shows the five components of the BFP model, which are subdivided into adjectives and statements that serve as guides or, as Dörnyei (2005) suggested, "an effective way of describing the main dimensions is listing some key adjectives they are associated with

at the high and the low end" (p. 15). In the next paragraph, I will explore the literature around personality traits in online learning contexts.

2.4.4. Personality in online language learning

Several studies have focused on personality traits as crucial factors in L2/FL learning, and many researchers in early studies have attempted to define the "good language learner" in terms of personality (Rubin, 1975; Naiman et al., 1978; Stern, 1975 among others). If we narrow down the examination to L2/FL learning in online settings, however, little research has been done, except in terms of academic achievement both in online and blended learning contexts (Alkış & Temizel, 2018; Arispe & Blake, 2012; Kim, 2013).

Alkış & Temizel (2018) investigated the impact of students' motivation and personality traits on their academic performance in online and blended learning environments by using The Big Five Inventory on 316 Turkish students attending a mandatory introductory IT course. The results showed that personality was indeed a predictor of academic performance in both online and blended courses. In the online context, students who were conscientious and had higher self-efficacy were more likely to succeed, whereas in the blended course students experienced test anxiety and task value constructs. Since the study was conducted on students enrolled in an introductory IT course at a university in Turkey, the researchers concluded that "the results cannot be generalised across other disciplines and cultures" (p. 45). This limitation means that study findings need to be interpreted cautiously, and further research should be conducted in different disciplines.

Arispe & Blake (2012) examined certain personality and cognitive factors that might define a person they describe as "ideal hybrid language learner", a successful FL learner in an introductory hybrid Spanish course which combined multimedia materials supported by synchronous chat (video, voice, text). Personality traits were investigated using the Big Five

Inventory. The findings suggest that students who are strongly self-motivated and with the personality trait of conscientiousness perform well in a hybrid learning environment; moreover, low-verbal students seem to prefer the online material as it allows them to work at their own pace.

Kim (2013) examined the correlation between personality traits and academic achievements in a blended learning environment by administering The Big Five Inventory on 200 students who enrolled in a blended communication course in Korea. The findings of the study showed that extraverted and conscientious students tended to have higher learning results.

It is also worth mentioning Hurd's study (2006) on personality and motivation in a distance context from the point of view of the language learners enrolled in an Open University (UK) French course, who were asked to provide their perceptions of some factors (motivation, personality and tutor/learner role) through questionnaires. The data collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods showed that being motivated, persistent, enthusiastic and systematic are considered as advantageous traits to distance language learners, whose responses suggested good levels of self-awareness.

All these findings and previous studies enhance our understanding of how some personality traits play a part in learning success, but they partially take into account online language learning. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring personality correlates of second language learning success in online contexts.

2.5. Language Learner Autonomy

Another important concept in language learning and teaching is the idea of autonomy, a "buzzword" (Little, 1991) for which interest has grown in the last 30 years with a larger literature on autonomy in language learning than in other fields (Gandhimathi & Anitha, 2016). The main challenges that teachers and scholars in the field of education have faced are first the meaning

of language learner autonomy, i.e. trying to narrow down a definition of such a broad concept, and then finding a way to promote language learner autonomy in the classroom. In the next pages I will first explore these issues and how they have been addressed in the literature, and then expand the contribution by analysing the online learning context.

The first definition of autonomy in education as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” was given by Holec (1981, p. 3) in a seminal report about a Modern Languages project established by the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1971. In particular, the project led to the creation of the Centre de Recherches et d’Applications pédagogiques en Langues (CRAPEL) directed by Holec, who still has an eminent role within the field of autonomy. In fact, even now Holec’s definition of learner autonomy remains the most cited in the subject area (Benson, 2007) and “universally accepted” (Little, 2007, p. 14). Dickinson (1987) provided a variation of the definition, describing an autonomous learner as an individual capable of taking responsibility for all the decisions concerned with learning and able to implement those decisions and learning strategies. From this point of view, autonomy is a characteristic within learners and their capacity of self-direction and does not depend on the learning situation. Similarly, Little (1991) sees autonomy in language learning as “a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action” (p. 4). Little provides a relevant contribution to implementing the definition proposed by Holec towards a more psychological view, suggesting that autonomy should be considered as a capacity to manage one’s own learning instead of considering it as “self-instruction” (Little, 2003), and therefore in addition to Holec’s concept on “WHAT autonomous learners are able to do” (Benson, 2007), Little’s psychological approach gives an insight in the metacognitive strategies that autonomous learners are able to put into practice in the learning process.

Some researchers have offered alternative representations/critiques of the concept of autonomy in foreign language learning (Benson, 2007). Pennycook (1997), for example,

introduced the Western cultural construct of “mainstream” autonomy, described as individualist and competitive, whereas Holliday (2003) suggested a social autonomy approach according to which “autonomy resides in the social worlds of the students, which they bring with them from their lives outside the classroom” (p. 117). But, as Benson (2007) points out, these alternative concepts of autonomy “are also somewhat vaguely formulated and inadequately motivated in both theoretical and empirical terms” (p. 25). In fact, if we merely look at these definitions of autonomy in the literature, we might conclude that autonomy depends only on the learners’ capacity. Conversely, autonomy is a complex phenomenon which involves the interaction of many other educational elements (Paiva & Braga, 2016). As a matter of fact, Benson (2003, 2007) extended the notion of autonomy from a simple learner ability to a broader concept which sees autonomy as a “natural tendency for learners to take control over their learning" (Benson, 2001, p. 2) and that can be developed by each learner in different ways and at different levels, which Benson divided into three perspectives: technical, psychological and political. The technical perspective concerns essential skills and strategies enabling learners to learn a language on their own and without teacher supervision; the psychological perspective covers all learners’ internal abilities and attitudes which enable them to take responsibility for their own learning; finally, the political perspective is concerned with the learners’ control over the learning content, context and process. These three dimensions of learner autonomy in the field of language education embrace many other agents involved in the language educational process such as motivation, teacher supervision, learning context and technology. In the next paragraphs I will focus on all these agents, which embody the components in the “in constant movement” process of language learner autonomy (Pavia, 2006).

2.5.1.1. The teacher

A widespread misconception around autonomy is that autonomous learners should be able to study a language “on their own” and without a teacher (Little, 1991). On the contrary, teachers play a key role in fostering learner autonomy (Little, 1991; Dam, 1995; Nunan, 1997) in learner-centred contexts, by promoting what Little (2007) calls learner involvement, learner reflection and target language use. The crucial role of the teacher in implementing learner autonomy as a competence to be acquired by the end of compulsory school has also been recognised by the European Union as an essential component to be included in the curriculum. I will discuss this particular European point of view in paragraph 5.1.

There are several levels and degrees of learner autonomy (Nanun, 1997) and elements to consider, such as age, progression in learning, perception of learning needs etc. (Little, 1994), which make defining and implementing learner autonomy difficult.

To overcome this limitation, some researchers (Littlewood, 1997; Nanun, 1997; Macaro, 1997; Scharle & Szabó, 2000; Benson, 2001) have attempted to turn levels of autonomy into usable models. In particular, Nanun (1997) designed a model in 5 levels, with a progression from lower to higher degrees of learner autonomy:

Level	*Learner action*	*Content*	*Process*
Level 1	*Awareness*	*Learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of materials they are using*	*Learners identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own*

			preferred styles/strategies
Level 2	*Involvement*	*Learners are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer*	*Learners make choices among a range of options*
Level 3	*Intervention*	*Learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and content of the learning program*	*Learners modify and adapt tasks*
Level 4	*Creation*	*Learners create their own goals and objectives*	*Learners create their own learning tasks*
Level 5	*Transcendence*	*Learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of classroom learning and the world beyond the classroom and are*	*Learners become teachers and researchers*

		functioning as a fully autonomous learners	

The assumption in Nunan's model is that autonomy in language learning is intrinsic to each learner to various degrees and "can be a normal, everyday addition to regular instructions" (p. 201), therefore can increase over time depending on the teaching and learning environment.

Subsequently, in terms of the role of the teacher in helping learners moving from dependence to autonomy, Nanun (2003) developed a nine-step program which might be used by teachers and educators as a guide in educational curricula to help students in their path towards language autonomy:

- Step 1: Make instruction goals clear to learners.
- Step 2: Allow learners to create their own goals.
- Step 3: Encourage learners to use their second language outside the classroom.
- Step 4: Raise awareness of learning processes.
- Step 5: Help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies.
- Step 6: Encourage learner choice.
- Step 7: Allow learners to generate their own tasks.
- Step 8: Encourage learners to become teachers.
- Step 9: Encourage learners to become researchers.

Including these 9-step procedure in the learning curriculum can foster learner autonomy in the language classroom and beyond.

2.5.1.2. Motivation and learner autonomy in FL

There is considerable evidence in the literature that shows a significant relationship between learners' autonomy and motivation towards language learning (Benson 1997, Dickinson 1995, Deci & Ryan 1985 among others), indicating that it is important for language learners to be motivated in order to promote autonomous learning. Ushioda (2011) has been interested in the interactions between motivation and autonomy, providing an "alternative" perspective within the language learning motivation field, which takes into consideration the individuality of the learner as a "fully rounded person" (p. 13), thus overcoming the idea of a generalised (and generalisable) language learning context and model of FL motivation. Ushioda (1996) stresses this correlation by stating that "autonomous learners are by definition motivated learners" (p. 2). In a way, motivation drives autonomy and vice versa. Significantly, in their Self-Determination Theory, Deci & Ryan (1992) include autonomy (together with competence and relatedness) as one of the three psychological needs to enhance motivation, stating that, in particular, "choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction were found to enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow people a greater feeling of autonomy" (2000, p. 70).

Lastly, in an empirical study conducted by Dörnyei & Csizér (1998) on two hundred Hungarian teachers of English as an FL, which resulted in the drawing up of "Ten commandments for motivating language learners", autonomy emerged as one of the commandments, namely the 7th "*Promote learner autonomy"*, to enhance motivation in the language classroom.

I have already discussed motivation as a crucial factor in FL learning, both online and F2F. I have also shown a correlation with motivation and personality, the second crucial factor I am going to investigate in this thesis. Autonomy is the third factor involved in FL learning, and the significant relationship between learner language autonomy and motivation in the literature reinforces the aim of my study, i.e. examining these specific crucial factors involved in the online language learning of Italian as an FL *before* COVID-19.

2.5.1.3. Technology and learning context

The use of technology in language learning has been considered as a valid tool to promote learner autonomy in out-of-class environments (Benson, 2001; Benson & Chik, 2010), namely informal learning contexts. As a matter of fact, sending e-mails, using mobile phones and other devices are actions we perform every day which we could bring into formal learning contexts, for instance structured and organised learning environments such as schools and universities.

For instance, if we consider the Internet as a technology tool to foster autonomy in formal learning, Yumuk (2002) states that:

> the Internet can encourage learners not only to view themselves as being in charge of their own learning, but also to perceive teachers as facilitators in their learning process. Unlike resources such as textbooks, journals and other materials used in traditional teaching and learning, the Internet can stimulate learners to find the most updated information in a shorter amount of time. The Internet, with its hyper-linking capabilities to sources from all over the world, gives learners instant access to an enormous amount of information which, as a result, can enhance their desire and curiosity to learn more. (pp. 142-143)

In this context, the challenge for language teachers and educators is trying to adopt educational practices that emulate the design of out-of-class technology and use such "globalised online spaces" (Benson & Chik, 2010) in formal contexts in order to implement autonomous learning (Hafner & Miller, 2011). However, there are aspects such as age, progression in learning, perception of learning needs etc. (Little, 1994), which need to be considered when trying to implement learner autonomy within a group of students. For example, the level of autonomy in using technology by children, or school leavers in their transition from a highly structured school context to higher education, or undergraduate students in their first year might be lower than the one displayed by postgraduate students (Benson & Brack, 2010). Besides, it should be considered that people who access the web, in our case students, might not possess the skills needed to make the best use of the internet (Hargittai, 2011). At worst, *virtual dystopians* (Yar,

2014) argue that the internet and technologies will result eventually in the loss of autonomy by individuals “when making decisions and interacting with others (McMillan, 2013).

Having considered the above counterpart which pessimistically sees technology and the internet as problems rather than solutions, yet borrowing Citton’s words (2017), in a growing virtual world where every information is “available at a click in a fraction of a second, […] our educational institutions can no longer be organized around the transmission of content.” (p. 97). In point of fact, teachers can accommodate their students’ needs through online activities and tools according to their age, interests and degree of autonomy. For example, children can be encouraged through games and role plays using technology, whereas teenagers who are attracted to mobile technologies and social media can be stimulated through activities which involve this type of technological tools. “Bring Your Own Device” (BYOD) is an example of a useful educational practice, where students are encouraged to bring their mobile phones into the classroom and use it for learning activities (Johnson, 2012).

Bringing technology into formal educational systems certainly requires broader changes not just by language teachers but also by institutions, which have to adapt the curricula and the assessment so as to provide “a 21st-century system for 21st-century learners” (Ley, 2010, p. 162).

The use of technology in formal learning can therefore happen in different learning contexts: within the physical classroom, where language teachers can bring technology, or through blended learning defined as “the thoughtful integration of classroom F2F learning experiences with online learning experiences” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p. 96), or completely online. In this final scenario, however, the two concepts of technology and learning context “join their forces”, as the online learning context cannot happen without technology. However, how and to what extent can language learners’ autonomy be defined and measured in a fully online context, where formal and informal environments are not always clearly separated, and the

presence of the teacher might not be guaranteed? Can learner autonomy still be promoted for different ages and levels in online contexts, or is the assumption that a learner must already be autonomous when learning online?

Before answering these questions, in the following paragraph I will attempt to close the circle of the literature on learner autonomy through the lens of the European Union's contribution to the field of learner autonomy. Then, I will attempt to answer the above questions by examining autonomy in online learning within the existing literature, with the intention of providing a contribution to the literature on crucial factors and how autonomy and the other internal variables of motivation and personality influence the process of acquiring a language through the means of technology or online tools. Might the perception on the effectiveness of the online FL learning process, which encourages a sort of "faith in the transformative […] power of the internet" (Yar, 2014, p. 30), depend on having specific personality traits, or having a certain level of motivation and autonomy in learning?

2.5.2. The European Union's idea of Learner Autonomy

Along with theoretical studies in the field, institutions have regarded autonomy as a key component in educational. In 2006, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe developed eight key competences for lifelong learning (Recommendation 2006/962/EC of 18 December 2006). Competences are defined as what "all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment" (EU Parliament 2006, p. 13). Out of these competences, "Learning to learn" is defined as "the ability to effectively manage one's own learning process, either individually or in groups", perfectly fitting the concept of autonomy in learning proposed by Holec (1981). Not only has the European Union promoted a broader usage of the 8 key competences in education and training systems since 2006, but the following year the Italian government itself developed a new version of these competences, the so called "Competenze di cittadinanza" (Citizenship competences) which

students should acquire by the end of compulsory education “to a level that equips them for adult life, and which forms a basis for further learning and working life” (Recommendation 2006/962/EC, paragraph 13). One of the mentioned competences is “Acting Autonomously and Responsibly”. All eight competences refer mostly to the ordinary school and compulsory education environments but can also be used for general learning and in particular with online language learning, as potential learners need to develop appropriate digital literacies (digital competence) to study a foreign language effectively (Communication in a foreign language) using technology. Moreover, learning (how) to learn is the key to develop learning autonomy and responsibility.

Another example of how institutions have paid attention to the principle of learner autonomy is the Council of Europe’s European Language Portfolio (ELP), a document developed by the Language Policy Programme, through which learners can record their language progress. The ELP is made up of three parts (language passport, language biography and dossier) and aims at supporting the development of learner autonomy, in addition to plurilingualism and intercultural awareness and competence, by recording their language learning progress and achievements and helping students to reflect on their learning objectives. The ELP Principles and Guidelines (2000) state that “The Council of Europe is committed to the development of learner autonomy as one of the cornerstones of education for democratic citizenship and lifelong learning” (p. 4), which means that the Council of Europe encourages language learning as a lifelong process which takes place in or outside formal education, showing that developing autonomy has been one of the main concerns because “once teaching stops, further learning has to be autonomous” (CEFR, p. 141). As a matter of fact, in the 1970s the Council of Europe firstly engaged in developing the concept of autonomy through the adult education project, where Holec (1981) wrote the previously mentioned report “Autonomy and foreign language learning”. The view of the autonomous learner in relation to language learning developed by

Holec was subsequently reflected through the functions and structures of the ELP (Little, 2022). In light of the Council of Europe's view, autonomy had a central role in (democratic) society, where learners being able to critical thinking and self-managing can actively participate, in (language) education, as through "autonomisation" learners can "take control of their learning now and in the future" (Little, 2022, p. 2).

2.5.3. Autonomy in online language learning

In paragraph 5.c. I have discussed the role of technology and online tools to foster language learner autonomy. Then, in paragraph 5.1. I have mentioned language learning as a lifelong process (The Council of Europe) which does not end in the classroom or at the end of compulsory education. When learners, in the light of a more or less conscious lifelong learning perspective, decide to study a language completely online on their own, or through online activities and approaches where a teacher's intervention is not immediate, different components come into play.

A first important difference between F2F learning/teaching and online learning/teaching concerns the "degree of separation between learners, and between teacher and learners" (Benson & Brack, 2010, p. 56). In online learning the teacher is not physically present and, depending on the online platform, the process of language learning might even happen without teacher supervision (e.g. MOOCs, mobile apps and platforms such as Duolingo and Babbel). According to the constructivist approach, where main proponents were Piaget (1957) and Vygotsky (1986), online learning promotes the learners' language skills, collaboration and interaction among learners, in addition to fostering autonomy and increasing motivation (Can, 2009). Therefore, multiple factors including autonomy and motivation play a key role in effective online learning because, as happens with foreign language learning within a classroom, without motivation students will not be predisposed to achieving their learning goals. Learner autonomy requires a shift from a teacher-centred approach to learner-centred teaching, which

is the core of online teaching learning environments. As a consequence, distance learners are asked to be more autonomous than other students in a classroom context (White, 2006).

These premises bring us to a concept worth mentioning when referring to autonomous online learning, i.e. self-directed learning (SDL). In SDL contexts, learners can take responsibility for their own learning at all stages of the learning process, from setting learning goals and strategies to evaluating their progress, with or without help from others (Knowles, 1975; Merriam et al., 2007). SDL is an essential 21st-century skill (Jaleel & Anuroofa, 2017) required for lifelong learning (Greveson & Spencer, 2005) and can be considered an educational approach to improve learner autonomy (O'Shea, 2003). Focusing on the online learning context, SDL has recently found breeding ground in many studies (Song & Hill, 2007; Kim et al., 2014; Beach, 2017; Khalid et al. 2020). For instance, Kim et al. (2014) found that the online environment "keenly lends itself to the cultivation of SDL" (p. 159). The more recent case study analysis by Khalid et al. (2020) comparing SDL of online and traditional students demonstrated positive and large correlation between SDL and online students "who tend to achieve better academic achievement as compared to conventional students" (p. 141).

Recent research before COVID-19 focused more on learner autonomy in online contexts, such as on how students perceive their autonomy in MOOLCs (Mısır, Koban Koç, & Koç, 2018), the evolution of autonomy in online environments (Zhong, 2018), and autonomy development in distance language learning programmes (Collins, 2008). However, it would appear that the main misconception around autonomy in online contexts comes from the confusion around concepts such as "learning on their own" and "studying alone", which has led to the false assumption that students are required to study in isolation (Esch, 1997), which is not realistic if we consider that interaction with peers is essential when learning a foreign language.

Very little is known about the issue above and this thesis aims to contribute to this research gap, through an examination of language learner autonomy by administering a questionnaire

to participants involved in fully online courses. The results will help to define and measure learner autonomy, and through the combination of findings in the before and during COVID-19 stages, it will be possible to make further theoretical and practical contributions to the issues surrounding the idea of “isolation” in online contexts.

2.6. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the literature about motivation, personality and autonomy as internal factors which influence the process of learning a language in an online context, where the learner is seen as alone and independent. This is significant in the first place if we consider that the literature related to those specific internal factors and produced before COVID-19 is limited. In fact, most of the literature reviewed here is related to motivation, personality and autonomy in classroom-based environments. Moreover, this field of inquiry is also very important as it concerns helping researchers, institutions, educators and all stakeholders in education to detect which personality traits, types of motivation and levels of learner autonomy are involved in online language learning, so as to implement and develop online courses and activities which take into account the factors mentioned above and can hope to draw many other students to the study of FL. Helping educational stakeholders to implement their online delivery models and getting students to see the importance of online learning has become fundamental in current society, where remote education has suddenly become a hot topic of discussion and practice.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Overview of the methodology

Conducting an inquiry, a piece of research or a case study, leads researchers to aspire to "what is sought to be known, the thrust from which it wishes to be known and the depth the issue is chosen to be dug" (Njie & Asimiran, 2014, p. 35). The choice of research methodology represents a keystone to achieve the aims set for the study. The present thesis covers a chronological period which started in 2018 and continued until 2022 and represented a time of change for humanity: the COVID-19 emergency. In the first section of the thesis, which focuses on what can be called the *before* COVID-19 period, I am endorsing the idea that online learning can be effective when certain criteria are met related to a learner's personality traits, inclination towards technology, digital competence, motivation and autonomy to learn the language online. I aim to show that some internal factors, on the parts of individuals, can also influence their decisions to study an FL online, in addition to their perceptions of the effectiveness of online language learning. The first section of this chapter introduces the methodology for the research conducted in the *before* COVID-19 section, using a mixed-method approach which aims to examine the crucial factors of motivation, personality and autonomy involved in the online learning of Italian as an FL among 36 participants who had freely decided to learn Italian as an FL online, and their perception of and satisfaction with the process of learning. In order to identify valuable insights into the effectiveness of the acquisition of the Italian language through the Internet, two methodological approaches, namely deductive and inductive, will be explained as well as their main features and the decision to use a combination of both. This will be in order to carry out the case study and give a full answer to my research questions: "to what extent do (these) internal factors affect the learning of Italian as an FL in online contexts?",

“what are the students’ perception of and satisfaction with the effectiveness of learning Italian through the Internet?” and “to what extent do students perceive they have acquired or improved the Italian language in an online context?”. A literature review as an integral part of my research method will also be discussed, with some clarifications on how the theoretical framework of this thesis has been built in order to find evidence and detect areas where there was a lack of research which needed further consideration. In particular, all recent studies have only focused on the impact of COVID-19 on education, attributing the onset and poor success of online learning to the pandemic. However, the sudden migration and adaptation of teaching and learning to a temporary new format, namely emergency remote learning, cannot be taken to reflect the situation of online learning before the pandemic, which indicates the need to differentiate and expand the discourse by investigating online learning *before* and *during*/*after* the COVID-19 emergency separately, with the aim of verifying the assumption of the effectiveness of online learning of Italian as an FL. For this reason, the second section of this chapter will cover the methodology used for the period which started soon after the COVID-19 outbreak.

The current chapter on methodology is therefore crucial to outline the methods of both the case study conducted *before* COVID-19 through two questionnaires, and the *during*/*after* COVID-19 analysis developed through the production of a second and more recent literature review. My analysis covers both a critical assessment of current theoretical approaches on the subject as well as suggestions and possible theoretical developments. The impact of COVID-19 on education, as well as its implications on the social dimensions and mental health of students and teachers, holds a complexity which needs to be examined on multiple levels and through different approaches. Therefore, the investigation on ERL and language learning, in particular Italian as an FL, has moved on parallel methodological paths: starting from the existing extensive literature on such a growing research topic, I conducted an additional literature

review with the aim of “evaluating the strength of the scientific evidence, identifying gaps in current research, identifying the need for future research” (Russel, 2005, p. 12), hence to create new knowledge (Torraco, 2016). In particular, this additional literature review has revealed gaps around the terminology employed to refer to online learning during the pandemic, which has created confusion about the difference between online learning *before* and *during* the COVID-19 emergency, and therefore misconceptions around the actual effectiveness of learning an FL online. Subsequently, a social media-based analysis has been conducted with the intention of expanding the discussion on COVID-19 and online learning through the examination of trending hashtags which reflected the sentiments, opinions and perceptions of people around education and online learning during the pandemic. The results of this analysis have confirmed the gaps which had emerged from the literature review and has served to reinforce the discourse about the misconception of a temporary emergency perceived as an unpleasant experience by many, who also wrongly associated and transferred their sentiments of dissatisfaction to online learning, thereby precluding any future chance of innovating the education system by considering online and distance learning as an opportunity.

Finally, I integrated the case study through the administration of additional questionnaires and group interviews with students of Italian at the UoB during ERL, who matched with a new category of online students, namely those who had to switch to distance education during the COVID-19 emergency, as well as interviews with academic staff who experienced ERL and could share the challenges and lessons they have learnt from the ERL experience. After collecting these group interviews, I developed a narrative about students’ perceptions of the ERL experience. The results of the interviews will provide some useful insights to rethink academic policies and can serve as a basis for policymakers to draw up a framework for the future of education.

In summary, the *before* COVID-19 section of the chapter, focusing on the case study conducted through the two questionnaires will begin with a description of the researcher and the participants, i.e. the two elements involved in the process. Then, the recruitment of participants, ethical concerns and procedure for ethical approval required by the University of Birmingham will be outlined. To conclude the section, the collection and analysis of the data from the questionnaires will be explained, together with a brief illustration of the software used to create and administer the questionnaires and to collate the responses.

3.2. Online learning *before* COVID-19

3.2.1. Methodological approaches

This chapter discusses the main methodological approaches to research, their definitions, differences and similarities, in order to legitimise the decision made to opt for a combined method to examine the problem more thoroughly and provide a more complete picture of the research problem. I will not list all the methods and instruments associated to the two approaches but will focus on the ones I consider pertinent to my research.

Generally speaking, the inductive method could be defined as a process of theorising that looks at specific data and draws more general observations, which in turn become theories, while the deductive approach takes a general theory and tests it by looking at the specific data. Both methods are different in how data are collected and analysed, how a literature review is used, and what the role of the researcher is, but the main goals are the same: describing, assessing and confirming the validity of existing approaches, and exploring, or adding new knowledge about a particular phenomenon or research problem. The research problem, and subsequently the research question(s) will determine the method, or methods, chosen.

In the inductive approach the researcher “explores” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005) a phenomenon by observation in order to develop a theory on a field about which there is little

or even no existing literature. On this account, the literature review, if existing, is presented as a basis to frame and formulate the research questions to be investigated, but it is not the main guidance in the research process. In fact, the aim of inductive research is to start from the data collected to develop a new theory as an end point. In research with an inductive approach concerning the academic disciplines of education and FL learning, researchers play a key role, because they bring their personal experience as educators, teachers and educationalists as a starting point, then they collect information from participants via questionnaires through open-ended questions and interviews, interpret meanings from the data collected and generalise patterns and theories from these results. Qualitative studies are an example of this research approach: as far as the present research is concerned, by investigating the effectiveness of online FL learning, and above all distance learning as a constantly growing phenomenon during COVID-19, the aim is to identify new patterns and contribute to the emerging theories of online FL learning and distance education. Multiple sources of information will be explored, such as European documents, articles, academic resources, case studies and direct observation of behaviour in natural settings.

Conversely, in the deductive approach the process starts from the theory, embodied in the literature review, from which research questions and hypotheses are formulated. Researchers then test them in order to confirm or disprove the theory. In quantitative research, or what Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2005) would call “confirmatory”, the literature review plays a crucial methodological role in identifying the research problem and questions, as well as in narrowing down the hypotheses arising from them. In the *before* COVID-19 section of this thesis, I have conducted a case study on the perception of learning Italian as an FL in online contexts, using an approach which can be described as deductive in its procedures and scope. Furthermore, I have conducted a literature review in order to use it as a tool to detect the crucial factors in FL learning. In fact, in the present research, the literature review was based on previous studies

about FL learning, and because of a gap in research related to online FL learning, especially in the Italian as an FL field, I formulated research questions which started from classroom-based premises. My aim was then to test them in the online environment with the aim of assessing whether the results of prior studies could be valid in the new context, and accordingly integrating the results in the existing theory, so as to expand it with the incorporation of new outcomes about online FL learning. The results of my investigation included aspects such as more flexibility in learning (concerning both time and space), being in charge of one's own learning and social interaction issues. This process is typical of the deductive approach, and according to Bhattacherjee (2012) it seems to be "an efficient way of building new theories by building on existing ones" (p. 29). In other words, I consider it essential for a literature review to be part of the methodology process. For this reason, before concluding this section by expanding on the decision of opting for a mixed approach in developing my research, I find it relevant to mention the approach which regards a literature review as methodology, in an attempt to develop new theories through the evaluation of previous ones. Different scholars (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2011; among others) agree that the process of writing a literature review itself represents, in a way, the process of writing a research study, where data collection is the same as collecting knowledge. Briefly, as Snyder (2019) points out, "a literature review provides the basis for building a new conceptual model or theory, and it can be valuable when aiming to map the development of a particular research field over time" (p. 334). However, using a literature as a method might have the limitation of it needing to be constantly updated: research surrounding online education and FL learning has been increasing due to the pandemic, therefore I have explored the literature published up to the time of submission of my thesis.

In conclusion to this section, after describing both inductive and deductive approaches to research, a combination of both is presented as a methodology for the present thesis. In a

manner of speaking, the two approaches are always interconnected, as several scholars (Parkhe, 1993; Richards, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Perry & Jensen, 2001) have argued. Specifically, Perry & Jensen (2001) underline that opting for a combination of both approaches in a single study can be seen as a solution when the PhD candidate is expected to produce a thesis. In such a case, the use of a mixed approach allows an all-round understanding and comprehension of the phenomenon (Ali & Birley, 1999) and a thorough insight of the matter at the same time, whether it results in presenting a new possible theory, consolidating the existing one or even both. Specifically, in the *before* COVID-19 section, this thesis intends to contribute to the existing literature on online learning pre-pandemic, by both reinforcing previous knowledge on the effectiveness of online FL learning and filling the research gap on online learning of Italian as an FL.

3.2.2. Researcher, Study Participants, Recruitment, questionnaire administration and ethical approval

The researcher played an important role at all stages of the study, starting as a promoter of the research at the proposal stage through the subsequent development of the research and its methodological approach, essential to define the instruments and methods to better answer the research questions. As mentioned, this thesis has involved the use of different methods, including a case study with the involvement of participants, which has been key to its development. As Stake (2005) points out, the researcher plays the role of the interpreter in defining the case study, digging into meanings (p. 450), and choosing “what is to be studied” (p. 443). In other words, a case study is a form of research which is “defined by interest in an individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used” (p. 443). In particular, I chose to study the case of online learning as I started my teaching career by delivering online Italian classes to foreigners, using different types of platforms and online materials, and at the same time by gaining educational experience in the field of FL learning. As a matter of fact, my PhD was

carried out through a distance-learning programme, which shows my considerably strong support for distance education as a means to promote inclusive and accessible education for everyone. Just as my personal background and understanding of the context have influenced the direction of my research, the assumptions, evaluation and interpretations of all the gathered information have been filtered through my personal sensitivity and knowledge of the subject matter. In inductively and deductively searching for meanings and findings, I have taken advantage of my personal experiences as both online FL teacher and FL student to search for evidence in support of my hypothesis about the effectiveness of online FL learning and about the fact that only students with specific personality traits or motivation and autonomy levels relied on online learning and not necessarily for academic purposes. It was clear to me that some students with certain FL attitudes and needs, such as flexibility and autonomy in learning, would prefer to study online, as they find it more effective than classroom-based contexts, and the same deduction applied to me as an FL learner who preferred online environments. However, the simple assumption based on my personal experience was not enough, and I had to find tangible evidence through pragmatic investigation. At the same time, the conscious observation of the sudden shift to distance education during COVID-19 corroborated my belief and conviction that online learning can innovate the way we access education by making it easily available all over the world. In particular, we have observed that the switch to online delivery has been perceived differently by each individual, with acceptance or refusal of the temporary online migration based on personal attitudes and learning preferences. I was also intrigued by the reasons behind the perception people had of the effectiveness of online FL learning and what internal factors would have influenced either satisfaction with or reluctance towards online and distance learning.

Participants in the *before* COVID-19 case study were deliberately selected among peers, people who had freely decided to learn Italian as a foreign language online, and therefore who

shared the same non-prejudicial idea of personal and linguistic improvement through technology. Thus, both participants and researcher held the same positive opinions and perception of learning an FL through the Internet and its effectiveness.

Participants were recruited from social networks, for example Facebook groups of users studying Italian online, and from universities and institutions which provided distance learning or blended learning before the pandemic. Moreover, as an online Italian teacher, I personally recruited participants among my students and former learners, and by enlisting the help of colleagues and friends living abroad. The participants included a number of people who were attending, or had attended, an Italian course online. Some had decided to learn Italian online independently, using online learning tools and platforms, such as MOOCs, Duolingo, Rosetta Stone, AdgBlog, others were students enrolled in undergraduate distance-learning degrees. All participants were over 18 and were asked to consent to using their answers in this study.

Because the Internet was used as a means of interaction and communication, and in order to reach a broad and varied sample of participants, the questionnaires were administered through an online survey software tool, accessed through an e-mailed link.

At the start of their first questionnaire, participants were asked to provide their e-mail addresses, which was the only contact information requested to help identify the responses of a specific ID and associate them with results from the final questionnaire. E-mail addresses were also used to send the follow-up questionnaire, but all data remained confidential. No personal data was or will be shared.

Before beginning the study, my research required ethical approval by the Ethics Review Committee of the University of Birmingham, in accordance with the “Code of Practice for Research”, which regulates the conduct of research in all its parts, such as research participants and recruitment, how to obtain consent, withdrawal, how to ensure confidentiality

and anonymity and data management (storage, access and disposal). The Ethics Review process involves filling in an online ethics self-assessment form (SAF) within the first year of registration in the PhD programme. Because the present study needed the participation of humans, a further step was required before ethical approval was granted. A further amendment to the form and to the questionnaire was necessary so as to implement the *after* COVID-19 analysis, by extending the list of open-ended questions and the number of participants. For further details, see Appendix 1 and Appendix 3 for the information sheets, and Appendix 5 for the consent form.

3.3. Online learning *during* and *after* COVID-19

The Coronavirus emergency has certainly changed the perspective of education and online learning. When conducting research during an event such as an ongoing pandemic, it is essential to investigate and analyse relevant aspects and implications of the event. COVID-19 itself has been regarded as a social and complex phenomenon which embraces education, health, behaviour and many other facets (El Said, 2021). The methodology chosen for my study needed therefore to be re-examined in the light of this event. I revised the mixed method used in the *before* COVID-19 section and refined the methodology with the incorporation of a multimethod approach, a model in line with the variations and complexity caused by the pandemic. In fact, as Johnson et al. (2007) stated: ‘‘Multimethod research is when different approaches or methods are used in parallel or sequence but are not integrated until inferences are being made’’ (p. 119), whereas mixed methods involve the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, which are combined and mixed (Morse, 2010) “in either parallel or sequential phases” (Teddie and Tashakkori, 2010, p. 11). I found that multimethod research can deal with complexity of this kind and can provide a comprehensive explanation of these heterogeneous social phenomena (Greene, 2015).

3.3.1. Complementary Literature Review as a research method

Chapter Five of the thesis will explore and discuss current theoretical approaches on the impact of COVID-19 on education, as well as outline the differences between online learning and emergency remote learning, with the intention of building a literature review on COVID-19 and emergency remote learning which can contribute to this research field and allow a critical evaluation and analysis of the last two years of the pandemic and the near future. I chose to write a complementary review of the literature, a form of research which Torraco (2016) recommends be “conducted on dynamic topics that experience rapid growth in the literature” or “to review new emerging topics that generate a growing body of literature” (p. 404). This is the case of the research topic explored in this thesis. By building a complementary literature review on emergency remote learning which included European documents and guidelines, I was able to assess and synthesise a rapidly growing field of research, in order to generate new frameworks and perspectives (Torraco, 2005) on online learning during COVID-19 and beyond, and with the intention of developing “fresh theoretical models” (Raju & Poh Phung, 2021, p. 6309) which can be useful to the future of both online and F2F education. Moreover, the complementary literature review can also prompt further research on the topics (Torraco, 2005, 2016) of emergency remote learning and online learning.

In addition to researching academic publications, the literature search was extended to European documents and reports. In the initial stage I searched websites and official databases of European Institutions by using keywords such as “online learning”, “digital competences”, “COVID-19” and “education”, narrowing down the list of relevant documents from both past and present regulations and projects. As a first result, I built a useful set of literature on European policies and decision-making process, which explores the challenges and objectives faced by the EU during the pandemic, with the intention of highlighting the role of the EU in coordinating and providing a response to the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, I was

able to detect challenges, obstacles and opportunities of the impact of COVID-19 on education and remote learning. The second stage aimed at reviewing the literature through the analysis of studies and existing research on the topic published between March 2020 and 2021. The keywords searched were “emergency remote learning”, “online learning”, “COVID-19”, “online language learning” and “remote learning”. At that point, I was able to draw specific conclusions and sketch new perspectives on the impact that the pandemic had had and was having on education.

The results of the literature review showed that emergency remote learning and online learning were somehow initially perceived as synonymous, with a blurry differentiation among the two terms which affected the perception of everyone about the effectiveness of learning online. In some cases, emergency remote learning had even been completely replaced by other terms such as distance learning and remote learning. As a consequence, students, teachers and families felt worried about the negative impact of online learning during the pandemic, and unsatisfied with the overall ERL experience equalised to online learning. This is the turning point where my analysis becomes relevant: the objective of my study is to endorse the effectiveness of online FL learning, and for doing so I find important to emphasise the differences between ERL and online learning. The conclusions of the literature review gave better insights into the research topic, and the results helped to further narrow down the investigation with an analysis of hashtags related to emergency remote learning which aimed to better understand the perception of people around online learning at the time of COVID-19. The conclusions of the literature review were also crucial to formulating the interview questions: with an overview of all specific aspects involved in emergency remote learning in mind, I was able to address precise queries on challenges and opportunities brought by the pandemic, on what have we learned, and on what we can retain in order to improve the education systems beyond COVID-19.

3.3.2. The mining and citing of Twitter hashtags in social media-based research

In the academic and education arena, as well as in other fields of study, social media is recognised as an important instrument because, through social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and Facebook, people can publicly express thoughts and feelings channelled through metadata tags called hashtags, i.e. words, keywords or phrases introduced by a hash sign (#). Clicking on the words/phrase makes it possible to use them as a search link and see all posts with the same hashtag, hence correlated to the same topic or event. This makes it it easier for researchers, the authorities and stakeholders to observe public opinion and people's changes in attitudes, beliefs and feelings.

Following the pandemic outbreak, COVID-19 has become a ubiquitous topic on social media, with information and feelings, concerns and frustrations expressed and shared through hashtags (Lacsa, 2021). Yet, in terms of education, people still have "mixed perceptions" (Asare et al., 2021), often confusing ERL with online learning. Although the term ERL is regarded as popular amongst the educational technology community (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020 among others), multiple concepts such as "online learning" remained well-established in the literature corpus to describe ERT/L (Bond et al., 2021). This confirmed the need to investigate the perception of ERL during COVID-19 by exploring the opinions of social media users about ERL and whether they perceive a difference between the concepts of online learning and ERL through the mining and analysis of Twitter hashtags and tweets, in order to improve the discussion and provide a theoretical contribution to the existing knowledge of ERL and online learning during COVID-19. At the same time, I also included in my search the term "didattica a distanza", which has been mostly perceived as the Italian equivalent of ERL**,** with the intention of narrowing the focus of the examination to Italian public opinion, which is appropriate to the sphere of interest of the present thesis.

For years, the Internet has been increasingly considered the most widely used source of information (Jones & Salathé, 2009) when analysing public opinion. Using the Web as a source, I applied a content analysis approach (Krippendorff, 2018) to social media content by monitoring certain hashtags in tweets and posts in the selected period of reference, in order to identify what Kehoe & Gee (2011) call “textual aboutness”, a concept which relates to the information that a certain tag or hashtag provides and which can help mark the topic(s) of discussion (DeArmas, 2018; Zappavigna, 2021). The content analysis technique of mining online information applied here is also known as “infoveillance” (Eysenbach, 2009), a term derived from “information surveillance”, specifically used “to measure the pulse of public opinion, attention, behaviour, knowledge, and attitudes by tracking what people do and write on the Internet” (Eysenbach, 2011, p. 154).

The quantitative method of gathering online data through content can give insight on new term(s) in the form of frequently occurring hashtags over time on Twitter. Moreover, this approach also allows a qualitative analysis of possible opinions, feelings and perceptions of the pandemic. The analysis of feelings, also known as opinion mining (Zhang and Liu, 2012), aims to identify specific emotions or opinions related to a certain topic, which in this study is ERL. The feelings mined can then be classified as neutral, positive or negative, according to the orientation and point of view of the authors of the tweets. For instance, Go, Bhayani, and Huang (2009) labelled tweets ending with positive emoticons such as “:-)” as indicative of positive feelings, and tweets ending with negative emoticons like “:-(” as indicative of negative ones. In this study, the feeling analysis of tweets was conducted through the mining of words associated with positive or negative prior polarity, referring to the feeling they would evoke out of context: in other words, as Gatti and Guerini (2012) exemplify, “*wonderful* has a positive connotation - prior polarity, and *horrible* has a negative prior polarity” (p. 362).

The period of reference ran from April 2020 to October 2021. It covered the phenomenon from the schools' closure after the spread of COVID-19 and first lockdown, when the shift to remote learning was immediate and chaotic (Basford, 2021). It then continued through the reopening of schools after the summer of 2020, when a mix of remote and hybrid learning was used and public opinion was concerned about the restart of education, wondering whether it had to continue fully online or in-person. Finally, the period ended in October 2021, when it was clear that the emergency measures would have to continue for longer than originally planned.

3.3.3. Ethical considerations

This section aims to outline a clear good-practice procedure when using social media data in research. Current literature and guidelines are not unambiguous, and there is lack of consensus in the research community (Webb, et al., 2017) on how to gather the data and obtain permission to use it, which leads to unclear instructions on the ethical use of social media data. Therefore, working with social media to collect data for academic research raises complex ethical challenges. The first issue when collecting and retrieving data concerns acquiring informed consent from all participants, in traditional research usually the first form to be signed and/or box ticked before proceeding with questionnaires. In social media-based research, where the volume of tweets retrieved might be large, it becomes difficult and time-consuming to obtain informed consent from every single user involved in the dataset (Ahmed, Bath, and Demartini, 2017). In the case of Twitter, the social media platform used in this study to collect data, informed consent relies on its Terms of Service and Privacy Policy, whose acceptance by users may result in the collection and use of the information provided by third parties. Specifically, paragraph 2, "Privacy" of "Twitter Terms of Service" states that:

> You understand that through your use of the Services you consent to the collection and use (as set forth in the Privacy Policy) of this information, including the transfer of this information to the United

> States, Ireland, and/or other countries for storage, processing and use by Twitter and its affiliates (Twitter, 2021A).

Moreover, in 2021 Twitter launched the “API product track for academic research”, a service which grants academic researchers free access to the complete archive of historical public Tweets, aiming to “provide data access that is open and fair for developers, safe for people on Twitter, and beneficial for the Twitter platform as a whole” (Twitter, 2021B). Twitter’s Developer Policy document also contains useful instructions for academic researchers on how to use Twitter data for research purposes:

> Academic researchers are permitted to distribute an unlimited number of Tweet IDs and/or User IDs if they are doing so on behalf of an academic institution and for the sole purpose of non-commercial research. For example, you are permitted to share an unlimited number of Tweet IDs for the purpose of enabling peer review or validation of your research (Twitter, 2021B).

Twitter must be aware of the power of its platform as a tool that can advance research objectives on many topics (Tornes, 2021), as well as the key benefits of “more precise, complete, and unbiased datasets” (Twitter, 2021C) to support academic research, and such a starting point in providing ethical guidelines on the use of Twitter data in research will be of service to the academic community.

When conducting research, it is also important to guarantee participants’ confidentiality or anonymity with an eye towards protecting their identity and avoiding any potential risk of harm, especially when the researcher intends to cite some tweets reporting sensitive topics or where the user is somehow identifiable. However, as Townsend and Wallace (2016) suggest, Twitter is a platform where all posts are set to public by default with the purpose to be seen and read by everyone using the platform, and the further use of hashtags is intended as a way to reach a large audience of potential contributors to a debate.

A solution proposed by some scholars (Webb et al., 2017; Ahmed et al., 2017) is to slightly modify the social media content, for example by paraphrasing some words or by correcting spelling mistakes and remove the ID handles with the aim of anonymising the tweets and minimising the risk of finding matching results of the tweets in the search engine. The ultimate objective of sharing tweets in this study was to show in the data the perception of the situation which had arisen; therefore, feeling analysis and relevant tweet citation were considered necessary for the purpose of the study.

However, in the absence of clear guidelines, researchers are encouraged to ask the Ethical Review Committee for the appropriate route to be followed. In the specific instance of this study, ethical approval was granted, provided that all tweets quoted be anonymised. Moreover, because the study does not deal with sensitive topics or vulnerable individuals, it is very unlikely that demographic and identity features will emerge in the research outputs.

I am hopeful that the section on “Ethical Considerations” can be a valid contribution to ethical procedures and guidelines when using social media data in research as both a theoretical and a practical framework in the future.

3.3.4. Developing a phenomenological study using interviews and questionnaires from students and staff members who experienced ERL

This section illustrates the methodology used for Chapter 7, where I collected and analysed lived experiences on the impact that emergency remote learning has had on students who were forced to migrate their learning online, on what we could take with us now that the pandemic is over, on what benefits and advantages we could profit from after this experience and on what we have learnt from the past few years which can be retained or should be avoided in the future. The aspiration of this study is mostly to investigate the effectiveness of online language learning when certain criteria are met, specifically remaining aware of the rapid and

temporary (Hodges et al., 2020) virtual educational environments which characterised the emergency remote learning context.

The interviews with students were conducted in 3 small groups on Zoom, with a series of open-ended questions (See Appendix 3, Section One for the list of questions and Appendix 6 for the respondents' answers) whereas 2 interviews with staff members were conducted individually, and one in a group of 2 participants (See Appendix 4 for the list of questions, and Appendix 6 for the interview transcripts). The interviews were carried out in the form of focus groups, which differ from general group interviews in the way participants interact, because "instead of asking questions of each person in turn, focus group researchers encourage participants to talk to one another" (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999, p. 4) and, throughout the interview, "focus group participants have the opportunity to piece together the fragmented experiences of group members and may come to view events in their own lives in a new light in the course of such discussions" (p. 19). This kind of interaction might influence participants' responses, leading to the modification of their opinions (Krueger, 1994) and, therefore, can restrict the generalisability of the findings (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). However, during the focus group interviews I noticed that participants remained firm in their positions, and their lived experiences appeared not to be influenced by each other's opinions.

I subsequently presented my results in the form of a description of "what" participants had experienced and "how" they had experienced it (Moustakas, 1994, in Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 76). I propose to contribute to, and expand the discussion on online learning at the time of COVID-19 and beyond, starting with interviews conducted with groups of students who had to migrate their learning online during the pandemic, or who started their first year at university shortly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by questionnaires which aimed to assess the motivation, personality and autonomy in learning of this category of students, who enrolled in on-campus university programmes but had to temporarily change to online learning,

as well as interviews to staff members.. My decision to use the phenomenological approach lies in the purpose of this approach, which Creswell and Poth (2018) recognised to be a deep understanding of common lived experiences “in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon” (p. 81), which I cover in the conclusive chapter of this thesis.

3.4. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to outline the methodology used to answer my research questions. A discussion on the approaches, as well as a description of the study participants, recruitment procedures, ethical approval and data collection were also outlined throughout the chapter. My study covers a period from 2018 to 2022, thus the work was divided into two sections, and as such so has the present chapter: one “*before* COVID-19” and one “*during/after* COVID-19”. In the first section, a combination of inductive and deductive approaches was selected and justified in order to answer the research questions and contribute to the existing theories regarding online FL learning pre-pandemic and, specifically, to fill a research gap in the emerging theories about online learning of Italian as a Foreign Language. The second section of the chapter considered a “multimethod approach” consisting of a combination of multiple methods in an attempt to achieve a whole picture of a situation which might need a thorough investigation of elements. In the *before* COVID-19 part I have used a mixed-method approach, combining and integrating quantitative and qualitative data. This is often perceived as synonymous with multimethod studies, due to a lack of clarity and the failure to differentiate the two concepts (Anguera et al., 2018). In my opinion, the two concepts are distinct, and the method used in the *before* COVID-19 section is different from the multimethod studies used for the second part of my work. The chapter concluded with the development of a phenomenological analysis of online learning at the time of COVID-19 using interviews and

questionnaires from students who experienced ERL, which concluded my investigation around the effectiveness of online FL learning of Italian.

SECTION ONE: RESEARCH BEFORE COVID-19

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In the previous chapters I carried out a literature review and outlined the research methodology used to answer my research questions. This chapter is devoted to the case study *before* COVID-19 and the results of the questionnaires. In particular, the findings aim to find answers to three research questions, related to the crucial factors involved in online learning of Italian as an FL among participants ("to what extent do internal factors such as motivation, personality and autonomy affect the learning of Italian as an FL in online contexts?"), and participants' perception of and level of satisfaction with the process of learning Italian in online contexts, investigated through two questions: "what are the students' perception of and satisfaction with the effectiveness of learning Italian through the Internet?" and "to what extent do students perceive they have acquired or improved the Italian language in an online context?". After a brief description of the questionnaires and how the questions have been structured, in the following pages I will analyse the data collected and draw conclusions and implications.

All participants were considered students of Italian as an FL *before* COVID-19, who freely chose to study in a distance learning mode, both for academic and non-academic purposes. Participants were mainly recruited from social networks, for example Facebook groups of users studying Italian online, and from universities and institutions which provided distance learning or blended learning before the pandemic[5]. In the next paragraph (4.1.1. Personal information) I discuss the main demographics and variables. The study consisted of two questionnaires in English, both because I relied on parts of previously published English-language questionnaires, and because the participants were of various nationalities, therefore the English version would have been the lingua franca for every respondent. The first questionnaire

[5] See "2.1.2. Researcher, Study Participants, Recruitment, questionnaire administration and ethical approval" for all details about the sample and how participants were recruited.

was divided into 4 parts: part I elicited general information using both open and closed-ended questions; part II contained 20 questions to assess students' motivation in learning Italian online; part III consisted of 10 questions about personality; and part IV consisted of 13 questions about autonomy in learning. A few months after completing this questionnaire, the participants were contacted again for a second questionnaire about their perception of learning Italian online and progress with the language. The aim of the second questionnaire was to give students enough time to start, continue or complete their Italian language course, whilst reflecting on their progress and the effectiveness of learning online. As stated in the literature, follow-up questionnaires usually "help the participants expand on their answer" (Bolderston, 2012; p. 69) when necessary.

4.1. First questionnaire: data analysis

In the first questionnaire, thirty-six (36) participants gave consent to the study, with thirty-three (33) continuing to the second questionnaire. As Dworkin (2012) observes, qualitative methods require a more in-depth analysis compared to quantitative ones, therefore a smaller sample size usually suffices. According to Dworkin, "an extremely large number of articles, book chapters, and books recommend guidance and suggest anywhere from 5 to 50 participants as adequate" (p. 1319), thereby verifying the acceptability of the sample size above. In terms of validity and reliability of the questionnaires to assess the crucial factors involved in online FL learning, I started from pre-existing and validated questionnaires. For example, regarding the BFI-10, several studies demonstrated acceptable reliability (Rammstedt and John, 2007; Rammstedt et al., 2014), as well as its validity (Rammstedt and John, 2007; Rammstedt et al., 2013; Rammstedt et al., 2014). Concerning the motivation questionnaire adapted from Dörnyei and Taguchi's study (2009), many studies (Taguchi, Magid and Papi, 2009; Ryan, 2009; Kim, 2012; İslam, Lamb and Chambers, 2013; Yarwood (2018) have validated Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System model. Moreover, Taguchi, Magid and Papi (2009)

demonstrated the generalisability of the L2 Motivational Self System to diverse cultural contexts.

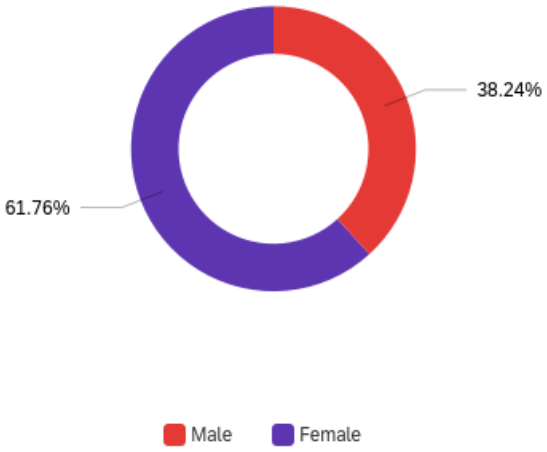
In the present study, data were collected through mixed method which is more reliable because it can help to investigate complex issues involved in language education (Dörnyei, 2007). And may represent further evidence to support generalisation. However, even though a complete generalisation of the findings is not possible because the perceptions and experiences of individuals may differ, according to the platforms they used and their level in the language they studied, this study remains representative of the larger population of learners who opted to study online instead of F2F. More reflections on generalisation of findings and representativeness of the sample are discussed in Chapter Eight (See 8.4. Limitation of my research).

4.1.1. Personal information

Part I of the first questionnaire gathered general information regarding participants' age, gender, nationality, education, employment status and details about previous learning of Italian. All data are included in Results of the First questionnaire (Appendix 1).

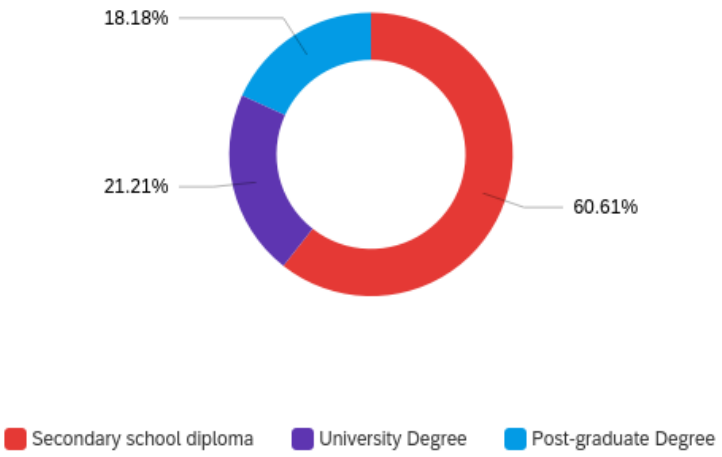
The demographic data showed that age ranged between 18 and 73, with the highest number of respondents (7) aged 19, and the highest range of participants between 18 and 22 years old (17). This age range coincides with the so-called Generation Z, i.e. individuals born after 1995 (Ensari, 2017) and raised in the Internet era, who have access to new technologies and social media and mostly communicate through them (Dolot, 2018). It is not unexpected to receive such information, which suggests a positive correspondence of the sampling with the current social and educational scenarios.

Thirteen participants were male (38.24%), and twenty female (61.76%).

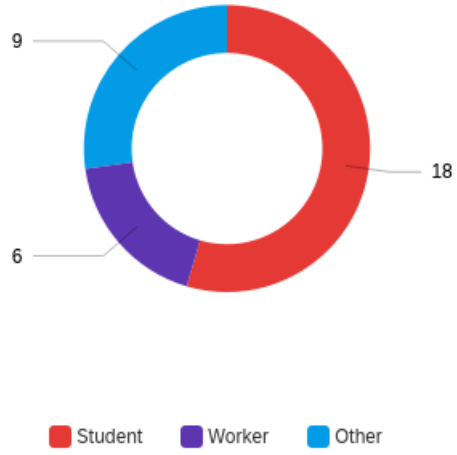


Thirty participants gave their nationality: the majority (16) were British, but we can also include those who considered themselves as “white British”, “British/Russian” and “English” (2), for a total of twenty. Of the remaining participants who came from the EU, one was French and one Irish, and two were Italian-born, but studying in the UK, as demonstrated by their email address domains displaying their university and student status. Outside the EU, three participants were from Israel, two participants were Peruvian, one from Brazil, one from Argentina, one from Taiwan and one from the U.S.

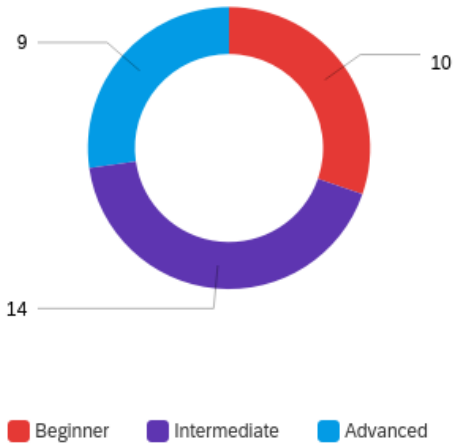
The educational qualification which scored the most was secondary school diploma (20), followed by university degree (7) and post-graduate degree (6). The pie-chart below shows the data in percentage.



Some participants were enrolled at (and recruited from) the OU and on blended learning university courses. In fact, eighteen participants stated they were students, six were workers and nine had “other” employment status.

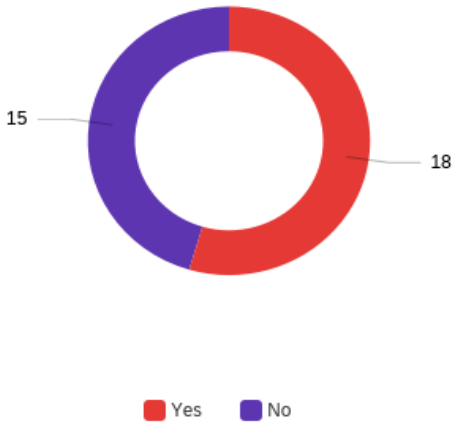


When asked to self-assess their level of Italian, ten participants assessed themselves as beginners, fourteen as intermediate and nine as advanced.



Out of thirty-two participants, twenty-three had or had had a teacher of Italian (F2F or online) in support of their online study.

Eighteen participants had spent a long period of time (at least one month) in Italy (e.g. travelling, studying).



Finally, the learners were asked to list platforms and tools they used to learn Italian. According to their answers, with fourteen mentions, Duolingo was shown to be the most widely used tool to learn Italian online, followed by YouTube (6) and some Facebook groups (6). Some other

tools include Quizlet (3), Memrise (3), Babbel (1) and Busuu (1). Some participants studied, or had studied, at the OU (4). Watching original language TV series, Netflix, videos and listening to music were also indicated as tools to learn Italian in an online environment. Therefore, the majority of tools and platforms used to learn Italian are asynchronous.

4.1.2. Motivation

Part II aimed to assess the participants' motivation to learn Italian online, through the administration of a self-reported test based on a 5-point Likert-type scale, where participants respond to every statement on a scale from 1 to 5 (from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree").

The statements in the questionnaire were extrapolated from some motivation questionnaires used in 2008 for a project in Japan, China and Iran, which were designed by Dörnyei and focused on students' motivation, ideal self and ought-to self. The statements used from the questionnaire were regrouped into three subgroups to investigate three components: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and "L2 Motivational Self System". Moreover, the statements were included without being rephrased, therefore they did not reference online learning. However, the information sheet provided a reference to online learning by asking "I would like to ask you to help me with my PhD research at the UoB, UK to better understand the thoughts and beliefs of learners of Italian in online environments by answering the following questions" (See Appendix 1).

The answers were analysed as a general picture, so not looking at each participant individually, because the study aims to outline an ideal image of individual participation in online FL learning environments. The aim of this section of the questionnaire was to examine which types of L2 Motivation are involved in driving participants to learn Italian online, and for this reason it was important to consider and analyse the results as a whole, in an attempt to find an unambiguous concept of L2 Motivation.

The following statements investigated intrinsic motivation:

1) I like Italian language and culture.

3) I think learning Italian is important in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers.

5) I like TV programmes and films made in Italy.

8) I like/ I'd like to travel to Italy.

10) I really like the actual process of learning Italian.

13) I find learning Italian really interesting.

14) I think time passes faster while studying Italian.

17) Learning Italian is important to me because I plan to travel to Italy in the future.

18) I really enjoy learning Italian.

Other statements looked at extrinsic motivation:

2) Studying Italian can be important to me because I think I'll need it for further studies.

11) Studying Italian is important to me in order to achieve a personally important goal (e.g.: to obtain a degree or scholarship).

19) I have to learn Italian because I don't want to fail the Italian course.

Finally, the remaining statements aimed to prove the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self of the learners:

4) I can imagine myself speaking Italian in the future with foreign friends.

6) I study Italian because close friends of mine think it is important.

7) Studying Italian is important to me in order to gain the approval of my family.

9) I can imagine myself giving an Italian speech in public successfully in the future.

12) My dreams of how I want to use Italian in the future are the same as those of my parents.

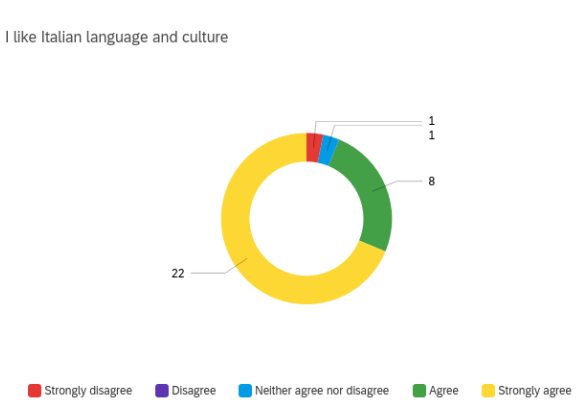
15) I consider learning Italian important because the people I respect think that I should do it.

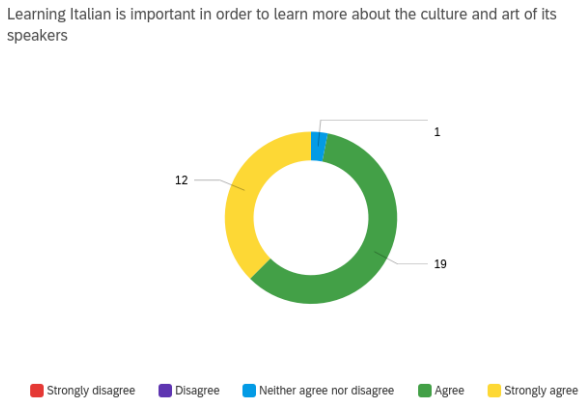
16) I can imagine that in the future in a café with light music, a foreign friend and I will be chatting in Italian casually over a cup of coffee.

20) My image of how I want to use Italian in the future is mainly influenced by my parents.

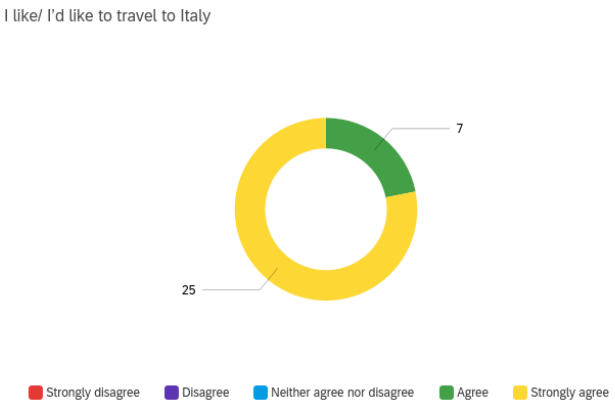
The complete questionnaire is in Appendix 1: Information Sheet and First Online Questionnaire with results.

Participants responded positively to all statements related to intrinsic motivation, for example they strongly agreed with the statement “I like Italian language and culture” (22), and 19 participants agreed that “learning Italian is important in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers”.



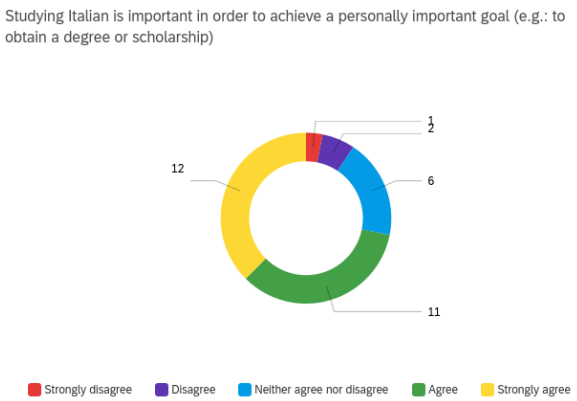


No negative or neutral answers were given to the statement “I like/ I’d like to travel to Italy”.



The statements on learning Italian for academic purposes, related to extrinsic motivation, showed a less homogeneous trend, certainly explained with the status of the respondents, as not all participants were students enrolled in university courses. For example, with the statement “studying Italian can be important to me because I think I’ll need it for further studies”, two participants strongly disagreed, six disagreed, the majority of responses (10) neither agreed nor disagreed, eight agreed and six strongly agreed. With the statement “I have to learn Italian because I don’t want to fail the Italian course”, four strongly agreed, seven agreed, but then ten strongly disagreed, and seven disagreed, which can be explained by the simple fact that not all participants were enrolled in an Italian, perhaps compulsory course.

With the more specific statement on whether “studying Italian is important [to me], in order to achieve a personally important goal (e.g.: to obtain a degree or scholarship)” twelve participants strongly agreed, eleven agreed, six neither agreed nor disagreed, two agreed and one strongly disagreed.



These results show that the participants were intrinsically motivated to learn Italian, as they showed a positive attitude towards learning for pleasure rather than for others' acceptance. However, some participants appeared to study Italian in order to achieve a goal, therefore showing some extrinsic motivation. This particular result is not surprising in a learning environment, as an unquestionable amount of extrinsic motivation is needed while learning, but nonetheless, as Bodnar et al. (2016) suggest, the more the L2 learning process is "in line with the goals and interests of the learner, [the more] the state of motivation becomes increasingly intrinsic, and in principle, results in more exerted effort" (p. 9).

The majority of the participants (10 strongly agreed and 14 agreed) can imagine that in the future in a café with light music, a foreign friend and they will be chatting in Italian casually over a cup of coffee, which depicts a scenario of the person they would like to become in speaking an L2, the Ideal L2 Self proposed by Dörnyei (2009) as one of the three components of the "L2 Motivational Self System".

Another component of the "L2 Motivational Self System", the L2 Learning Experience, theorised by Dörnyei (2019) as "the perceived quality of the learners' engagement with various aspects of the language learning process" (p. 26) was measured through some statements about the process of learning a language online, as well as the reasons for doing this and its expected goals: twenty participants agreed and eight strongly agreed they "really like the actual process of learning Italian", whereas two remained neutral and only two disagreed. Sixteen of the participants strongly agreed with the statement "I find learning Italian really interesting", fifteen agreed and one neither agreed nor disagreed. Twenty-one participants strongly agreed with the statement "I really enjoy learning Italian". The overall L2 Learning Experience thus appeared to be positive.

On the other hand, statements about external acceptance, the so-called "ought-to L2 self", seem to have little correlation with participants' motivation for learning Italian online. In

particular, participants appeared not to contemplate their families' approval as an incentive to learn Italian: twelve students strongly disagreed and ten disagreed with the statement "studying Italian is important to me in order to gain the approval of my family"; thirteen participants strongly disagreed and eleven disagreed with "my dreams of how I want to use Italian in the future are the same as those of my parents", with six remaining neutral; sixteen participants strongly disagreed with the statement "my image of how I want to use Italian in the future is mainly influenced by my parents" and ten disagreed. Finally, "I consider learning Italian important because the people I respect think that I should do it" had 13 "strongly disagree" answers.

There can also be another interpretation of these results, which is linked to the concept of Gardner and Lambert (1972): in fact, participants showed a strongly positive attitude to the Italian language and culture, as twenty-two people strongly agreed with the statement "I like Italian language and culture", twenty-five strongly liked or would like to travel to Italy and eighteen could strongly imagine themselves speaking Italian in the future with foreign friends. When asked if they "think learning Italian is important in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers", nineteen agreed and twelve strongly agreed, while only one remained neutral. Learning a language to better integrate with the target language community is what Gardner and Lambert (1972) called integrative motivation. The desire to learn a language to get to know people who speak the target language, or even more the interest towards the Italian culture and art, can have a significant influence on students' motivation and their success in learning the language. The responses showed a homogeneous level of integrative motivation, which is considered to be "a better support for language learning", contrary to instrumental motivation, described as "a desire to learn or pragmatic gains such as getting a better job or a higher salary" (Liu, 2007).

4.1.3. Personality

When approaching language learning, both online and in the classroom, people reveal different personalities, as well as individual learning styles, identities, educational and cultural background, and so on. Rüdian and al. (2019) suggest that personality has not been considered in depth in online courses and learning environments, whilst research has been focused on quantitative data such as “drop-out rates or final outcomes” (p. 1). Thus, in line with the need to explore further and focus more closely on personality traits in online language learning, this study aims to find how personality might influence the process of language learning in online contexts, and to outline the personality traits which most significantly appear to play a crucial role in online foreign language aptitude. In line with these main aims, four hypotheses were formulated:

- [H1] Regarding openness to experience, individuals represented by this trait are willing to consider alternatives, are intellectually curious, open-minded and open to new situations. Therefore, I speculated that individuals with a high score in this trait would have an aptitude for learning the language online.

- [H2] Neurotic individuals feel anxious, tense, insecure, unstable, have a superficial attitude towards learning, and might give up when facing difficulties. In an online learning environment, people can be self-determined and independent in their own learning, with no worries about others, therefore, I supposed that participants opted for an online learning environment to avoid unstable and tense contexts, meaning they would score highly in neuroticism.

- [H3] Extraverts are friendly and socially active and prefer the company of others, are talkative and in constant connection with the external world. Introverts, on the other hand, “need less stimulation than extraverts and more time alone” (Biedroń, 2011). Based on these premises, I postulated that introverts would prefer prefer an asynchronous online learning

environment, where they can learn at their own pace, whereas extraverts would prefer the company of others, which is only feasible in synchronous online contexts.

All participants were considered students of Italian as an FL who freely chose to study in a distance learning mode, both for academic and non-academic purposes. Participants concluded the first questionnaires before 2020, thus with no obligation to study online due to extenuating circumstances imposed by the pandemic. This gives me an additional hypothesis to examine, regarding online language learning for academic purposes. For this reason, in addition to analysing the personality traits which are more likely to be related to online language learning, I also tested the following question: which personality traits are associated with academic performance in online FL learning? Given previous studies on conscientiousness and its positive relation to academic achievement (Noftle and Robins, 2007; O'Connor and Paunonen, 2007), as conscientious individuals are perceived as achievement-oriented, efficient, reliable and persistent towards a goal, the hypothesis linked to this question was that [H4] participants studying Italian for academic purposes would score high in conscientiousness.

In order to either confirm or refute these hypotheses, I extracted and analysed all results from participants enrolled in an online academic course during the study.

As expounded in the literature review, the short version of the Big Five Inventory (Rammstedt and John, 2007) was used to measure the main traits of 5 personalities, through 10 short phrases graded on a five-degree scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The results were scored following the instructions provided by Rammstedt and John (2007).

Each trait embraces two statements (or items), one scored through a rising count from 1 to 5 and the other one scored in reverse (in the key score table, the items followed by "R"). To reverse score an item, 1 is changed to 5, 2 to 4, 4 to 2, and 5 to 1.

Scoring the BFI-10 scales (R = item is reverse-scored):

Extraversion: 1R, 6

Agreeableness: 2, 7R

Conscientiousness: 3R, 8

Neuroticism: 4R, 9

Openness to Experience: 5R, 10

The results were then converted to percentage values.

Table 2, below, provides the number of participants who scored a certain percentage for each trait.

	100%	50%	Above 50%	Under 50%
Openness	5	13	10	4
Agreeableness	1	7	19	5
Conscientiousness	1	6	18	7
Neuroticism	5	4	14	9
Extraversion	2	9	9	12

The majority of the 32 participants who completed this section scored highly in “openness to experience”. In fact, only 4 participants scored under 50%. Hence, H1 has been supported by the results.

According to the findings, H2 has been partially proven to be true, as most participants scored highly, but there were 9 students whose results were below 50%, therefore with a low score in neuroticism.

Finally, H3 has also been supported. In fact, 12 participants showed a low score in extraversion, and 9 scored 50%.

To confirm H4, I extrapolated the data from participants who were clearly attending an academic course or had stated they were (for example, some had declared they were enrolled on or had attended courses at the Open University, others had provided an institutional student e-mail)[6]. I detected 18 participants who appeared to study for academic purposes, and I collected the following data:

	100%	50%	Above 50%	Under 50%
Conscientiousness	/	2	12	4

The results show that most respondents (12) scored highly in conscientiousness, and only 4 got a low score. H4 is therefore supported.

This section intended to examine the relationship between personality and online FL learning, with a focus on which traits are more likely to have an impact in an online context and to what extent. The findings showed that personality is indeed correlated to distance language learning and might affect the process of learning an FL online. More and more institutions and countries switched to distance learning due to the pandemic, hence investigating personality traits and their crucial implications in online FL learning is fundamental in order to provide a significant contribution to the literature.

[6] See Appendix 1 “Results of the First questionnaire”.

4.1.4. Learner Autonomy

The final part of the first questionnaire included 13 questions to assess participants' autonomy in learning online. Since little research (Zhang and Li, 2004; Tassinari, 2012) has focused on developing a standardised questionnaire to assess learner autonomy, and none in the field of online FL learning, I designed a questionnaire to explore online language learner autonomy. The only valuable contribution was given by Broady in 1996 who developed a 45-item questionnaire to assess the attitude towards self-direction of British university students of French or German as an FL. This questionnaire was also used by Breeze in 2002 to explore the beliefs of Spanish university EFL students about language autonomy in learning. The questionnaire was divided into 8 parts, namely general readiness for self-directed learning, general attitudes to language learning without the presence of a teacher, explanation and supervision by a teacher, language learning activities, selection of content, setting objectives and self-assessment, and attitudes towards external assessment. However, this questionnaire was designed for classroom-based contexts and the majority of the statements recalled the role of the teacher within the classroom, so I decided to borrow from Brody's questionnaire certain features such as the way the questionnaire has been divided into sections and its main headlines for each group of statements, which were then developed into the following groups: self-selecting the learning content, teacherless learning and readiness for self-directed learning.

The 13 questions were extrapolated from an online questionnaire at the following website https://www.askabox.fr/liste-111693-TfchNzmAvT0.html, which I found applicable to the purpose of creating a valid questionnaire for assessing learner autonomy in this particular study. The 13 statements were selected and some of them changed to fit within the context of this thesis, to assess learner autonomy in the learning of Italian as an FL among adults,

therefore excluding some words and statements referring to the context of a physical classroom, or specifically pertaining to the studying of English.

The questionnaire, like the other ones used to assess the motivation and personality of the participants, was constructed in the form of a Likert scale, self-assessment test where participants could choose 1 out of 5 options which most closely represented their perception towards the descriptor, from “Strongly disagree”, to “Strongly agree”. The proposed questionnaire, which aimed at evaluating the autonomy of students in learning as an ability (Guo and Dai, 2011) could also be used as a tool by teachers, educators and course designers to collect students’ feedback with the intention of adjusting the learning process in order to improve learners’ autonomy. Moreover, as in the dynamic model of learner autonomy proposed by Tassinari (2012), the following self-administered questionnaire provides students with the possibility of self-reflection on their level of autonomy in the learning process and an incentive on ways to enhance their autonomy. The learner autonomy of adult online learners of Italian as an FL was investigated in relation to the three perspectives previously mentioned: self-selecting the learning content, teacherless learning, and readiness for self-directed learning.

The ability to self-select the learning content was examined through the statements:

2. If I have the right materials, I prefer to spend some time studying alone

7. I regularly review my Italian learning and check what I have learned

8. I read a certain amount of Italian material every day

10. I also investigate the culture of the foreign language I am learning

11. I like learning Italian words by looking them up in a dictionary

Teacherless learning was investigated with the statements:

1. I can learn without teacher supervision

4. I prefer to read books, magazines, newspapers all by myself without the teacher telling me what to read

5. The teacher should only be a counsellor, a helper and a guide

9. When I have a language problem, I first try to solve it myself and only if I don't manage to do it, I turn to teachers or online peers for help

Finally, the perspective related to readiness for self-directed learning was explored with the following:

3. In language learning I enjoy tasks where I can learn on my own

6. I like learning the language on my own because I know best how to learn

12. I know my weaknesses and go for it

13. I am responsible for my own learning

The overall responses show a high level of autonomy and very few participants – in only 4 statements out of 13 - opted for “strongly disagree” as an answer, as showed in Table 3.

#	Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total
1	I can learn without teacher supervision.	0.00%	0	12.50%	4	15.63%	5	65.63%	21	6.25%	2	32
2	If I have the right materials, I prefer to spend some time studying alone.	0.00%	0	31.25%	10	18.75%	6	43.75%	14	6.25%	2	32
3	In language learning I enjoy tasks where I can	0.00%	0	18.75%	6	25.00%	8	46.88%	15	9.38%	3	32

	learn on my own.											
4	I prefer to read books, magazines, newspapers all by myself without the teacher telling me what to read.	0.00%	0	28.13%	9	34.38%	11	34.38%	11	3.13%	1	32
5	The teacher should only be a counsellor, a helper and a guide.	6.25%	2	21.88%	7	34.38%	11	34.38%	11	3.13%	1	32
6	I like learning the language on my own because I know best how to learn.	6.25%	2	46.88%	15	28.13%	9	18.75%	6	0.00%	0	32
7	I regularly review my Italian learning and check what I have learned.	0.00%	0	31.25%	10	31.25%	10	34.38%	11	3.13%	1	32
8	I read a certain amount of Italian material every day.	6.25%	2	50.00%	16	15.63%	5	25.00%	8	3.13%	1	32
9	When I have a language problem, I first try to solve it myself and only if I can’t manage it, I turn to teachers or online	0.00%	0	3.13%	1	12.50%	4	68.75%	22	15.63%	5	32

	peers for help.											
10	I also investigate the culture of the foreign language I am learning.	0.00%	0	6.25%	2	6.25%	2	50.00%	16	37.50%	12	32
11	I like learning Italian words by looking them up in a dictionary.	12.50%	4	6.25%	2	15.63%	5	46.88%	15	18.75%	6	32
12	I know my weaknesses and go for it.	0.00%	0	6.25%	2	28.13%	9	62.50%	20	3.13%	1	32
13	I am responsible for my own learning.	0.00%	0	3.13%	1	9.38%	3	75.00%	24	12.50%	4	32

The statements with high percentages of positive agreement were “I can learn without teacher supervision” (65.63%) “in language learning I enjoy tasks where I can learn on my own” (46.88%), “when I have a language problem, I first try to solve it myself and only if I can’t manage it, I turn to teachers or online peers for help” (68.75%), “I know my weaknesses and go for it” (62.50%), “I like learning Italian words by looking them up in a dictionary”, and the most important statement “I am responsible for my own learning” (75.00%).

Although participants demonstrated a high level of autonomy in learning online, some other responses show low consistence in learning, for example 16 students disagreed and 2 strongly disagreed with “read[ing] a certain amount of Italian material every day”, 11 students stated they regularly review their Italian learning and check what they have learned, whereas 10 remained neutral, and a further 10 disagreed with this statement; finally, 15 disagreed and 2

strongly disagreed with the statement “I like learning the language on my own because I know best how to learn”.

Other statements showed a heterogeneous distribution of answers, such as “I prefer to read books, magazines, newspapers all by myself without the teacher telling me what to read”, “the teacher should only be a counsellor, a helper and a guide” which can be explained as the statements having the least correlation with online learning, and more with classroom and real-life contexts (the idea of physical material such as books, magazines and newspapers, and the teacher as a physical presence in the classroom), and therefore might have confused the participants when giving their opinions.

4.2. Final questionnaire: perception of learning Italian online and progress with the language

The overall response to the survey was adequate. Out of thirty-three participants, seventeen individuals completed and returned the final questionnaire, with a response rate of 51.5%. The link to the final questionnaire was sent to each participant, via the emails they provided. Non-response could occur for various reasons, such as: a person being unable to respond or temporarily absent; non-delivery due to addresses being incorrect or emails failing to get through; or individuals’ refusal to complete the questionnaire (for example such participants might have perceived that this did not hold a benefit for their learning or progression). To understand the students’ perception of learning Italian online, a range of open-ended and closed responses was elicited.

In Question 1, about how the Italian language has improved after learning online, out of seventeen respondents, 41.18% (7 participants) perceived they have improved their Italian language “quite a lot”, 35.29% (6) “a little” and the remaining 23.53% “a lot”. No one had a perception of having “not at all” improved.

Later in the survey, Question 7 was linked to Question 1, and was is formulated as an open-ended question: “Please, describe how you think your level of Italian has changed over the past months: (You can answer in Italian, English or in your first language)”.

The participants who perceived they had improved their Italian language “a little”, according to their explanations, might be influenced by their poor initial level of language and, therefore, consider their path through learning the Italian language more cautiously and moderately. In fact, their answers showed a very positive attitude towards the experience of learning online, for example: “I had never learnt any Italian, so my Italian and confidence has definitely improved”, “I have learned some useful communication skills, and I can read bits of Italian info online and make some sense of it, whereas before I knew none”, “I can understand more words than before”, “I’ve learned more words and sentences”, “I feel that it has improved in terms of comprehension and sometimes in production, the more exposure to native grammatical structures makes it easier to reproduce them. My vocabulary has widened slightly”. The participants felt they had improved, but still did not want to be too optimistic with their self-evaluation.

Out of the seven participants who considered their level of Italian had improved “quite a lot”, two of them contradicted themselves in their answers, when they stated that their language was “more or less the same, neither improved nor worsened” or “No change since I have not dedicated time to improve”. This mismatch can be explained if we presume a misunderstanding of both questions, when “quite a lot” might be related to how the Italian language had improved overall, whereas Question 7 was limited to the “past months”. More detailed answers specified that “It has mostly stayed the same, because although my classes are over, I have been watching Italian programmes and reading Italian articles”, “Vocabulary improved. Managed to have a decent conversation with a native speaker on a recent visit to Italy” and, regarding language skills (all analysed in the next question), two participants identified receptive skills as

those which had improved: “Better at listening and reading mainly” and “Improved in reading and listening”.

Finally, the respondents who had replied “a lot” declared: “I am now able to form a sentence and understand simple conversations, whereas before I knew nothing”, “I am not fully active in learning Italian since I also study various other ones but whenever an opportunity comes, I will learn a few extra words”, and one participant answered in Italian “my ability to understand other people who speak Italian has improved, especially regarding Italian native speakers”.

The language skill which was perceived to have improved the most was Reading (58.82%), followed by Listening (23.53%) and Speaking (17.65%). Writing was regarded as the only skill which had not improved during the online learning experience. Thus, the data points to the fact that receptive skills (namely reading and listening) compared to productive skills (speaking and writing) might be perceived as easier to acquire in foreign language learning. These results tally with the evidence in the existing literature review on Second Language Learning. For example, as Golkova and Hubackova (2014) suggest, “when learning a foreign language, receptive skills usually come first and should be followed by practical application of productive ones” (p. 478). A study conducted by Jabeen and Thomas (2015) on 53 Emirate students aged 18-25 to evaluate the effectiveness of learning a foreign language online, showed that reading developed the most (38%), followed by listening (33.4%), writing (23.8%) and speaking (4.8%). Especially at lower levels of the language, receptive skills are shown to increase faster than productive ones (Morgan and Oberdeck, 1930). Thus, the answers to the above question reinforce the current theoretical foundations.

All participants were almost unanimous about the time spent in learning Italian online. Only 1 respondent devoted between 5 and 10 hours per week (or at least 1 hour per day) studying Italian online, whereas all the others spent fewer than 3 hours per week learning the FL.

The overwhelming majority (82.35%) of participants still felt motivated about learning Italian online. The remaining 17.65% felt less motivated. No response was given to “No” and “more motivated”, suggesting that participants’ motivation was high at the beginning of the study, and although three participants appeared to feel less motivated, the overall motivation level remained constant.

A detailed clarification of the data above was expected in the answers to Question 5, where participants were asked to provide an optional explanation to better support and understand their earlier answer. Because the request was not mandatory, only 1 out of 3 “less motivated” participants gave a justification to their response, stating that the “other (Italian) module with the Open University is more demanding and, as Level 3, more important to my degree classification” which supports the premise about extrinsic motivation, where it is the desire to gain the degree that drives the student’s motivation to study Italian. The same respondent perceived s/he had improved “a little” in the Italian language.

On the other hand, some “yes” answers were justified with responses which recall intrinsic motivation. For example, one more student from the Open University answered “yes” to the question asking whether if they were still feeling motivated to learn Italian online and stated: “I have finished my Open University course. I will continue with Duolingo”. The course was finished, yet the student was motivated to learn Italian through an online app. Another participant wrote: “I am still motivated because I want to keep my Italian up to a good standard to be able to take a job that uses Italian, in translation particularly”, meaning the participant was intrinsically motivated to find a job that fitted their personal interests. Finally, one respondent was still intrinsically motivated and gave as a justification “I love to listen and speak Italian”.

Out of the other participants who answered “yes”, two participants expressed some benefits of online learning which prompted them to study online, such as “it’s convenient, there are [m]any options, I can do it anytime” and “it’s a cheap and easy system – [I can] access [it] anywhere”.

Other incentives to continue learning Italian were related to family matters (“it’s the language of my forefathers” and “part of my heritage”).

Among the advantages of online learning, participants mentioned flexibility in terms of time and space (“anytime, everywhere”) and the possibility to learn “at your own pace”.

The lack of F2F interaction (“not enough face to face interaction with native speakers”), the absence of an instructor (“you can’t ask questions like you would in class”), or the chance to meet native speakers (“I think the lack of advice from a native speaker”), and no opportunity to practise speaking (“no substitute for face to face with a native speaker - no good for speaking practice”; “limited capability for learning speaking”) were definitely perceived as limitations of online language learning.

Other answers about limitations concerned productive skills and were: “Lacks opportunity to practise speaking with another person in the same organic way that it would F2F, people might have difficulty expressing themselves in words rather than in speech” (referring to the act of typing on the computer keyboard instead of talking); “it's hard to practise speaking. I know there are apps and websites where I could find a conversation practice partner, but I haven't done that because I find the "conversation just to practise speaking" concept quite difficult”; “lack of progress in speaking and writing skills - or slower progress”; “need strong will power to do written homework”. These answers show how productive skills are perceived by participants as less practised than receptive skills.

The absence of an instructor in online learning, and possible bad app/tools were also viewed as obstacles: “No personalised learning, nor the one-to-one question and answer teachings

from the teacher to the student. Plus, a teacher won't be around to correct the learner"; "it is still limited by the fact it is not fully immersive and that sometimes online exercises lack explanations for your mistakes, or you are required to create (sometimes bizarre) sentences you would never actually use in real life"; "for me, the pronunciation matters. Sometimes PC resolution would be very bad, then it becomes difficult to understand".

Some participants understood the importance of motivation and interaction when learning a language, especially in online contexts: "you need to be very motivated to do the work since you have no class and friends to talk to"; "Interaction with other classmates is the most important [advantage] in learning a language, but it is missing in online learning, Moreover, the student has to be very organised and with high motivation, and this is not the case for many people" .

Finally, two participants replied they "don't see any" limitations to learning a language online.

When participants were asked if they would continue learning Italian or other languages in an online environment, the majority (94.12%) answered positively. Only one participant stated s/he was "not sure".

The explanation in the following (optional) open-ended answer by the "not sure" participant is that "if time and money are available, I prefer learning languages face to face". Out of those who were positive about the option of continuing learning an FL online, the responses, as for the previous question about advantages in learning an FL online, highlighted the convenience in terms of money saving, and time and space flexibility:

"Since I am an autodidactic person and prefer to do everything possible online".

"Because it's better than any other options I have available to me".

"I can do it from home, office, coffee place".

“Because I can go at my own pace and I can decide when and where to take my lessons. In addition, it's much cheaper”.

"Learning online is often cheaper than going to classes - no transport needed etc.”

4.3. Analysis of the results

Before interpreting my results, it is essential to restate the research questions of this chapter, which are:

1) to what extent do students perceive they have acquired or improved the Italian language in an online context?

2) to what extent do internal factors such as motivation, personality and autonomy affect the learning of Italian as an FL in online contexts?

3) what are the students’ perception of and satisfaction with the effectiveness of learning Italian through the Internet?

The final questionnaire certainly provided further evidence for the perception of online learning as an effective environment to learn and improve Italian as an FL. Despite limitations which characterise the remote context, namely the absence of an instructor (in non-structured or online academic courses), the lack of interaction, little opportunity to practise productive skills, online learning was still considered convenient in terms of time and space flexibility, as well as money saving. Returning to the second research question at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that students had a positive perception of and satisfaction with the effectiveness of learning Italian through the Internet, since the majority (except one participant) would surely continue learning Italian online. The third research question was also addressed through the final questionnaire, in particular in Question 1 and Question 7, where students self-assessed their lever of language as improved overall during their online learning experience. As expected, the answer was positive.

The internal factors (motivation, personality and autonomy) which might affect the learning of Italian as an FL in online contexts were also analysed. Taken together, the evidence and the collection of data from the study suggest the following:

4.3.1. Motivation in online FL learning of Italian

People who decided to learn Italian online showed strong intrinsic motivation, a result in line with previous findings in the literature (See also Chapter Two; Huett et al. 2008; Shroff and Vogel 2009; Wighting et al. 2008). We might not be surprised by this outcome, but what this study brings to the table is the connection with different theorised types of motivation, which help us to understand the correlation between motivation and the decision to study online. Integrative motivation as theorised by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and the concept of intrinsic motivation developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) are connected through the re-adaptation of the "L2 Motivational Self System" proposed by Dörnyei (2009). Specifically, students demonstrated a highly positive attitude towards the Italian language and culture, and a desire to feel integrated within the foreign culture community, which drove their decision to learn autonomously in an online environment. This is consistent with the alternative perspective (Covington and Müeller, 2021), which considers the presence of some extrinsic motivation as a component that reinforces the participants' nature of being intrinsically motivated by the process of online learning. As a matter of fact, some participants who asserted they also were university students, need to be extrinsically motivated in order to achieve their academic goals. At the same time, the results did not show evidence of any desire to learn Italian online to gain others' approval, which is usually presumed to be correlated with extrinsic motivation. Finally, students expressed a positive approach towards the L2 Learning Experience, proving their positive attitude towards the online learning mode.

Another result which confirms the effectiveness of online Italian language learning through the analysis of participants' motivation is that at the end of the study, participants claimed they still

felt motivated about learning Italian online. Only 17.65% felt less motivated. No one felt no motivation at all, or more motivated than before, which supports the findings on motivation according to which participants have a strong intrinsic motivation and a positive attitude towards the L2 online process of learning, which remained throughout the online learning experience as only three participants appeared to feel less motivated, whereas the general level of motivation among participants remained unchanged.

4.3.2. Personality in online FL learning of Italian

As in the case of motivation, the findings about personality demonstrated a correlation between the impact of certain personality traits and the perception of learning an FL online. First, participants who freely decided to learn Italian online showed they were open to (new) experiences and learned for reasons not necessarily related to achieving academic goals. Instead, they seemed to engage and interact with peers in online courses in order to improve their knowledge (Komarraju et al., 2011). These results can also be combined with the findings on motivation, where the convergence between a high score in openness to experience and strong intrinsic motivation provides a significant contribution to the literature about the effectiveness of online FL learning. The findings showed a low score in extraversion, therefore favourably pointing towards the idea that introverts prefer an online learning environment, where they can learn at their own pace and with less social interaction than extraverts, who conversely prefer being F2F with others. These values correlate fairly well with the those showing that students engaged in academic courses scored highly in conscientiousness. Not only did this personality trait confirm previous research about the correlation between online learning for academic purposes and conscientiousness (Alkış and Temizel, 2018; Arispe and Blake, 2012; Kim, 2013), but it also further supports the concept already mentioned in the literature review section, that introversion is not to be seen negatively. On the contrary, introverts “possess a good study method and cognitive academic ability (Ellis, 1994) which

may lead to better academic achievement" (Entwistle and Entwistle, 1970)" (See Chapter Two, page 35). This knowledge, which was limited to classroom-based learning experiences, can also be extended to the literature on online learning, where the positive correlation between introversion and conscientiousness leads to the conclusion that introverts also have great academic skills, are achievement-oriented and can perform well in order to achieve a goal.

4.3.3. Autonomy in online FL learning of Italian

Overall, the participants' responses seemed to show a good ability to self-select the learning content and a high degree of readiness for autonomy, whereas the answers which mention the role of the teacher did not show a consistent trend. Students perceived they can learn without teacher supervision, and first try to solve a problem on their own, but they do not seem to be completely clear about the role of the teacher (a counsellor, a helper and a guide). This result might depend on the fact that the learners were studying Italian online mostly in courses designed and delivered without the presence of a teacher or a tutor (Duolingo, YouTube, Facebook groups and informal learning). These results take us back to the self-directed learning (SDL) essential 21st-century skill (mentioned in Chapter Two, paragraph 5.2.), described as a process in which individuals take responsibility for their own learning, with or without help from others.

In fact, the analysis of the results about online learner autonomy of Italian as an FL showed that learners who decide to learn an FL online are autonomous and responsible for their own learning. They are able to select their language learning content and learn without a teacher. Learners who are confident with digital tools and online contexts already have the instruments to learn and work independently. In sum, the findings suggested high level of SDL skills and supported previous research which sees online contexts as spaces where SDL is cultivated (Kim et al., 2014). However, no relevant correlation emerged about online learner autonomy and the concepts of "learning on their own" and "studying alone". We will return to the topic

with the comparison of results from the *before* COVID-19 period and during ERL in Chapter Six.

4.4. Conclusion

Various conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. Firstly, learners who decide to freely learn an FL online are autonomous and responsible for their own learning, are strongly motivated by factors others than external gratification and examinations and fall into certain personality traits, demonstrating that internal factors such as motivation, personality and autonomy do affect the learning of Italian as an FL in online contexts.

Moreover, students of Italian online perceived they had improved their language through the Internet, they had a positive perception of and were satisfied with their online FL experience, confirming the effectiveness of learning an FL online this study intended to investigate.

This work offers evidence for the internal factors involved in the process of online learning of Italian as an FL not just for academic purposes and extends our knowledge of the effectiveness of learning an FL online. Moreover, these findings add to an existing literature which ended with the advent of COVID-19 but are still important to retain and analyse because they create a bridge between two inseparable, historical and social periods, which need to be compared and investigated. Incidentally, the strong point of the present thesis lies in the fact that it crosses both periods, that can be read individually as a single study, or in correlation with the data collected after COVID-19 (See Chapter Seven). Exploring the parallels between comparing students who freely decided to learn online in the before COVID-19 era, with students forced to move to online learning due to the pandemic, offers unique scholarly evidence about the effectiveness of online FL learning from the point of view of learners with disparate perceptions and attitudes towards remote learning, in different historical periods, one of which brought many sudden changes and uncertainty.

SECTION TWO: EMERGENCY REMOTE LEARNING DURING COVID-19

CHAPTER FIVE: LITERATURE REVIEW ON EMERGENCY REMOTE LEARNING AND ONLINE LEARNING AT THE TIME OF COVID-19

The unexpected shift from F2F to distance learning after the COVID-19 outbreak and the temporary closures of schools and institutions, which affected more than 1.5 billion students in about 188 countries (UNESCO, 2020), has increased attention on online learning. While before the pandemic remote learning was mainly embraced by students who freely and independently chose to learn online, the pandemic has generated a new category of online students, namely those who had to make a transition to distance education during the COVID-19 emergency, which were estimated by the United Nations to represent more than 91 per cent of students worldwide. It is worth noticing that this transition to online learning in - and from - March 2020 is not to be regarded as *online learning* per se, but rather, because of the nature of "uncertainty that characterizes this period of human existence" (Bozkurt et al., 2020, p. 4) and the sudden shift online with "such a narrow preparation window" (Hodges et al., 2020) it is more appropriate to name it "emergency remote learning and teaching" (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020) which Bozkurt et al. (2020) deliberately classify as "a branch of distance education as in the case of online learning, e-learning, m-learning, or homeschooling" (p. 2). It is worth briefly discussing the above-mentioned terms of electronic learning (e-learning), which involves the use of computers and the Internet, and mobile learning (m-learning) which is considered as a subset of e-learning and involves the specific use of mobile devices (Behera, 2013). Lastly, homeschooling is the practice of instructing a child at home (Inayatulloh et al., 2022) which can also involve the use of e-learning platforms.

Once we understand the difference between online learning and emergency remote learning, and we further separate and dissociate the two terms, we will become aware of the opportunities this exceptional period will bring forth.

Students were asked to remain at home, to maintain social distancing and to keep learning in an “unfamiliar terrain” (Carolan et al., 2020, p. 1), that is the online environment, and such a change had an impact on students’ interpersonal, educational, and social lives (Alghamdi, 2021). The disruption and the need to move education online in record time have also unfolded a scenario of digital innovation and transformation. These digital, educational, and social transformation of course cannot be left out in the discussion developed in the present thesis on online Foreign Language learning. Accordingly, for a clearer organisation, the research has been divided into online learning *before* the outbreak of COVID-19, and online learning *during* the spread of COVID-19 around the world and *after*, including a focus on future perspectives. Specifically, current events and circumstances after COVID-19 are discussed in this chapter, covering both a critical assessment of current theoretical approaches on the subject as well as suggestions and possible theoretical developments. The aim is to build a literature review on a topic which caused an impact on education and needed to be defined and organised. The study also represents one of the first contributions to the discussion about COVID-19 and distance learning. The collection and presentation of sources from existing literature and media articles, evidence from recent international documents (recommendations, regulations, guidelines), technical reports and opinions on the topic will provide a better understanding on how the pandemic has affected education and training. The literature review presented aims to provide a framework of the current sources and knowledge which allows a critical evaluation and analysis of the last two years of pandemic and the near future.

5.1. Emergency Remote Learning/Teaching

The abrupt shift from physical classroom to a temporary remote delivery mode due to the pandemic cannot be simplistically labelled as “online learning” (Iglesias-Pradas et al., 2021), which is conceptualised by Hodges et al. (2020) as “the normal, everyday type of effective online instruction”, in contrast with what “we are doing in a hurry with bare minimum resources

and scant time: emergency remote teaching" (p. 7). The two delivery modes have many differences, starting from time planning for the course design: the already existing online courses are pre-planned (Shim and Lee, 2020) through a careful design planning process which can take from six to nine months (Hodges et al., 2020) and purposely integrate technology in its educational ecosystem (Manfuso, 2020). On the other hand, ERL/T represented a temporary solution which required a few days preparation time, with no specific expectations, as the general idea was to get back to normal once the crisis ended (Erdem-Aydin, 2021). As a matter of fact, there is evidence about previous experiences of temporary shift to online education during crises (Shin and Hickey, 2021), for instance when 20 colleges and university in New Orleans, U.S., had to provide online classes after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, but after two years in this situation, it is clear that such a delivery mode is becoming less temporary and more a fact. In retrospect, the first consideration we should not take for granted is that schools, universities, and institutions needed to be prepared for any emergency and envisaged any possible alternative before the crisis occurs (Oliveira et al., 2021; Stein et al., 2007). Instead, the worldwide unpreparedness resulted in dissimilarities between institutions already equipped with online learning systems, and others which were not (Shim and Lee, 2020), bringing to light many issues about inequalities and accessibilities, among others. Some equity factors detected in emergency remote learning are related to socioeconomic status, home environment, parents that had to "juggle" between their jobs and family responsibilities (Santhanam, 2020) during the pandemic, making hard to find a balance (Shin and Hickey, 2021). All those factors will be addressed in the next pages and tracked down as challenges of ERL. The abrupt shift from F2F to ERL/T is a phenomenon which involved education worldwide. In order to track challenges and opportunities of this emergency situation, in the following paragraph we will seek to investigate the European reaction on education in relation to the COVID-19 crisis and the role played by the EU governance in providing a rapid response to the emergency.

5.2. European response to the COVID-19 emergency

The European Union has promptly contributed to the discussion on COVID-19 and education through many reports and documents delivered by agencies and centres which collaborate with the EU policies through providing data, reports and evidence. The COVID-19 crisis and the consequential temporary physical closures of schools and institutions have posed new challenges (continuity of education, students' wellbeing, accessibility to technology, ensuring inclusion and equality, redefining new learning skills) for the European Union, and all stakeholders involved.

In 2006 the European Union already recognised the importance of developing digital competences in learning among 8 key competences in education and training systems which students should acquire by the end of compulsory education "to a level that equips them for adult life, and which forms a basis for further learning and working life" (Recommendation 2006/962/EC, paragraph 13). However, learners cannot acquire digital skills if not supported by well-digitalised environments and competent educators. The picture was then upgraded in 2013, when the Joint Research Centre (JRC), a service which supports the European Commission, first published the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp), a tool to improve citizens' digital competence, then updated in 2016, along with the publication of the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu), which reflected the European States' awareness about the need for educators to improve their digital competences in order to enhance and innovate their teaching practices. The COVID-19 emergency has brought new issues to light, which have been addressed in the second Digital Education Action Plan (the first was adopted in 2018) which covers the years 2021-2027. The action plan contains measures and policies which aim at making digital education and training more inclusive and effective through two priorities: "fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem" and "enhancing digital skills and competences of

teachers and learners". It sets out to support Member States in adapting and transforming their education and training systems to the digital age. It is obvious that such transformation will not happen right away, but the awareness at European level shows how educational challenges and opportunities of the pandemic are acknowledged by international, supranational, and national institutions and set to be tackled.

Despite the measures and efforts of the European institutions in taking action against the COVID-19 crisis in order to avoid or limit the disruption to education, the published reports and studies have generically shown pessimistic outcome concerning the future of education and the impact of the pandemic on students' learning, although distance learning offers advantages in terms of time and space flexibility, innovation in teaching practices and source accessibility. Such a rush to switch education from in-person to online mode surely had a psychological repercussion on the perception of distance learning and its benefits. According to a survey[7] conducted by the School Education Gateway (2020) between 9 April and 10 May 2020 on 4,859 respondents (mostly of whom were teachers) from more than 40 countries, 66.9% of participants were experiencing online teaching for the first time and faced problems in accessing technology (by pupils according to 49% of respondents, and by teachers for 34% of answers). In addition to these inconveniences, such a lack of preparation in delivering online classes led to increased workload and stress working from home (43%).

There is agreement on the opinion that practical disadvantages were mainly caused by the unexpected and confused change in the educational delivery mode, labelled as emergency remote schooling by scholars and experts in the education arena. Nonetheless, subsequent reports and studies have been relevant to define problems and risks related to COVID-19 and distance learning, in order to better understand the circumstances and delineate strategies and policies to tackle the rapid digital transformation during, and due to, the pandemic. In a

[7]https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/surveys/survey-on-online-teaching.htm

technical report published by JRC Research, Di Pietro et al. (2020) focus on the impact that COVID-19 may have on students' learning and performance. According to the report, some factors resulting from the physical school closure and the consequential switch to online learning, which are less amount of time spent in learning remotely, the reduction of physical interaction among students, and the lack of extrinsic motivation in learning will cause a learning loss, especially among younger students and students with special needs and disabilities who need the support and supervision of educators. Moreover, the socio-economic status will play a role in students' achievement, as "students from less advantaged backgrounds are likely to experience a larger decline in learning compared to their more advantaged counterparts" (p. 28), and this will lead to socio-economic inequalities in the future. The authors conclude the reports with some practical suggestions, from the need to detect students who have experienced learning loss during the lockdown (disables, students with special needs or loss of motivation) in order to adopt remedial measures accordingly, to the set-up of small group tuition as an approach to support students. Among future recommendations such as implementing technology as well as its accessibility and inclusivity and supporting teachers, parents finally emerge as "an essential element of the picture" (p. 35) and therefore should be more involved as active interlocutors in their children' learning process and be emotionally supportive. This is an interesting turning point in the educational arena if we consider that until the school closure and the move to remote learning, the implementation of students' learning strategies was only delegated to teachers and schools, whereas the report recognises that a "constant and detailed communication between parents, teachers, and the school is a fundamental element of a successful online learning strategy" (p. 35). Consistently with Di Pietro et al.'s findings, in a publication by the same JRC Research, Vuorikari et al. (2020) questioned on how families of 10 to 18-year-old children from 11 EU countries handled remote schooling during the time of Covid-19 lockdown. The overall findings show that children involved in the report were able to study from home using technology and through learning

platforms provided by their schools, even if they perceived an increased workload than before the pandemic. The challenges faced were related to the accessibility of devices and the availability of parental support at home, as well as teacher competences in using technology. During the school closure, parents supported their children with free-of-charge additional learning materials to complement their online learning. On the perception of online schooling, families felt worried about the negative impact that this emergency situation might have on education, and they asked for better guidelines on how to support their children during emergency remote learning both educationally and psychologically, together with a personal need for more psychological support. The authors claim that these “early results” (p. 4) can help and guide schools in their transition to distance education, and they conclude with the promise of conducting more in-depth surveys in the next year, for example about equitable access to education, a right that should be guaranteed by the school systems and society. The results of the survey show that online learning is an opportunity for children to improve their digital skills. However, the family socio-economic context and background can influence children’ learning.

Another useful analytical report on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education in Europe has been conducted by Farnell, Skledar Matijević and Šćukanec Schmidt (2021) for NESET, an advisory network of experts established by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Education and Culture. The report consisted of rapid-response surveys administered in 2020 by university networks, student organisations and researchers on three areas, which are teaching and learning, the social dimension of higher education and student mobility. Again, accessibility, support from families and suitable home learning environment are recognised as factors which, if insufficient or missing, can cause learning losses and disengagement from education. Besides the negative impacts of moving to distance education emerged from the analytical report, namely the impact of learning losses and disengagement of students, the

financial impact and the impact on educational inequalities, the authors recognise the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to rethink and renew higher education by adopting creative and innovative approaches to online learning and virtual mobility such as “internationalisation at home”. Finally, the authors bring to light new questions about how to ensure the quality of online learning, how to support teachers struggling with online teaching and help students who experience difficulties in learning online and might disengage or dropout.

Teachers and students’ digital competence and skills, technological implementation, learning loss, socio-economic inequalities, accessibility and inclusivity, families’ support, are the aspects which emerged as educational challenges during the pandemic to be monitored and tackled. In the following paragraph, we are going to examine the current research on remote learning during the pandemic and the focus areas detected as challenges and issues of online education.

5.3. Research and academic response to COVID-19 and education

In March 2020, schools and institutions in several countries around the world were imposed to close in line with the lockdown actions, and to find alternative methods for delivering classes in order to avoid education disruption. Online learning, which has been considered until then an alternative option to traditional education, has afterwards been viewed has a necessity (Dhawan, 2020). This unexpected transition from traditional to distance learning due to pandemic reasons, which has caught teachers and students unprepared, has been named emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al.,2020) and considered as a temporary learning/teaching solution to a worldwide emergency. As Hodges et al. point out, the primary objective is to temporarily provide access to classes without recreating a “robust educational ecosystem” (Hodges et al.,2020), and to return to traditional learning once the crisis has been overcome, which caused, in their opinion, a decrease in the quality of the courses and classes delivered online. Because of a lack of short and long-term anticipation (Maican and

Cocoradă,2021) and the temporary consideration of the online learning approach, many teachers' first reaction was to take what they usually do in a classroom and replicate it online. The migration to an online emergency teaching has brought new questions to light, as well as new challenges for schools and institutions. According to the World Economic Forum (2020), the "double-disruption" brought about by both the pandemic and technological changes which are inevitably transforming the ways of working, learning, and living, will lead 50% of the global population to reskill in the next five years. Other challenges include the access to technology and technical infrastructures, teachers' lack of digital literacy skills which are important to acquire in order to implement online learning pedagogies to engage students and maintain their motivation through digital material and tools, online assessment through the evaluation of transversal skills, how to recreate an inclusive online environment for students with disabilities and special needs. Finally, lack of social interaction has been perceived as a downside of online learning during the pandemic.

The temporary migration to emergency remote teaching has touched all grades of education, from primary to university levels. However, some elements and factors differ from one level to the other and require different approaches to online learning (Doucet et al., 2020), such as the learning objectives and subjects, the classroom settings, the age groups, the stakeholders involved (for example parents are involved in the first levels of education, but not indispensable in university classes), the perception of inclusion and access to online education. Therefore, before moving to the focus of my research, FL learning of Italian in Higher Education, a subdivision of sources into compulsory education (approximately from primary to upper secondary school) and higher education is needed to build a more comprehensible literature review which includes FL learning in education as a whole.

5.3.1. Secondary school

Although the focus of my research is language learning for adults and in HE, I found that it was relevant to expand the literature review with an eye towards secondary school language learning and younger learners in order to have a thorough comprehension of ERL. The sudden and unexpected closure of schools and the lack of guidelines (Greenhow, Lewin, and Willet, 2021; Scanni, 2022) on how to proceed with remote learning during the initial phase of the emergency, have posed some challenges for teachers, families and students. It should be remembered that, while e-learning and hybrid courses continued as they were during the COVID-19 lockdown (Bondarenko, 2021), in-person instructors and teachers were “forced” to make a sudden transition to ERL/T (Shin and Hickey, 2021), sometimes with no previous digital teaching competency and expertise (Johnson, Veletsianos, and Seaman 2020; Sahu 2020), a factor which clearly affected the quality of the classes provided online (Choi et al., 2021; Ezra et al., 2021; Brooks and Grajek 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). As already mentioned in the previous pages, low levels of digital skills both in teachers and students are perceived as issues of the sudden transfer to ERL/T. As Bergdahl et al. (2020) point out, inequality in students’ digital skills and the disengagement caused by poor quality of teaching through technologies may exacerbate the educational and socioeconomic gaps.

Many potential students might be left out if they do not have access to digital devices and a reliable Internet connection or excluded because they face difficulties in learning (vulnerable learners, students with special needs, disable students). In 2005, many years before the Emergency remote learning swift, Kelland already cautioned against issues related to the access and inclusion of distance learning, points which are still on the debate floor, in the form of “digital exclusion”, a term which already existed (Bowyer et al., 2021), but has re-emerged given the impact of the Covid-19 crisis (Holmes and Burgess, 2021), and whom meaning embrace a wide range of factors, from issues with access in low-resource settings, to actual use and use efficacy of digital resources (Vassilakopoulou and Hustad, 2021) through digital

literacy and skills. Digital exclusion mirrors social and socio-economic inequalities, since many families from less advantaged backgrounds, with a particular focus on students from developing countries (Sahu, 2020; Zhang, 2020; Tadesse and Muluye, 2020), still do not have access to proper IT equipment at home. Moreover, people with disabilities are less likely to use the internet than non-disabled people (Helsper and Reisdorf, 2017; Hollier, 2007; Dobransky and Hargittai, 2006). It becomes clear that, in the transition to emergency remote learning, many issues regarding digital equity of access and support of low-income families emerged, as discussed by Greenhow, Lewin, et al. (2021) as well as new perspectives about the sharing of educational responsibilities among teachers and parents involved, the latter who had to collaborate more.

With reference to inclusive matters, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2021) reviewed 250 documents of the period between March and December 2020. The findings showed a limited support for vulnerable children and their families, and little attention on inclusive education in the public debate about the challenges of remote learning during COVID-19, remarking the need to focus more on the students' and teachers' voices as well as their well-being; to encourage collaboration between schools, parents and vulnerable learners; to implement policy measures on inclusion based on cross-sectoral collaborations. The documents do not give clear instructions on how institutions and stakeholders should cooperate to build a more inclusive online learning environment, but certainly raises awareness on an issue which have been partially overlooked. Surely, investing time and resources to implement pedagogical alternative of learners with Special Needs should be the first step (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, parents play an important role in supporting their children learning at home, especially younger aged learners who are higher dependant and might need more guidance from parents in learning online than students from older age groups (Tzifopoulos, 2020). Families' educational and socio-economic

background, as well as unequal access to ICT infrastructure and educational resources at home, and inclusive practices have increased inequalities during COVID-19 and school closures (Tadesse and Muluye, 2020).

Learning loss due to COVID-19 has been detected by the European Union in the previous paragraph as a challenge of online learning during the pandemic. It is related with the experience of learning less during lockdown (Engzell et al., 2020) but the literature on the topic is still scarce. The only study who attempted to measure the learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic has been the one conducted by Engzell et al. (2020), who investigated the learning progress of children aged 7 to 11 from a school in The Netherlands through the analysis of standardised tests. The findings showed that there was limited learning progress of students during the lockdown, and a learning loss of around 3% compared to a typical school year. The learning loss during the lockdown was higher among “students from less-educated homes” (p. 1), which result prominently confirms that all key factors and challenges interconnected with online learning drive to the risk of social inequalities in schools.

Another challenge of online learning to be considered is giving students timely feedback and authentic assessment. As Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) point out, exams and assignments are performed from home and it is essential to make sure that the learning process is happening, and proper criteria for grading students are implemented.

Online classes impose settings and communication other than the ones involved in F2F lessons, but still, many teachers simply transferred the same in-person materials and teaching approaches to the online environment (Choi et al., 2021). The limitation of many teachers was reported to be that of reproducing teacher-centred activities rather than construct student-centred ones (Pozo et al., 2021). Besides policy actions from governments and institutions, especially regarding inclusive perspectives, the whole process of online learning should head towards more creative and interactive methods. There are some simple strategies which can

be incorporated in distance education practices, where students are asked to effectively employ their homework time through completing tasks and solve problems instead of simply doing their homework. Consequently, the online classroom time is used to reflect on the learning process. This approach is constructive to encourage the development of transversal skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and autonomous learning, in a motivating and engaging way. Flipped classroom, challenge-based and task-based learning, WebQuests and inquiry-oriented activities, are examples of strategies of suitable and effective pedagogies for online education. Along these lines, students are required to spend enough time learning, avoiding the learning loss. Parent support is reduced, as the learners can study through intuitive activities and tasks with peers in breakout rooms or chat groups, with the supervision of the teacher as a facilitator. Students with disabilities and special needs can also take part in the activities with simplified instructions and the supervision of an in-person supporter. Lastly, authentic and timely assessment is guaranteed, as it focuses on the completion of a task and the assessment of competences and how knowledge is acquired, rather than testing students merely on the theory. If teachers worry that students might cheat or might use visual aids (such as notes, books, online resources) during a written or oral test, instead of asking questions about the theory, students can be asked to put the theory and knowledge into practice by performing a task. By doing so, students are stimulated to critically study and analyse the topic and not simply learning pages by heart. All these teaching ideas and suggestions require digital literacy and re-skill of teachers and students.

5.3.2. Higher education

Many papers and articles (Talib et al, 2021; Butnaru et al., 2021; Kusmaryono et al., 2021; Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021; Carrillo and Flores, 2020; Butler-Henderson et al., 2020) have investigated the impact of COVID-19 on education through the review of the literature which

looked at consequences of the transition from F2F to online learning and aimed at presenting suggestions to reduce the negative impacts in long-term practices.

Contrary to the current research on education during school closure, which mainly focuses on tangible and concrete impacts such as learning loss, digital competences, or the need for more inclusive practices, research involving higher education during the COVID-19 crisis has paid specific attention to students' emotions and perceptions on online learning during the pandemic. It goes without saying that higher education is not compulsory, and whether attendance is mandatory or not, maintaining self-discipline, high motivation and strong determination in achieving a degree or qualification is essential to avoid the risk of disengagement and dropouts. Thus, the challenges that universities have faced during the COVID-19 crisis were about maintaining students' academic engagement (Bond, 2020), and increasing mental health support for students (León García and Cherbowski-Lask, 2020). Improving students' digital competence has also been perceived as a challenge and opportunity during the pandemic (Gewerc et al., 2020). Some researchers (Bergdahl et al., 2020; Stoyanov et al., 2021) examined the correlation between students' academic engagement and digital skills, demonstrating that students with higher digital competence are more engaged in online environments. Specifically, Heidari et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between academic engagement and digital competence, introducing the role of "digital informal learning" (DIL), defined as the process of accessing and acquiring information through digital communication with others, and learning online outside the classroom in a self-controlled and self-directed manner (Meyers et al., 2013). In tackling those challenges, Heidari et al. (2021) recognised higher education institutions during COVID-19 as crucial in developing policies which aim at improving students' digital skills through DIL platforms as a means to increase students' academic engagement.

Students are concerned about their academic success and worried about their progress, frustration of interpersonal relationships, or about their ability to learn entirely online (Maican and Cocorad ˘a, 2021). Peper and Yang (2021) interviewed 36 college students engaged in online classes on Zoom, who claimed to feel more isolated, anxious, and depressed. Moreover, they felt it was harder to focus their attention and stay present while taking classes online. Concentration appeared to be another prevalent concern for students (Ezra et al., 2021), whether caused by lack of a sense of belonging (Shim and Lee, 2020) and involvement (Kathleen and Christopher, 2020) in the class, or simply distraction by external events during the lesson, for example checking the phone or Facebook (Shim and Lee, 2020). From the teachers' point of view, low concentration and disengagement of students is also challenging and stressful, since it becomes hard to have feedback from students (Peper and Yang, 2021).

Aristovnik et al. (2020) investigated students' perception on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in early 2020 on different aspects of their lives through a large-scale study of 30,383 higher education students from 62 countries. Teaching staff and universities' public relations offered students the most important support at the university during the pandemic. On the other hand, the lack of computer skills and the perception of a relatively higher workload prevented students from perceiving a higher performance while adapting to the 'new normal'; namely, education from a distance. While the role of both hospitals and universities appears to be positive, governments and banks did not meet the students' expectations during the pandemic. The results outline a description of students who perceived great satisfaction about their university operation during the COVID-19 crisis: "more hopeful and less bored students, students who were more satisfied with their academic work/life, social science students, students with a better living standard (with a scholarship and/or the ability to pay the overall costs of study), and those who were studying in Europe" (p. 23).

5.4. Discussion

The closures of schools and universities have caused an education disruption which have several consequences and effects both in and beyond education. Distance education has been seen as a solution to avoid a disruption of the education system. There is clear evidence that the sudden shift to online and distance learning has had an impact on students' performance and their extrinsic motivation. For instance, the less amount of time spent learning remotely compared to the time employed in learning when schools are open has caused a loss in learning, with resulting disengagement of students. Access to ICT infrastructure and educational resources from students living in rural areas, developing countries and poor families as well as inclusion to online education have increased social inequalities during school closures. Other limitations of emergency remote teaching include social distancing and consequent lack of interaction, which is an essential ingredient in every educational environment. Moreover, many teachers have faced difficulties in delivering online classes due to a lack of digital and technology competence.

The emergency remote teaching as a panacea (Dhawan, 2020) for temporary state does not reproduce the same favourable circumstances of an online teaching context in a non-emergency situation. Instead, we should think of the pandemic as an opportunity to reconsider the future of education, to modernise the curricula and to innovate learning methods with a focus on digitalisation.

Online learning surely puts some advantages and opportunities on the table, as identified by Talib et al. (2021): education can be accessible for all regardless geographical locations, and students can self-regulate their learning and study at their own pace; learning online from home can decrease costs in terms of infrastructure and many personal expenses, for example travel costs.

When some criteria in terms of accessibility, such as a solid IT infrastructure, the use of proper devices, a stable Internet connection, are met, online education becomes acceptable for

students regardless of COVID-19 (Agarwal et al, 2021). “Regardless” means also that schools and institutions should be ready to switch from in-person to remote learning in every future circumstance, to avoid disruption or unstable learning continuity.

What have we learned from the pandemic and how can we retain these past lessons in order to improve the education systems?

According to Fullan et al. (2020), the shift to remote learning during the first months of the pandemic was a response to the disruption of education, followed by a transition to the reopening of schools in the subsequent year. The final phase should be to *reimagine* an education system “that enables all students to thrive and prepares them with skills to navigate ambiguity and change” (p. 3). In other words, the future challenge of the education systems is to ensure what UNESCO (2020b) defined as “resilient learning continuity”, the capacity to ensure continuity in learning by developing hybrid learning models. In fact, together with Blended Learning (BL), hybrid learning seems to represent the future of education, as they combine both traditional F2F learning and technology and online learning, which in fact ensure a versatile shift in case of sudden disruption of learning. However, are these two innovative educational approaches enough to address all the challenges in a post-pandemic world?

In the following chapters we are going to deepen the discourse around the effectiveness of online language learning, considering the *after* COVID-19 scenario. We are going to explore the social perception of ERL and online learning, and to investigate the challenges and opportunities both universities students and staff members have experienced through interviews. The data gathered will be analysed in the conclusive chapter, and I will personally develop and propose an approach considering all findings.

5.5. Conclusion

The purpose of the presented chapter was to gain an understanding of the existing research by building a systematic literature review on online education during the pandemic, provided that the migration to online mode in time of crisis is considered as emergency remote teaching/learning (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020), a branch of distance learning (Bozkurt et al., 2020) separated from online learning in many issues and challenges. The here-conducted literature review also represented a contribution to the debates relevant to the topic. The listing of European documents (recommendations, regulations, guidelines), the presentation of sources and opinions from existing literature have been presented and critically analysed and discussed.

The only limitation in writing a literature review on online learning and COVID-19 is caused by the explosion and incessant growth of research literature on the topic, which makes it challenging for researchers to keep up with, especially when writing a PhD thesis in a certain time span which requires a continuous updating. However, this study is positioned in the first years of the COVID-19 spread, which allows an original and real-time contribution to the domain.

This part of the research contributes to the understanding of this extraordinary situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in education. Existing studies have demonstrated how the initial blurry differentiation among emergency remote learning and online learning has affected the perception of students, teachers and families about the effectiveness of learning online. Moreover, the general belief that the situation was to be temporary, prevented many instructors and institutions from promptly implementing and designing alternative delivery modes. We captured and explored all the challenges and opportunities which came with ERL/T, and that reinforced the initial research questions about the advantages and benefits of online learning, for example the spared daily commuting time to school or physical classrooms (Shim and Lee, 2020) which results in effective time management of study time flexibility (Fatonia et al. 2020)

and personal life. We also mentioned travel costs as monetary benefits, along with lower tuition fees (Fuchs, 2021).

What is currently missing in the existing knowledge is how to bring together all these challenges and opportunities, so that to implement new strategies and online delivery modes which can be promptly employed in future unexpected crisis. This thesis aims to fill the gap in the literature by proposing, in the conclusive chapter, an innovative online lesson format as an outcome of all data collected, from this evaluation of the current state of the literature reviewed, to the results from the questionnaires and interviews conducted. The scope of my research is to sustain the effectiveness of online language learning, which can still be applicable in sudden ERL contexts without the need to separate it from online learning approaches, and especially without “diminishing the quality of the courses delivered”, as predicted by Hodges et al. (2020).

CHAPTER SIX: PERCEPTIONS OF EMERGENCY REMOTE LEARNING AND *DIDATTICA A DISTANZA* DURING COVID-19 THROUGH THE MINING AND SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF TWITTER HASHTAGS

Although coronavirus was firstly identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, it was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 11 March 2020. As a preventive measure to the spread of the virus through physical contact, education institutions, universities and schools were closed all over the world. Already two days before the WHO announcement, on 9 March 2020, Italy was credited "for instauring the first European lockdown, just two and a half weeks after the first autoctone Italian COVID-19 case was detected" (Kamps, 2020), since it was reported to be "the worst affected country at the time in terms of reported fatalities" (BBC, 2020). The need to avoid education disruption and to ensure learning continuity led several Governments world-wide to implement the migration to online environments. As a result, more than 91 percent of students all over the world (United Nations, 2020a) experienced a temporary transition online.

This sudden and unexpected transition to online learning during the lockdown from March 2020 was meant to be a "temporary solution to an immediate problem" (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 1), and was characterised by uncertainty (Bozkurt et al., 2020, p. 4). Accordingly, it is not to be wrongly mistaken for *online learning* per se. In my research, I give rise to the importance of avoiding equating online learning and emergency remote learning (ERL), as the dissatisfaction around learning online during COVID-19 and many other adverse perceived consequences of ERL (lack of social interaction, learning loss and instability, inequality in accessing remote learning among others) could be inappropriately transferred to the perception of online learning, which has been an alternative option to F2F learning for many years even before the pandemic. Only being able to separate and dissociate the two terms, we can become aware of the opportunities this exceptional period will bring forth.

A comprehensive analysis should therefore include a focus on the perception of people around the differences between online learning and ERL. In this sense, social media can provide and complement data for studying and interpreting public opinion (Reveilhac, Steinmetz, & Morselli , 2022). On this basis, the aim of the present chapter is to provide further support in favour of the distinction between ERL and online learning during COVID-19 by exploring the opinions of Twitter users about ERL on social media through the analysis of hashtags and tweets, and whether they perceive a difference between the concepts of online learning and that of ERL. At the same time, I will narrow down the discussion to the term “didattica a distanza” which has been mostly perceived as the Italian equivalent of the term ERL. This choice is made for the purpose of expanding the focus of the observation on the Italian context, which is appropriate to the sphere of interest of the present thesis. Presenting these empirical results may serve as a source of reference for researchers, authorities and stakeholders interested in the debate about COVID-19 and online learning.

6.1. Background: social media, hashtags and education

Social media can be defined as a group of online platforms which “allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). But why do we use social media? Whiting and Williams (2013) addressed the question by identifying the uses and gratifications of social media, namely: social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, expression of opinions, communicatory utility, convenience utility, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others. People use social media to escape from everyday routine (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999; Whiting and Williams, 2013; Omar and Dequan, 2020), but also for exhibitionism and voyeurism (Doster, 2013). In the research and education arena, as well as other fields of study, social media is recognised as being an important instrument because, through platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and Facebook, people can publicly express thoughts and feelings with the help of metadata

tags called hashtags: words, keywords, or phrases introduced by a hash sign (#) which makes it possible to click on the words/phrase so turned into a searchable link, and to see all posts with the same hashtag, hence correlated to the same topic or event making possible for researchers, authorities and stakeholders to observe public opinion, their changes in attitudes and sentiments.

In a way, hashtags facilitate and permit discussion on specific trends and contents (Small, 2011). These observations aim to stress how social media play an important role in reducing the sense of isolation during such extraordinary circumstances in a society temporarily dominated by social distancing, and disruption of typical education (Unni & Weinstein, 2021), as well as providing useful insights into young students' perceptions, challenges, and experiences of online learning (Literat, 2021), which cannot be left out in our analytical research related to online learning and COVID-19, because they contribute to the critical discussion and historical evaluation of this exceptional time by providing useful insights on public opinion and perception of ERL.

Besides the above-mentioned uses of social media to fulfil personal and social needs such as to communicate and interact with others, or escape isolation during the pandemic, previous studies have also shown the possibilities offered by social media, in particular Twitter (Carpenter and Krutka, 2015; Greenhalgh and Koehler, 2017; Kimmons, Carpenter, Veletsianos, and Krutka, 2018; Greenhow C. , Galvin, Brandon, and Askari, 2020), as a space were teachers can share and understand their peers' concerns, experiences and ideas (Carpenter, Trust, Kimmons, & Krutka, 2021) in emergency situations (Greenhow, Staudt Willet, and Galvin, 2021), as well as virtual places for supporting educators in their professional development (Trust, Krutka, and Carpenter, 2016) by connecting people and colleagues through "multiple digital tools, such as Twitter, blogs, and Facebook which allowed the teachers to expand their connections beyond their local networks and seek knowledge and opportunities

that might not otherwise be available" (p. 40). During the pandemic, especially in the lockdown period between March and June 2020, both young people and teachers used social media to share their experiences of remote learning, but also to seek and provide peer-to-peer support (Trust, Carpenter, Krutka, and Kimmons, 2020; Literat, 2021) in such an isolating time. As Greenhow et al. (2021) concisely say: "social media offer respite from being alone" (p. 2). As a matter of fact, under the lockdown in March 2020, and beyond that period, people's everyday life has faced an intense use of social media (Mohamad, 2020), with users spending increasingly more time on digital devices and online social networks (Li, Guan, Hammond, & Berrey, 2021). One particular social media platform called TikTok has received many downloads during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among young adults and teens (Sehl, 2020) since the ease of recording and posting short videos facilitates the social interaction through instant messages, comments and likes (Omar & Dequan, 2020). Given that people, among whom students and teachers, have increased their personal use of social media during the pandemic to escape a feeling of isolation and to access or share opinions and health-related information on COVID-19, it would be crucial to firstly examine the trending topics and most frequent words (by means of hashtags) about online learning during the COVID-19 emergency during a certain period not yet investigated.

Following the pandemic outbreak, COVID-19 has become a trending topic on social media as a way of sharing information and sentiments, expressing concerns and frustrations through hashtags (Lacsa, 2021). On Twitter alone, for example, #Covid19 or #Coronavirus have been shared on more than 410 million tweets from the beginning of the pandemic to April 2020 (Moukarzel, del Fresno, Bode, & Daly, 2020). Soon after the school closure and lockdowns world-wide, many new hashtags linked to the pandemic and education emerged. Trust et al. (2020) detected two popular hashtags, namely #RemoteTeaching and #RemoteLearning, during the period of March and April 2020 in the U.S., in other words during the first lockdown.

Before that period, where the term “Emergency Remote Teaching” did not exist yet, the usual hashtags referring to remote learning were #onlinelearning and #onlineteaching. The first interesting phenomenon we can note by this study is that the pandemic has brought new words and phrases into our vocabulary. In a study conducted on Twitter from February to December 2020, Kimmons et al. (2021) started from #EdTech, a popular conversation hashtag among schools and educators, to identify the trending hashtags – hence topics – more related and included in the #EdTech discussion through tweets. The findings showed that #remotelearning was initially one of the three most common co-occurring hashtags, along with #education and #edchat, together with #covid in April. However, over the months and specifically in September, after the Summer, the trend shifted back to #onlinelearning and #elearning. These interesting findings find an explanation considering that popular and trending hashtags often “pop up” as a reaction to nation/worldwide news and unexpected events (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010), and the COVID-19 emergency is definitely a global phenomenon, therefore it is not a surprise to notice the emerging of new adopted hashtags and words, including “(emergency) remote learning”, as a reaction to school closure and the lockdown, which were widely reported on breaking news. However, hashtags go viral for a limited amount of time, and after an initial growing interest by the public and users (Lehmann, Lalmas, Yom-Tov, & Dupret, 2012), they tend to disappear or “the focus will move elsewhere” (p. 1). And in fact, in a study conducted by Asare et al. (2021) from 10 March 2020 to 25 July 2020 on public sentiments and twitter trending topics of discussion about online learning during COVID-19, the authors highlighted the appearance of many tweets about the closure of schools at the beginning of March 2020, followed by a decrease from April to June 2020 but then, soon after the reopening of schools during the early weeks of July 2020, the number of tweets increased again, with “Covid-19”, “Distance Learning”, “E-Learning”, “Education”, and “Online learning” reported as the most trending topics. “Remote learning” and “emergency remote teaching/learning” (ERT/L) do not emerge as popular themes of discussion, even though ERL, as discussed in the Introduction

of the thesis, has been largely defined by Hodges et al. (2020) as the correct term to address the temporary online educational solution during the pandemic. Yet, people still have “mixed perceptions” (Asare et al., 2021) and wrongly confuse ERL with online learning, also given the fact that the term ERL was still unfamiliar and not commonly used outside the academic and research arena (Erlam et al., 2021). Thus, the tendency to shift back to “online learning” and other already well-known terms might be caused by this terminology misconception, together with the idea of online learning as the ultimate solution to avoid education disruption, described by Dhawan (2020) as a “panacea for the crisis” (p. 7).

6.2. Methods and research objectives

Asare et al. (2021) suggested to expand the theoretical contribution and to conduct further research on social media with a regard to the term Emergency Remote Learning (ERL), which is also the core of our discussion and critical analysis. I can surely state that above-mentioned previous research was promptly capable of identifying trending hashtags and revealing new words entered our everyday social media conversations. Yet, an issue that needs to be asked is about the social media trending topics related to the pandemic and education a year from the COVID-19 crisis and school closure, and whether users still call it ERL or not. In fact, I embraced the suggestions (Asare et al., 2021) of expanding the discussion on COVID-19 and online learning, by not only analysing public sentiments, opinions and perceptions through trending hashtags in the period soon after school reopening, but also focusing on the search term Emergency Remote Learning which is the correct expression to address online learning during COVID-19 among the educational community (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020 among others). The overall aim of the section is, therefore, to measure public perceptions and diffusion of new terms and concepts about online learning in emergency through the analysis of pertinent phrases on Twitter, and to investigate the extent to which the emerging hashtag #Emergencyremotelearning was associated with certain sentiments and whether users

perceived a difference between online learning and ERL. Simultaneously, I detected and compare the terminology used in Italy during the pandemic.

The Internet is surely considered as the most used source of information during a pandemic (Jones & Salathé, 2009) to analyse and understand public opinion. Starting from the Web as a source, I applied the content analysis approach (Krippendorff, 2018) by monitoring certain hashtags in tweets and posts in the selected periods of reference, in order to identify what Kehoe and Gee (2011) call “textual aboutness”, a concept which relates to the information that a certain tag or hashtag provides and which can help mark the topic(s) of discussion (DeArmas, 2018; Zappavigna, 2021). The here-applied content analysis technique of mining online information is also known as “infoveillance” (Eysenbach, 2009), a term which comes from “information surveillance”, specifically used “to measure the pulse of public opinion, attention, behavior, knowledge, and attitudes by tracking what people do and write on the Internet” (Eysenbach, 2011, p. 154).

The quantitative method of gathering data online through content can give insight on new term(s) in the form of frequently occurring hashtags over time on Twitter. Moreover, the approach also permits a qualitative analysis of possible opinions, sentiments and perceptions of the pandemic. The analysis of sentiments, also known as opinion mining (Zhang & Liu, 2012), aims to identify specific emotions or opinions related to a certain topic, which happens to be ERL in this study. The sentiments therefore mined can be classified into neutral, positive, or negative, according to the orientations of the authors of the tweets and their points of view. For instance, Go, Bhayani, and Huang (2009) labelled tweets ending with positive emoticons such as “:-)” as positive sentiment, and tweets ending with negative emoticons like “:-(” as negative sentiment. In this study, the sentiment analysis of tweets was conducted through the mining of words associated with positive or negative prior polarity, referring to the sentiment they would evoke out of context: in other words, as Gatti and Guerini (2012) exemplify,

"*wonderful* has a positive connotation - prior polarity, and *horrible* has a negative prior polarity" (p. 362). I manually analysed the tweets to avoid misreading, for example, uncovering some ironic and sarcastic expressions which might have evoked a false sentiment.

In light of the above, as presented in Chapter One, the main objectives of the mining and sentiment analysis of Twitter hashtags about online learning during COVID-19 are as follows:

4) Examining to what extent users perceive a difference between the concepts of online learning and that of ERL,
5) Understanding the users' opinion and perception about ERL as positive, negative, and neutral.
6) Investigating the term used in Italy in reference to ERL, namely "didattica a distanza", and which perceptions and sentiments it causes.

The period of reference was from April 2020 to October 2021, covering the phenomenon from the school closure after the spread of COVID-19 and first lockdown, where the shift to remote learning was immediate and chaotic (Basford, 2021), to the reopening of schools after summer 2020 with a mix of remote and hybrid learning, where public opinion was concerned about the restart of education, wondering whether it had to continue fully online or in-person. And finally, October 2021, when it was clear that the emergency was not temporary as it was supposed to be.

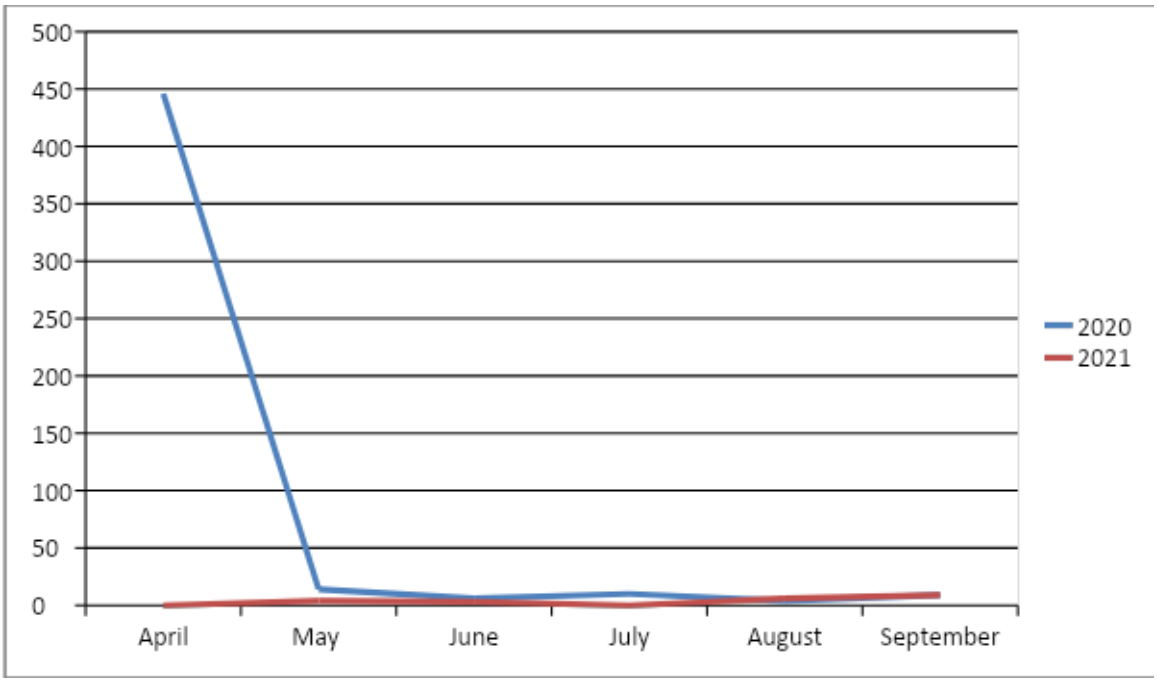
6.3. Data Collection and findings

6.3.1. #Emergencyremotelearning

I have collected all tweets containing the hashtag #emergencyremotelearning from any location worldwide in the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 October 2021. The total amount of tweets mentioning #emergencyremotelearning was 656 (277 of which are ReTweets, almost 50% of the total data). The first evident finding is that there were not so many tweets with the

targeted hashtag, if we consider that Twitter has a capacity of 396.5 million users (Dean, 2022), and an average of 500 million tweets published every day (Sayce, 2020).

Understandably, none of the tweets containing the hashtag #emergencyremotelearning came from Italy or was written in Italian. Needless to say, in the next pages we will retain this data when detecting the Italian corresponding term of ERL, “didattica a distanza”, and its impact among Italian Twitter users.



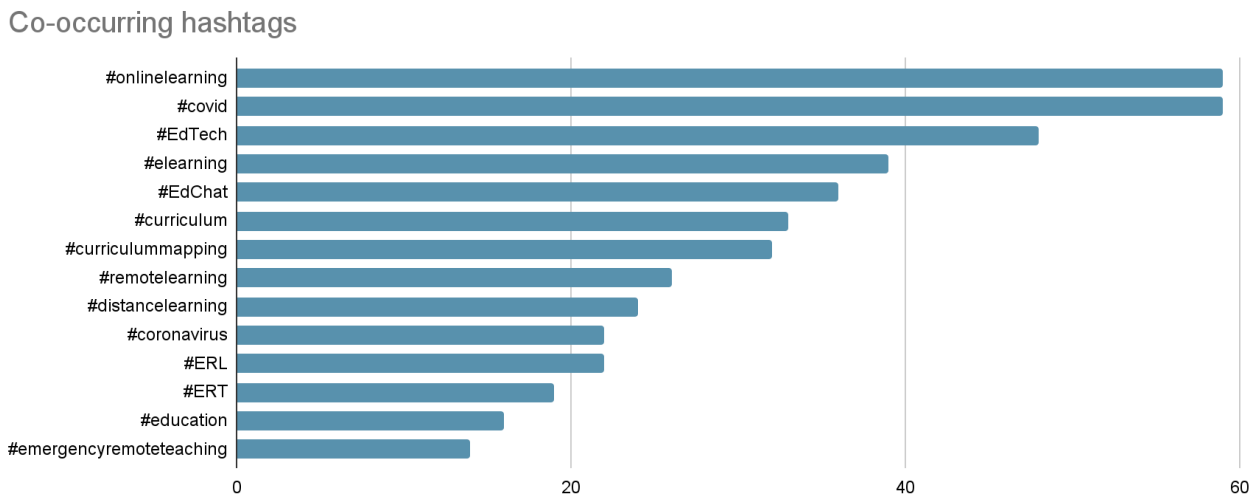
As shown in Chart 1, of 656 total tweets including #emergencyremotelearning, the higher majority were posted in April 2020 (446 tweets) with heavy decrease in May 2020 (only 14 tweets), followed by a stable trend in the coming months, until October 2021, where the number of tweets seems to slightly increase to 33 tweets. The first information we can extrapolate from the findings is, therefore, that April 2020 and October 2021 were the months with the highest numbers of tweets related to ERL. The findings about the first date of April 2020 corresponding to the school closure and lockdowns world-wide, confirms the previous assumptions that the pandemic has brought new words and terminology into the language’s lexis. October 2021 represents a turning point, as it determines the passage from the first academic year

(2020/2021) of experimenting with ERL, and the return to F2F learning around September 2021, which can lead to drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of ERL. However, the data shows how the use of the term ERL/T on social media among people outside the scientific community or involved in education, remains weak. The majority of users who mentioned the targeted hashtag reported in their Bio to be teachers (128 tweets), or educators (189 tweets).

6.3.2. Co-occuring hashtags

I then selected a list of other co-occuring hashtags, through a snowball sampling procedure which works as a chain where one hashtag directs to others (Åkerlund, 2020). Unsurprisingly, #onlinelearning and #covid were the most co-occuring hashtags with #emergencyremotelearning, but the two occured together only in 12 tweets.

Chart 2, below, shows other popular hashtags:



6.3.3. #Onlinelearning

As is evident from the above chart, #onlinelearning was the most co-occurring hashtag with #emergencyremotelearning, and they were mentioned together in 59 tweets out of a total of 656 tweets from April 2020 to October 2021.

Before performing an analysis on the textual data and content of tweets to better identify to what extent users perceive a difference between the concepts of online learning and that of ERL, I have narrowed down the quantitative analysis and mined the hashtag “online learning” in the selected periods of April 2020 and October 2021, which have been previously detected as the months with more tweet engagement of the hashtag “emergency remote learning”, but only in the area of UK and Italy.

Table 4, below, shows the total count of tweets containing #onlinelearning:

April 2020	UK	ITALY	Total
2020-04-01	390	25	415
2020-04-02	370	12	382
2020-04-03	340	9	349
2020-04-04	119	11	130
2020-04-05	119	6	125
2020-04-06	311	12	323
2020-04-07	314	4	318
2020-04-08	308	9	317
2020-04-09	281	8	289
2020-04-10	189	10	199
2020-04-11	106	7	113
2020-04-12	71	0	71
2020-04-13	215	2	217
2020-04-14	271	5	276
2020-04-15	245	6	251
2020-04-16	310	8	318
2020-04-17	285	8	293
2020-04-18	159	3	162
2020-04-19	187	3	190
2020-04-20	455	9	464
2020-04-21	430	15	445

October 2021	UK	ITALY	Total
2021-10-01	52	2	54
2021-10-02	23	1	24
2021-10-03	15	0	15
2021-10-04	44	3	47
2021-10-05	53	0	53
2021-10-06	62	0	62
2021-10-07	52	2	54
2021-10-08	48	2	50
2021-10-09	11	0	11
2021-10-10	15	0	15
2021-10-11	45	0	45
2021-10-12	61	0	61
2021-10-13	69	0	69
2021-10-14	32	3	35
2021-10-15	33	0	33
2021-10-16	24	0	24
2021-10-17	15	0	15
2021-10-18	42	0	42
2021-10-19	44	0	44
2021-10-20	59	1	60
2021-10-21	43	2	45

2020-04-22	405	8	413
2020-04-23	370	7	377
2020-04-24	319	6	325
2020-04-25	180	8	188
2020-04-26	132	6	138
2020-04-27	366	6	372
2020-04-28	400	10	410
2020-04-29	357	9	366
2020-04-30	382	10	392
Total count	***8386***	***242***	***8628***

2021-10-22	37	0	37
2021-10-23	22	0	22
2021-10-24	20	0	20
2021-10-25	46	0	46
2021-10-26	45	1	46
2021-10-27	55	1	56
2021-10-28	73	3	76
2021-10-29	37	0	37
2021-10-30	17	0	17
2021-10-31	22	0	22
Total count	***1216***	***21***	***1237***

The total count of the two columns in Table 3 offers compelling evidence that “online learning” has been widely used during the lockdowns and the pandemic more than ERL in the Twitter public opinion arena. In fact, only in the UK and Italy the hashtag #onlinelearning has been used 8628 times in April 2020 and 1237 times in October 2021, against #emergencyremotelearning which appeared only in 656 tweets during a period of 19 months, from April 2020 to October 2021, covering any location around the world.

Moreover, none of the tweets containing the hashtag #emergencyremotelearning came from Italy, whereas #onlinelearning appeared in tweets from Italy which demonstrated that, even though the two terms are not Italian, “online learning” was perceived more familiar than ERL in the Italian debate around education during COVID-19.

The findings prove that public opinion on Twitter tends to refer to “online learning” more often than ERL during the pandemic, essentially demonstrating that users are not aware of the terminological distinction between the two concepts. However, we can still investigate users’ awareness about the differences between the two concepts and examine public opinion and perception about ERL.

6.3.4. Awareness about differences between ERL and Online/Distance Learning

All tweets containing both hashtags #EmergencyRemoteLearning and #onlinelearning show awareness about the difference between ERT and other online delivery mode. For example, a tweet reported the following message:

> "Good point: it is not #eLearning, it is #EmergencyRemoteLearning. This is not online or distance learning". (April 2020)

Of course, the use of the term "emergency remote learning" in a tweet or through a hashtag means that users are able to discern the concepts, they are already aware of the terminology surrounding the online learning arena. However, the analysis of tweets correlated to #EmergencyRemoteLearning can provide a picture of a specific subset of the population and their perception around the phenomenon, what type(s) of sentiment(s) they perceive, and who are the speakers/interlocutors involved. Firstly, all tweets which attempt to highlight the difference between ERL/T and other online delivery modes in less than 280 characters, come from teachers who report in the Bio section to be #edtech leaders or experts, in other words professionals who are advocates for bringing technology into education practices. They express a clear awareness about the misunderstanding around the sudden transition to online learning in time of crisis, and online/distance learning before the COVID-19 emergency:

> "That's because what is happening right now isn't really distance learning. It's people doing the best with the tools they have to achieve an undefined objective to a population that wasn't prepared for the experience. It's #emergencyremotelearning". (20 May 2020 edtech leader)

It also appears evident that a specific subset of users shares a positive sentiment around online learning and distance learning "out of crisis", without the limitations and risks that ERL puts at stake:

> "The bad rap that Digital Learning is getting now is not the same as #emergencyremotelearning, as the latter is a response out of crisis. DL works as we are all doing it well". (April 2020 edtech leader)

> "What we're doing is not "online learning". #OnlineLearning is a deliberate planned intentional funded process. What we are doing is #EmergencyRemoteLearning. A thing done out of crisis, without all that's needed, under duress." (Sept 2020 edtech)

Another user, who self-described themself as a teacher and a parent, wrote:

> "Can we agree on the nomenclature? Not "distance learning"...it's crisis management. The reality: we are attempting trauma mitigation. Provide connection, suggestion, engagement opportunities. Do no harm. #emergencyremotelearning". (April 2020)

Nevertheless, all tweets mentioning the differences among ERL, Distance Learning, Online Learning etc... emerged in the first period, from April to September 2020, where the COVID-19 crisis was in its first stages, the closure of schools was unexpected and schools were not prepared to the shift to ERL (Scanni, 2022; Greenhow, et al., 2021), with no short and long-term anticipation (Maican and Cocoradă, 2021), and people wrongly assumed that the emergency was temporary (Hodges et al., 2020). Of course, after two years in the pandemic, people's reaction about the future of online education has clearly changed. As a matter of fact, while on one hand distance and online courses provided prior March 2020 continued as they were during the COVID-19 lockdown (Bondarenko, 2021) and beyond, on the other hand the future of in-person education remains uncertain.

6.3.5. Sentiment analysis about ERL

For the sentiment analysis I firstly filtered all tweet contents with some keywords related to a certain sentiment. For positive feelings I identified the words "thank you" (47 tweets), "wonderful" (22), "love" (22), "good" (20), "best" (7) and "happy" (5), for a total of 123 positive tweets, and users mainly expressed their gratitude and trust towards teachers and educators who had never experienced online teaching and had to suddenly switch to ERL:

> "Building the proverbial plane as we fly it these days! I think "Emergency Remote Learning" has a nice ring to it for those who have never done this before and getting a crash course at the moment".

Especially, the awareness came from parents who are also teachers:

> "Thank you to all of the educators out there doing the hard work of emergency remote teaching, for all the right reasons, in the most uncertain of times. As a parent, I appreciate you, and as a colleague, I am inspired by you."

> "For those beginning #emergencyremotelearning […]: It will feel like you're not doing enough. You are. It will by no means be perfect, but it sure is nice to connect. Be patient with your students and yourself."

For negative feeling, I detected the following:

The tweets containing the words "equity" (22 tweets) and "inclusion" (9) expressed negative sentiments (31 negative tweets in total) and questioned the role of school systems in providing equal access to education during the pandemic.

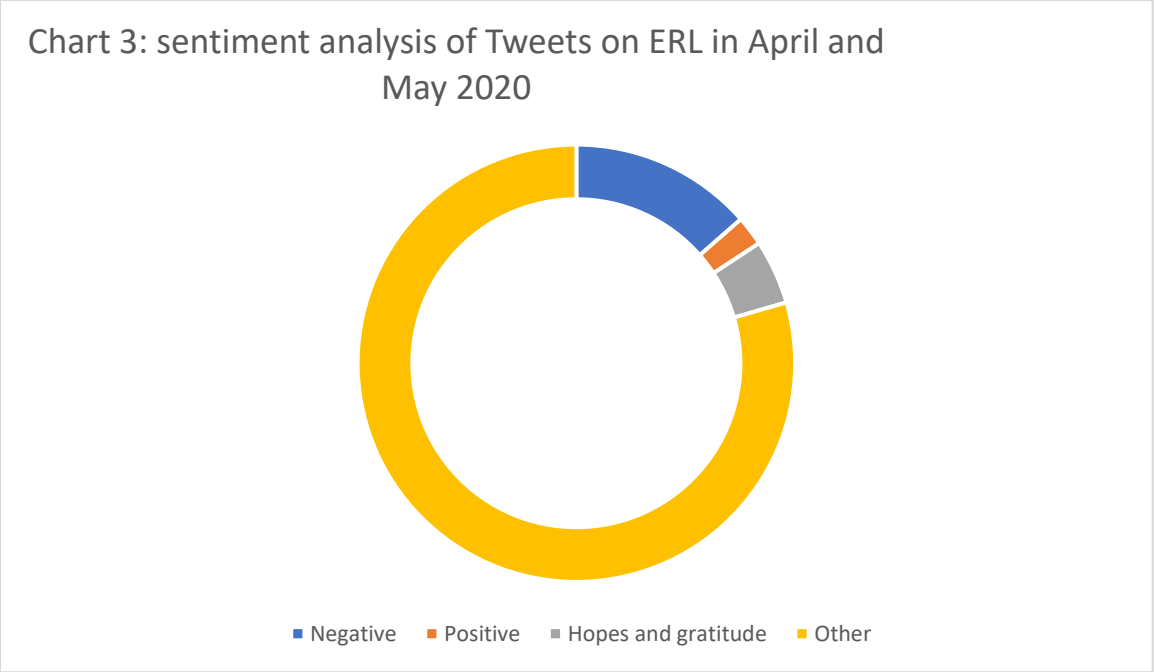
> "Surfing Twitter to again re-shift my online curriculum based on needs, feedback and resources of students. I've adjusted my unit plan many times now. From my perspective, #EmergencyRemoteLearning is so difficult regarding issues of equity and inclusion. Nothing beats "live teaching.""

> "Many school systems are rushing to embrace distance learning regardless of #equity concerns. School leaders must ask themselves, are we providing six weeks of #EmergencyRemoteLearning or redesigning public education to serve a privileged subset? #DistanceLearning #RuralEdChat".

Equity, inclusion, accessibility, socio-economic differences have been largely debated through reports, documents and papers by supranational institutions (UNESCO, 2020a; UNICEF, 2020a; United Nations, 2020b; OECD, 2020; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021), which recognised the challenges posed by COVID-19 and its impact on education. However, being able to identify inclusive education during the COVID-19 pandemic as a priority topic in the aftermath is a good starting point, but much effort is still needed. Other tweets reporting issues with access to technology stated that "80% of students

with no little or no technology are Aboriginal" or described their district as "a hybrid of haves and have nots with technology". In short, "#EmergencyRemoteLearning is tough."

After a first analysis based on keywords, I then manually reviewed and read all tweet contents. Apart from the first months, April and May 2020, all tweets in the remaining analysed period were mainly neutral, and Twitter appeared to become again a virtual space where people could share and exchange information on education for their professional development (Trust et al., 2016). Instead, the total 548 tweets from the period of April and May 2020, which mainly mentioned the differences among ERL, Distance Learning, Online Learning etc... (See previous paragraph 6.3.4.), included 74 tweets expressing negative feelings around ERL and only12 tweets expressing positive feelings. Moreover, 26 tweets expressed gratitude and hope among teachers, families and schools, but no positive opinion around ERL. The remaining 434 tweets were simply sharing materials, links and articles.



6.4. Didattica a distanza

Italy was reported as the first country after China to have a large number of COVID-19 cases. In order to contain the spread of the virus, the Italian Government imposed rigorous restrictions

and, among those, on 5 March 2020 Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced the closure of all schools and universities, which remained closed until the end of the school year in June. On 8 March 2020, teachers and students were asked to experiment with learning remotely, so as to avoid education disruption during the lockdown through the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers on "Further provisions implementing the decree-law of 23 February 2020, No. 6 on urgent containment and management measures of the epidemiological emergency from COVID-19", which introduced "the possibility of carrying out distance learning activities" (art.2.1. paragraph H) as a measure to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Soon after the school closure on 9 March 2020 in Italy, the term "Didattica a Distanza" (acronym DAD) was adopted when speaking about ERL in the Italian education system. "Didattica a distanza" can be translated to "Distance learning" which means it already existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in upper secondary schools and higher education (Capperucci, 2020). However, when talking about "didattica a distanza" in secondary school and at university level, the Italian language has always accepted foreign words such as "e-learning" (Benigno et al., 2021), or included the descriptor "online" (*apprendimento online*, *didattica online*), as well as other words coined from the English language like "smart working" for "working from home". The term "didattica a distanza" was soon employed in reference to ERL: initially, the Decree of 9 March 2020[8] cited "attività formative a distanza" ("formative activities at distance"), and subsequently a public statement by the Italian Ministry of Education[9] on 10 March 2020 recalled the Decree mentioning "didattica a distanza" within the written text. From that point forward newspapers, social media and all other means of information, as well as politicians and educational institutions, employed the term "didattica a distanza", more often and easily contracted in DAD, in relation to online learning during COVID-

[8] DPCM of 9 March 2020 retrieved from https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/09/20A01558/sg
[9] https://www.miur.gov.it/-/coronavirus-sospensione-delle-attivita-didattiche-fino-al-3-aprile-cosa-prevede-il-dpcm-del-9-marzo-

19. Indeed, because of the complexity of the Italian language, the term “emergency remote learning” can have several translations in Italian, among which there are “apprendimento d’emergenza da remoto”, “apprendimento remoto in emergenza”, “apprendimento in emergenza da remoto”, “didattica di emergenza da remoto”. Therefore, DAD seemed the most rapid expression to address the phenomenon.

6.4.1. Co-occuring hashtags and sentiment analysis

The tweets collected with the hashtag #didatticaadistanza were 1407 only in April 2020.

With 395 mentions, the most co-occuring hashtag was #scuola (school), but the word “scuola” with no # was mentioned 638 times. Of course, #covid was another popular co-occurring hashtag (254 tweets), as well as the acronym #DAD (108 tweets). There was no mention to #emergencyremotelearning and only a few tweets referring to #onlinelearning (4 tweets) and #elearning (37 tweets), which suggest that users might consider “didattica a distanza” as the only explicit term which refers to remote learning during the COVID-19 emergency. Moreover, neither tweet mentioned any comparison between DAD and online learning before COVID-19. It would seem that users are not aware of any difference between the concepts of online learning and that of ERL/DAD in Italy. As a consequence, only some users recognised that during the COVID-19 emergency “*didattica a distanza* represents the only way to guarantee the continuity of education for students” and that in Italy

> “people had to turn to #onlinelearning to carry on classes in #didatticaadistanza modality”.

On the other hand, some tweets expressed negative sentiments towards DAD, for example a user highlighted the importance of going back to school and to invest money into in-person education because DAD cannot substitute F2F learning:

> “It is important to go back to #school and not to think #didatticaadistanza can replace it. All the money needed to have in-person lessons must be invested”.

and another user sharply said that “this is not school”.

Generally, almost all tweets were neutral, essentially sharing information and links through impersonal and descriptive captions. Despite that, the presence of catchphrases is noteworthy, since the Government has begun to create and promote slogans to raise awareness during the lockdown (68 tweets with #andratuttobene which means “everything will be alright”), and to reassure people confined at home (116 tweets with #iorestoacasa meaning “I stay at home”). In a way, the strategic communication of using slogans to promote hygiene practices and awareness has been compared to historical propagandas during the WW I and II (Bellinetti, 2020).

Engaging in public debates on social media can contribute to critical online/offline discussions and can encourage users to share their ideas and opinions (Asare et al., 2021) on public interest issues. Instead, the only noticeable debate involved a series of blame-oriented tweets (106) against the Minister of Education Lucia Azzolina and the Government decisions on DAD. This led to unproductive solutions as any user was able to take advantage of the Twitter platform to suggest educational ideas or teaching practices to be used during ERL and beyond the pandemic.

6.5. Discussion

The present chapter aimed at examining Twitter hashtags on online learning during the pandemic in order to interpret public opinion and perception about ERL and people’s sentiments. The findings demonstrated that users on Twitter tend to refer to online learning more often than ERL during the pandemic, essentially demonstrating that people do not perceive many differences between the two concepts. Such a blurry differentiation among ERL and online learning has affected the perception of many stakeholders about the effectiveness of learning online.

However, among the little group of EdTech experts, ERL is recognised to be not the same as online learning “out of crisis”. Moreover, sentiments around the recognised phenomenon of ERL were quite positive, especially towards teachers and educators involved in ERL, whereas negative emotions appeared mostly during the first two months of April and May 2020, and they referred to the topics of inclusion, equity and digital accessibility.

In Italy the term “Didattica a distanza” has been immediately employed in relation to online learning during COVID-19. However, ERL has never been mentioned in any tweet, whereas #onlinelearning appeared in tweets from Italy which demonstrated that, even though the two terms are not Italian, “online learning” was perceived more familiar than ERL in the Italian debate around education during COVID-19. Overall, users seemed not aware of any difference between the concepts of online learning “out of crisis” and that of DAD during the emergency. Therefore, no discussion around ERL and online/distance learning emerged, and the only blame-oriented debate that transpired was against the Minister of Education Azzolina. In conclusion, the lack of awareness about the differences between ERL and online learning, or DAD and online learning, has affected the perception of many stakeholders about the effectiveness of learning online. By equating all these concepts, users inappropriately transferred their unpleasant experience during the pandemic to a general dissatisfaction to online learning, therefore excluding any possibility to re-think of technology and remote learning as an opportunity to digitally innovate the education systems.

Future research could take this study further by expanding the investigation to other social media platforms (e.g. TikTok, Facebook, Instagram) or considering the equivalent of “didattica a distanza” and ERL in other countries and translations, in order to link all country related results in one complete literature review.

Finally, the paragraph on “Ethical considerations” in Chapter Three on Methodology surely provides an original contribution on ethical procedures and guidelines when using social media data in research and can serve as both theoretical and practical framework in the future.

The present chapter adds another piece to the investigation around ERL, a term which I have demonstrated, through the analysis of hashtags, was not commonly used in non-educational environments. In addition to this analysis and the case study in the before COVID-19 section, the following chapter explores ERL through the stories of students of Italian as an FL at UoB, and staff members, during the pandemic, as well as their perceptions of, and satisfaction with, the ERL experience.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONNAIRES ABOUT EMERGENCY REMOTE LEARNING

This chapter is the final section in the discussion around COVID-19 and online language learning. I started the “during COVID-19” section with the collection and analysis of the growing literature surrounding the field, with the intention of providing a firm foundation which can be used for further research, as well as an instrument to place this study in context. By conducting this supplementary literature review, I was able to identify advantages, disadvantages and research gaps which led me to the analysis of Twitter hashtags in order to better investigate the interpretation related to ERL at the time of the pandemic and how the misconception about the differences between ERL and online learning might have affected the feelings of people and, as a consequence, influenced the idea of the effectiveness of online learning regardless of the exceptional circumstances imposed by the pandemic (National Council for Online Education, 2022; Hodges et al., 2020).

In this chapter I am going to discuss the impact that ERL has had on students who were forced to move to online learning, what benefits and advantages we could profit from after this experience, what we have learnt from these past few years and what should be avoided in the future.

Starting from interviews conducted with groups of students enrolled in on-campus university programmes who had to move to online learning during the pandemic, or who started their first year at university a few months after the spread of COVID-19, followed by questionnaires which aimed to assess the motivation, personality and autonomy in learning of this group of students, I will conclude by analysing the common lived experience of ERL from the point of view of staff members. I propose to contribute to and expand the discussion on online learning at the time of COVID-19 and beyond. All stories and opinions collected from students and staff members

gravitated around the same problem of having to switch to emergency remote learning during the pandemic, and how it conditioned their learning but also their beliefs about online learning.

7.1. Interviews about emergency remote learning from the students' perspective

The interviews aimed at assessing the students' perception of the pedagogical changes they experienced during the pandemic when they had to move to emergency remote learning. The participants were recruited at the UoB through announcements displayed on the Italian courses on Canvas or via e-mails forwarded by Italian tutors. The interviews took place between 2021 and early 2022.

After a brief description of the participants, of the Italian course they attended and the changes made to adapt it to online mode during the emergency, I traced the background of the circumstances imposed by the spread of COVID-19 and the subsequent disruption of education. In the following paragraphs, I collated the students' answers thematically, starting with their answers to open-ended questions, with the intention of starting a discussion which could develop as a narrative about their perception of the experience. These results are reported below.

7.1.1. Participants' interviews and preliminary considerations about the course structure

The participants were undergraduate students enrolled in courses of Italian as an FL at the UoB. The interviews were conducted online, depending on their level of language and their academic year of study. The total number of students involved in the interviews were 22, from both intermediate and advanced levels of Italian. Some of the participants were in their second year at university, others in their fourth year and had experienced a virtual year abroad during the previous academic year. Including students who had never experienced on-campus learning provided me with a broader vision of the impact of COVID-19 on higher education, as all students interviewed enrolled in F2F academic programmes despite the pandemic and

subsequent COVID-19 on-campus restrictions, which imposed the need to study at home or maintain physical distance.

The first question put to students aimed to introduce the debate by making them aware of the organisational changes put in place by the tutors and the university when delivering their classes online. Apart from moving to Zoom for live and real-time classes, tutors redesigned the courses on the university virtual learning environment (Canvas), a platform which was already in use prior to the pandemic, in order to avoid disruption and still continue to meet the students' academic needs and objectives. Before the interviews, I examined the design and structure of the courses on Canvas and informally asked some tutors to clarify the differences in the course structure before and after the COVID-19 outbreak, in terms of materials uploaded to Canvas and also what had changed in relation to formative and summative assessments during the pandemic. The modules attended by students contain two essential elements: 1) Use of Language (abbr. UoL), which aims to reinforce linguistic, grammatical and lexical structures through the analysis of texts, and 2) Communicative Skills (abbr. CS), which aims to give students opportunities to interact orally and practise the language through discussions and group or individual presentations. Following the closure of the campus and the restrictions imposed to teaching, all classes were taught using Zoom, an easy-to-use popular software for synchronous teaching (McNamara and Bailenson, 2021), which allowed the transition from F2F to online learning, and was also used by people working from home. It was launched in 2013 but gained considerable popularity in 2020 during the pandemic, being downloaded 485 million times in 2020 (Iqbal, 2020). Unfortunately, being constantly on a video conference and gazed at (Bailenson, 2020) can be mentally exhausting and lead to what scholars call "Zoom Fatigue" (Fosslien and Duffy, 2020; Wiederhold, 2020; Hines and Sun, 2020; McNamara and Bailenson, 2021; GÖkce, 2021).

The main interesting change was the pre-recording of lectures using a software programme called Panopto, which allowed students to engage and learn at their own pace and level and from their own rooms or homes. This asynchronous learning approach alleviated the risk of "Zoom Fatigue" and showed that tutors and leading educators proactively tried to adapt the online learning environment beyond the temporary solution until a return to on-campus learning was allowed. In terms of the evaluation of students' learning at a distance, formative and summative assessments were carried out online. Formative assessment was carried out via group exercises and individual submissions, with deadlines and dates for submissions timetabled in a designated section on the Canvas course. The course summative assessment, which before the pandemic consisted of an on-campus written exam followed by a F2F oral test, was temporarily replaced by one "48-hour take-home exam" where students were given 48 hours to prepare and record a 7-minute oral presentation on topics covered during the Communicative Skills module, and an oral/aural exercise to be performed on online synchronous platforms. All this preliminary information about the course design and structure is essential because, as we are going to see in the following pages, students' opinions and considerations of their personal experience online were shaped by the way their classes were delivered. Some students who started their second year online during or after 2021 had no basis for comparison, whereas others had experienced their virtual year abroad and could make more than one differentiation. Yet, students who had started their university experience remotely were able to provide very firm opinions about their experience and future perspectives. The next paragraphs deal with the students' opinions about emergency remote learning. Each student shared their story and experience. The language used was Italian. This was done in order to incentivise the recruitment and participation of students to the study with the prospect of practising the language with a native speaker. Some students switched to English when they found it difficult to explain concepts, but most could manage to communicate effectively in Italian and were able to give very specific thoughts and ideas about their stories.

7.1.2. Background

“I am sure that this is going to become normality over time, but for us it has been different”, a student concisely said when asked about their overall experience with emergency remote learning. This interesting thought, which was shared at the end of my last interview, clearly summarises the attitude of students in terms of their hopes and concerns about the future of education when everything was expected to be getting back to a “new” normal. In order to understand the students’ narratives and conclusions about online learning during the pandemic, we need to trace back their university experience to the beginning of the pandemic, in early 2020, through their shared stories. When COVID-19 broke out and schools and institutions were closed, some interviewed students were already enrolled at the UoB and experienced a disruption in their learning due to lockdowns. All classes started again in September 2020 at the beginning of the following academic year. Those students were supposed to begin their year abroad, whereas other students among those interviewed were about to start their first year at university, their “undergraduate experience”, after the last months of their final school year were disrupted or somehow affected by the pandemic. Their expectations were surely high, but at the same time, students were understanding about the efforts they temporarily had to make and “the university and students were able to rapidly adapt to the new situation, because adaptability is just part of human nature” as a participant said. Thus, the academic year 2020/2021 started online or with some COVID-19 restrictions (wearing a mask or maintaining social distancing) both for students in their so-called virtual year abroad and for freshers. Their experience and perceptions about the effectiveness of the delivery mode implemented during the academic year was followed by an academic year when students were gradually getting back to on-campus activities. This was not without some trouble, especially for those who had started their first academic year remotely and had never experienced on-campus classes, so once they could move back to F2F lessons, they felt

confused and disoriented because everything was new. During that time, the future was unknown and unpredictable, but students were able to outline the situation and provide some useful suggestions and insights about their idea of the direction higher education could take in the future. In the next paragraph I am going to examine the experience of emergency remote learning from the students' perspectives. I have divided their answers according to themes, related to the different structure and organisation of classes, lectures and materials when online, the main differences perceived between on-campus and online classes, students' familiarity with technology, access to and inclusion of remote learning, how in their opinion online assessment has changed compared to F2F examinations, their overall experience with remote learning and, lastly, their preference between on-campus and online learning based on their personal experience.

7.1.3. Organisation of online classes and material

The students in their second or third year were already familiar with Canvas and positively assessed the organisation of the platform. For example, a student stated: "I have noticed that everything is organised in a clearer and more detailed way, there is more material and there are more options to catch up with the lesson if you cannot attend or you miss the class", and another student added that they were confident when navigating the platform because they were already used to it from before the pandemic. On the other hand, students who had started their first year entirely online experienced some difficulties in understanding where to find the right material and assignments and the purpose of each item, for example a student said that there was "more material [supposedly than before the pandemic] on Canvas but everything was confusing because nobody told us where to find the material and what to use it for".

The main innovative change in adapting Canvas to be used during the emergency was the uploading of pre-recorded lectures which were chunked into short videos and could be watched online at one's own pace. Students recognised that this method of viewing the lectures at home

was sometimes more convenient, for example a student declared “I think with lectures and big content it is much easier if you can go back over things and can rewatch pre-recorded video of lectures”. However, one student claimed that they would prefer F2F lectures because you can still ask the tutor/lecturer for clarification immediately and receive direct feedback instead of having to send an e-mail.

7.1.4. Differences between on-campus and online learning

If we were at home and needed to attend an online class, we would probably immediately think of Zoom, possibly the most popular video conferencing tool in the world (Woodward, 2022) with over 485 million downloads in 2020 (Iqbal, 2020), as the most likely platform for it. In 2020, the University of Birmingham adopted Zoom and Microsoft Teams as video-conferencing platforms, but Zoom was recognised as the “popular choice”. As a matter of fact, even my interviews were conducted via Zoom, and the students directly referred to this conferencing platform when talking about online teaching delivery tools. The only participants who mentioned other platforms, specifically Teams, were the ones who had experienced a virtual year abroad.

When asked in what way online classes differed from on-campus classes, all students were unanimous in mentioning the same differences about interaction, concentration, staying at home instead of walking to campus. But what is interesting to note is that each participant shared different feelings and had a different attitude towards the same point of differentiation. When talking about the possible lack of interaction when studying online, the issue was generally perceived as related to the COVID-19 restrictions, where students could not meet up and experience university life. But some students were able to narrow their opinion to the specific language experience of learning Italian as a foreign language online. For example, a student explained their preference for F2F classes because they can communicate with their peers and they can “feel that someone else is in your same room, see and perceive the

reactions and emotions of other people, [whereas] online this kind of connection is lost". On the other hand, another student gave a unique interpretation of the experience of online interaction: according to them, there is "more interaction during the lesson [online]", which is not "forced" and unavoidable as in a F2F lesson, but on the contrary you can actually choose whether to be there or not, and you can opt for the level of interaction you want, especially when it comes to practising the spoken language. Online, another student added, "you can mute the audio and turn off the camera, you can be alone in your role and your world without interaction." In brief, the online delivery mode allows you to interact much less because you can "disappear" from the class and decide when and to what extent you want to participate in the lesson, especially if you are afraid of making mistakes when speaking Italian, whereas in a F2F lesson you cannot avoid oral interaction. It is worth noticing how interaction within a virtual foreign language classroom acquires opposite meanings and connotations depending on the student's willingness to practise the language outside their comfort zone. Moreover, in terms of the perception of peers and classmates, two diametrically opposite points of view emerged about the same fact: some students perceived they could see all participants online from their screens and could predict who was going to intervene (presuming all cameras were on), whereas others felt that "online you do not have the perception of who is around you and you cannot understand, for example, when someone wants to talk and what they would like to say".

In the first part of this thesis, I explored the internal factors which might influence learners in their process of acquiring Italian as a foreign language online before the pandemic forced everyone to move to emergency remote learning. The findings from the questionnaires demonstrated that all participants, whose decision to learn online was not caused by extenuating circumstances, were unanimous in their opinions about the lack of interaction perceived as a limitation in their remote learning, but only because their online studying

modality mostly occurred asynchronously and did not include Zoom and/or other conferencing platforms, in actual fact reporting limitations about the reduced time or no opportunity to practise speaking skills, or the total absence of instructors or interaction with native speakers which are inevitable features in asynchronous learning platforms such as Duolingo, Babbel, YouTube and other tools mentioned. In fact, oral interaction occurs when several individuals are synchronously together (La Grassa, 2022). This limitation might have been overcome by simply adding some speaking opportunities to their individual learning experience, for example video chatting with an online instructor via Skype, Zoom or Google Meet or hiring a teacher on online language learning platforms such as Verbling or Italki. On the contrary, during emergency remote learning, all language classes and seminars, which already included speaking and communicative modules, moved onto Zoom which meant that the opportunities to practise the language with the presence of an instructor still existed and continued, therefore the perception of a lack of interaction should be considered in terms of isolation from and towards others. This in fact represents a distinctive trait of remote learning during the pandemic because it implies the subtle existence of a psychological dissatisfaction towards the whole situation which could not be avoided. A student expressed this discontent when stating that people now are growing further and further apart, and because “we already use chat and text messages on a daily basis, we risk drifting further away”. This feeling of dissatisfaction becomes clear in some students’ responses, when they said they felt there was more interaction in F2F classes, but they were unable to justify their answer, or only added “I don’t know why, but I prefer it this way”. Clearly, online interaction is characterised by the absence, or severe diminishment, of visual and non-verbal cues, which are present in F2F scenarios. Therefore, I suppose that students lost this important component in their interaction with others during the transition to ERL but were unable to explain it or figure it out.

Concentration during the lesson has been perceived as another difference between online and F2F classes, and again some responses provided an open window into the stress and fatigue experienced at the time. For some students, being at home all day in front of a screen made it difficult to focus mentally. A student gave a confusing idea about their perception of concentration, first providing a legitimate opinion that it is easier to get distracted during online lessons on Zoom, because you can turn your camera off and do something else, but then adding that in the physical classroom you can pretend to follow the teacher, which clearly cannot be considered as concentration *per se*. Conversely, a student found it easier to focus online when alone, because otherwise they might talk to classmates during the lesson. Overall, students recognised they lost more of their attention at home than within a physical classroom but when it comes to lectures, they can go back on the recorded video and repeat a section or watch it again at a later time.

All students identified commuting time as a difference which undoubtedly benefits online learning, especially for students who live outside the campus and/or far away from the campus area. The time saved from going to and coming back from the campus, as well as the fact that they could study at their own pace with lectures and did not “waste time” following the pace of other students was perceived as an advantage of online learning, which was already perceived as a benefit before the pandemic. Participants in pre-pandemic studies detected flexibility in terms of time and space (“anytime, everywhere”), and the possibility to learn “at your own pace” as two of the advantages of online learning. Moreover, studying remotely can sometimes be mentally beneficial when you perceive home as a secure place, your “comfort zone” as suggested by a student.

Possible lack of interaction, problems with concentration and commuting were perceived as the main differences between online learning and F2F classes by students, whose non-uniform answers and opinions might have been affected by personal attitudes and mental states due

to COVID-19 consequences on individuals' wellbeing. This is a crucial finding for the study because it supports the research statement, according to which emergency remote learning might have created a false assumption that the online environment might not be considered an effective learning delivery mode. On the contrary, the psychological implications derived from the COVID-19 extenuating circumstances, and the fact that students were forced to move online have played and still play an important role in keeping the two terminologies separated.

However, an objective disadvantage of online learning was stated to be the insecurity of internet usability and availability which conditioned the students' access to education.

7.1.5. Access and inclusion in remote learning

When carrying out the literature review on COVID-19 and emergency remote learning in Chapter Four I had already identified some challenges in online learning, with accessibility and affordability of online infrastructures debated in many other previous studies and articles (See for example Murgatrotd, 2020; Lucas, 2020; Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021; Li and Lalani, 2022 among others). When talking about remote learning during the pandemic during the interviews, many students felt it was presumed that everyone had the same access to technology, digital devices, and internet connection. On the contrary, many issues arose from the different access to online settings, as well as the varied economic affordability of online support for some learners, which resulted in questioning whether remote learning was inclusive or not. During the interviews, we were implicitly exposed to the matter, because some students with unstable connection were often cut off from the conversation or found it difficult to hear the questions. Envisioning a possible Zoom lesson, it appears "stressful because of the uncertainty of it working or not. If the connection drops during the lesson, there is no recording or recovery option". The switch to remote learning in 2020 has generated a "stark digital divide" in the UK with 1.9 million households with no access to the internet (Kelly, 2020). Thus, this digital divide caused by the pandemic has widened the gap in terms of inequality (Dhawan, 2020) and

inequity (Chitpin and Karoui, 2021), which we all observe every day and was clearly perceived during the interviews in the students' words and concerns. Staying at home means transforming a home environment into a learning setting, which would be far less impartial and *super partes* than the class and lecture rooms. Some homes are more comfortable than others, some are tiny, and all such characteristics affect the online experience. Socio-economic status surely plays a role in the way students perceive their learning from home, and their mental health was influenced by this variable (George et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021) during the lockdowns and beyond. Some students had to share their learning spaces with other members of the family and could not concentrate properly. As a student underlined, "F2F, all [students] are equal".

On the contrary, online education has been seen as inclusive for people who cannot travel or move much, or for international students living in foreign countries who could not otherwise attend their courses. Erasmus students, for example, could still attend their year abroad virtually despite the pandemic and limitations in travelling. Surely, this is not the best solution to the problem, and it scarcely enables intercultural exchange (Reiffenrath, De Louw, and Haug, 2020), but for some students who are not able to travel abroad, the opportunities to engage in international virtual mobility and activities without physically leaving their homes open doors and borders to new types of international exchanges, which are inclusive for all students. The impact of COVID-19 on higher education and students' mobility encouraged institutions to think about new alternatives to international education which can promote equity and inclusion. A "breath of fresh air" (Almeida, 2018) was offered by the implementation of the so-called "Internationalisation at Home" (See Chapter Five), defined as the internationalisation of the formal and informal curriculum and the teaching and learning process, which "aims to develop international and intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes for all students regardless of whether they also take part in mobility opportunities" (Beelen and Jones, 2015,

p. 5). In other words, promoting inclusivity through the internationalisation of the curriculum means creating opportunities for students to experience international and intercultural exchange within their programmes of study, whether they spend time abroad or not (Jones and Reiffenrath, 2018). Moreover, in light of future global perspective after COVID-19 and the inclusivity of mobile and non-mobile students in international exchanges, higher institutions might consider including the virtual mobility of students in their curriculum and engaging in implementing internationalisation at home.

Finally, a student introduced an interesting point of view regarding the idea of inclusion related to personality traits, stating that shy people speak less online, feeling “in the spotlight”. According to this student, who was supposedly speaking with full knowledge of the facts, being shy and introverted has a negative effect when learning online. Unfortunately, no further justification for the statement was provided, so we cannot consider the answer as a fact. However, we can provide some clarification from previous research about extrovert and introvert personality traits during a remote learning experience. For example, in a study conducted by Sanudin et al. (2022) introverts preferred to stay at home and communicate through writing (which might confirm the above student’s statement) but in terms of online learning, in the same study, they expressed the need to see people in person for study purposes, which is a requisite they cannot fulfil in an online environment. The above-mentioned findings (Sanudin et al., 2022) suggest a developing sense of isolation and exclusion from the academic environment, which can lead to perceiving the online learning context as not inclusive by shy and introverted students. On the other hand, previous research (Kraut et al., 2002) had showed that extroverted people with a high level of social competence and inclination to interpersonal relationships are more willing to benefit from the online experience than those with “social impairments” (Christabel et al., 2020). In fact, extroverts feel the need

to interact with others for social purposes and not only for academic objectives (Sanudin et al., 2022).

However, this information might be useful in the subsequent analysis of questionnaires on personality, to see whether any correlation exists between introvert/extrovert traits and the acceptance of emergency remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic; this will be explored in the next pages.

7.1.6. Experience with technology

The students' ages ranged from 20 to 24 years old. Despite being part of a "digital generation", the so-called Generation Z, i.e. anyone born after 1995 (Singh, 2014; Ensari, 2017; Cilliers, 2017) who grew up with technology, social media and the internet, students largely saw themselves as not very skilled with technology. In fact, many students in their first year at university faced some difficulties when using Canvas and understanding where to find the material. But how can a generation of learners who perceived technology as a regular part of life and not just as a tool (Kalkhurst, 2018), suddenly see themselves as not very digital? These results surely clash with previous research (Teräs, Myllylä, and Teräs, 2011; Lambert and Cuper, 2008) which sees the Gen-Z as a generation of "native speakers" (Prensky, 2001) of digital languages who need more effective digital learning. All these assumptions have led to the myth that being born digital means being more competent in using technology (Engen et al., 2014). In a study conducted on secondary school foreign language teachers during the COVID-19 emergency (Scanni, 2022), when the respondents were asked whether or not they agreed with the following statement in reference to their secondary school students:

> The generation born in this digital and modern age is known as "digital natives" or the "Net-gen" (Prensky, 2001). Digital natives are the generation that spontaneously learns to use the new technologies. However, these 'digital speakers' are used to getting information really fast, don't like to 'dive' into a text and prefer to 'surf' through hyperlinks.

most respondents strongly agreed with this idea about their students' digital competence, described as superficial when searching for information without "thinking about the process" of learning. All teachers believed that students described as "digital natives" are not competent enough to make full use of online and digital tools for educational and learning purposes (Scanni, 2022).

Another contribution is provided by Kirschner and De Bruyckere (2017), who found that the idea of these digital natives as being tech-savvy and more digitally prepared than previous generations is simply a myth. In fact, this generalisation is erroneous, and it could be "extremely deleterious" (p. 136) to ascribe to them such high abilities with modern technologies, or to keep spreading these myths in the educational arena. Digital natives were simply born *with* technology, which does not imply that they are more digitally oriented than previous generations and their teachers (McNaught, Lam, and Ho, 2009). As a matter of fact, the literature demonstrated their greater inclination to use social media, smartphones and WhatsApp than computers (Zhitomirsky-Geffet and Blau, 2017) and their ability to instantly access every kind of information, including their study material (Seemiller and Grace, 2016) with their smartphones as portable computers (Rosen, 2011), without "diving" into the text. As Kennedy and Fox (2013) pointed out, digital natives are "not always digitally literate when using technology to support their learning. This is particularly evident when it comes to students' use of technology as consumers of content rather than creators of content specifically for academic purposes" (p. 76). In light of COVID-19 and the need to accommodate learning to avoid disruption, education should surely be redesigned with the inclusion of technologies and online tools. However, no pedagogical or educational changes should start from the false assumption that students are more digitally literate than teachers. On the contrary, online education policies should train teachers and staff members to use technology and ensure that learning objectives

and outcomes are still being met. The next paragraph explores online assessment, and how the university dealt with it.

7.1.7. Online assessment

As mentioned, before the pandemic, the summative assessment consisted of two parts: a written exam and an oral exam. The move to online learning led to a redesign of the ways to assess students in order to preserve the evaluation without losing the nature and objectives of the assessment. As previously mentioned, some students in their second year online had no basis for comparison. However, they were able to provide their opinions on online assessment and differences based on their past experiences in school.

The findings showed different opinions on the same question, which suggests that all perceptions were filtered by mental and emotional predispositions towards the online setting during the pandemic. Once again, the students were forced to move to online learning and, although they demonstrated great adaptability to the emergency remote setting, they were still frustrated and discouraged by circumstances.

Students found the online assessment easier than F2F exams, which resulted in a positive outcome for some students who thought they could focus more on the exam at home, and because they felt “calmer” and with more time to complete the assignments and do some research in a 48h time span. On the other hand, some students claimed they got easily distracted at home and that a poor internet connection could represent an obstacle in terms of accessibility. Moreover, the chance to look up information on the internet for an exam was perceived as an aid which affected their learning process, and for a student it was considered as real “cheating”. As a result of preparing their exam at home with the help of dictionaries and online tools, some students believed the marks were higher in online assessments “because it is easier to get a good grade looking things up on the internet”, whereas others thought the

opposite: “before, if you made many mistakes but you were alone in a room without a dictionary you could get a good mark, but now that you have access to dictionaries and aids they want the exam to be perfect”, and as a consequence “they [tutors] mark it more harshly online” therefore it is more difficult to get a high grade.

Overall, almost all students would rather have their oral exam in person than online because it is more authentic, more as a conversation between the examiner and the student, with no screen separating the speakers. Some students believed that the F2F mode would assess their skills and knowledge realistically without the help of the internet. Others found the online mode more realistic because it reflects workplace settings and tasks where using the internet is allowed.

Yet, despite the exceptional period which had to be temporarily addressed, it is important to guarantee students a certain uniformity until the end of their studies. As one student argued, it would not be fair to ask students to be assessed online and then to get back to F2F assessments with no previous experience of them. Teachers and tutors should prepare students with mock tests, or the institution should give them chance to choose between the two options.

7.1.8. Overall experience with emergency remote learning

As the end of the interviews was approaching, it seemed appropriate to draw some conclusions about the overall experience with emergency remote learning of the past two years. Despite the feelings of uncertainty and dissatisfaction already expressed throughout the interviews, and the admissions about negative or less positive experiences students had gone through, they all recognised the efforts and dedication made by all, students and tutors/professors. The university, as stated by some students, “did everything they could to make our experience a positive one”. When listening to the students’ words, the fact that they related their hesitations

about the online adventure during the pandemic to their desire to experience the campus life they could not experience to the full for two years, half of their university undergraduate period, is understandable. As a matter of fact, when enrolling in an undergraduate university programme, students expect they will be making friends, joining associations, being part of a community, “so we need to be F2F”.

The results showed a high level of awareness and understanding about the need to learn online during the COVID-19 emergency, which was accepted as the only possible choice in order to adapt to the current situation and maintain interaction among students and teachers. Moreover, the students in their final year(s) at university, who experienced both modalities, i.e. “before” COVID-19 on-campus and online learning during the pandemic, had the feeling they had been the “guinea pigs” of a new type of education which they are sure will be established in future years. In other words, students recognised that such an extraordinary time has changed the way we should think about education, and online learning “will become normality over time”.

7.1.9. Personal preference for F2F or remote learning

This section analyses the most crucial aspect because, at this point, students were asked to provide their conclusive preference between the two learning modes. The findings were surprising and came full circle. Almost all students who had never experienced F2F learning because of the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, expressed their preference for F2F learning because there is more interaction, participation and greater learning, although these additional explanations are debatable if the premises were that they had never experienced full on-campus learning programmes since they started university. However, all responses in favour of F2F classes expressed the need to meet people in person and the importance of keeping motivated through social interaction. Even though some students were aware that they did not have “many terms of comparison”, they would choose on-campus classes “considering that [online classes] were the only option we had last year”.

Nobody expressed a desire to pursue an online degree after graduation, whereas many students, especially those in their final year, would rather opt for hybrid programmes which combine both online and F2F environments (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Reasons, Valdares, and Slavkin, 2005; Means et al., 2010; Lack, 2013). Most of the explanations reported the ease of online classes and the convenience of pre-recorded lectures but recognised the importance of the social exchange and communication which occur only F2F. “Studying online has many advantages”, a student added, but sometimes it is better to have people around. “In the UK, for example, many students are non-residential, and we need this type of community, for this reason we need to study F2F”. Once again, the issue of sociability and social objectives recurs in students’ opinions, which clearly recalls the discussion about motivation in learning, i.e. whether it is for extrinsic purposes, such as passing an exam or obtaining a degree, or intrinsic motivation, i.e. related to purposes other than academic ones. In the next pages, I am going to explore the correlation between the perception of the effectiveness of online learning and crucial factors such as motivation, personality and autonomy. The findings in my study suggest that online learning is perceived as effective, but students still need the physical presence of peers and instructors in order to feel engaged in the process of learning. These results suggest there should be further investigation into the type of motivation and personalities of students who preferred F2F or hybrid options, and to what extent these traits differ in students who preferred online lessons in the pre COVID-19 pandemic.

The only concern about the answers in favour of hybrid courses is that students think that online and F2F courses are interchangeable, and they could choose between these “double options” on a daily basis, according to their diary or mental/physical health, “depending on my mental state” or “if I am sick”. A student, for example, presumed that a hybrid lesson would include both students in the classroom and students online, which, as reported by the student, would result in organisational problems for the tutors. Of course, this is not how a hybrid

learning setting works. The teaching method where a group of students attend the class F2F and simultaneously other students may follow the same class remotely from home is what research (Raes et al., 2020; Butz et al., 2016; Hastie et al., 2010) calls a Hybrid Virtual Classroom, thus referring to the location of the teaching rather than its modality, which is designed for adult and working students who need more flexibility, as well as students who are ill or abroad for a some time. Conversely, hybrid learning, or blended learning as it is often referred to in the literature, (Eyal and Gil, 2021; Zhao and Breslow, 2013), combines both online and F2F components (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Reasons, Valdares, and Slavkin, 2005; Means, et al., 2010; Lack, 2013) with the intention of compensating for the respective shortcomings and deficiencies of each (Wong, 2008). After the online learning experience imposed by the pandemic, several students around the world have informally tested some types of hybrid learning, in particular what Twigg (2003) called “the replacement model”, characterised by a reduction of F2F lessons, replaced by online activities. As mentioned, in the case of the students interviewed, F2F lectures were replaced by online pre-recorded videos.

However, with reference to students’ preferences for hybrid learning where F2F and online classes were wrongly assumed to be interchangeable, prior research actually focused on a model called HyFlex (Beatty, 2013) which was designed in order to go beyond the “traditional blended learning approach” (Beatty, 2019, p. 14). This model combines both the hybrid component of the F2F and online learning modalities, with the flexibility component of choosing between attending F2F, synchronous classes and opting for online, asynchronous activities. In a further development, the HyFlex approach was implemented (Beatty, 2019) with a further option: “some HyFlex courses allow for further choice in the online delivery mode, allowing both synchronous and asynchronous participation” (p. 43). This model of hybrid learning surely represents the ideal approach students imagine when talking about the situation after the pandemic. In fact, in many institutions this type of both hybrid and flexible learning was applied

in the period between the lockdown and the “getting back to normal” conditions, in order to avoid disruption in a still confused and uncertain situation after two years in a pandemic. The literature suggests many other formats combining online and F2F learning and providing students with the opportunity of choosing between the two delivery modes: for example, Flexible Hybrid (He, Gajski, Farkas, and Warschauer, 2014), Multi-Options (Edler, 2018) and Flexibly Accessible Learning Environment (Hill, Yang, Kim, Oh, Choi, Branch, Lee, and Keisler, 2018), among others.

The main downside of these models is that they were all implemented before COVID-19, when the choice of participating in person, synchronously online or asynchronously at home was up to the students. In extraordinary circumstances, such freedom of choice has been shown to give rise to pitfalls which need to be addressed. The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred a debate on how to ensure students’ learning experiences have stability and remain satisfactory during emergency situations and beyond, opening up new perspectives for the future of education. This shows just how important it is to define new educational models which take into consideration several components: mental and physical health issues caused by exhausting/exasperating circumstances, the social purpose assigned to interaction and on-campus experience, the use and good command of technology, accessibility and inclusion. All these elements must be met in order to contribute to the discussion on the effectiveness of the learning process. All things considered, the additional aim of this study is to make a contribution to a new way of conceiving and approaching online language learning. To do that, I have extended my investigation to the crucial factors involved in online language learning of Italian as an FL, with the intention of comparing students who opted for studying the language online before COVID-19, and those who *adapted* to the online learning environment during the pandemic but who had preferred to study F2F. The findings will provide useful insights for the implementation of a new model of learning, which will be analysed in my concluding section.

7.2. Questionnaires about Motivation, Personality and Autonomy during Emergency Remote Learning

Differences in student characteristics may influence the effectiveness and success of online learning (Ritonga and Ramadhani, 2020). In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of online language learning, I am going to examine the factors involved in learning which I had already investigated before COVID-19. The aim is to compare the results before the pandemic and during emergency remote learning, with the intention of drawing conclusions about online learning and its effectiveness during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. This part of my research involved 19 university students of Italian as an FL who had also participated in the interviews. It consisted of one questionnaire, incorporating the 5 parts of the first questionnaire administered before COVID-19, but with some minor amendments in section I, about general information, which was reduced to data related to age, gender and level of linguistic knowledge. Sections from II to IV, which assessed motivation, personality and autonomy in learning through a Likert scale, remained unchanged in terms of statements presented, but the hypotheses from which I drew conclusions were amended in the light of COVID-19 In fact, the prerequisite for participants was that they had switched to distance learning due to the pandemic, so they could not be considered if they had intentionally opted for online learning, but rather they had to be learners who had been required to study online due to extenuating circumstances. On the contrary, the rationale for using the same questionnaires but with different hypotheses was that all students had had to *adapt* to the new online learning context. Consequently, all research questions and hypotheses were reformulated according to the aim of examining the association between the crucial factors following the adjustment by students to studying remotely during the pandemic.

All data were collected through the online survey software Qualtrics. Questionnaires were administered from July 2021 to March 2022.

7.2.1. Motivation during COVID-19

Meeter et al. (2020) stated that a decrease in social interaction can have a negative impact on motivation. Students can also become less active and bored in an online setting, which can lead to a lack of motivation (Faridah et al., 2020). However, if students were interested in what they were learning, intrinsic motivation remained high during the COVID-19 emergency (Goksel, 2021). Previous studies indicated that online students are more intrinsically motivated than students studying on campus (Huett et al. 2008; Shroff and Vogel 2009; Wighting et al. 2008), although for chronological reasons these results did not consider the negative impact on mental health which have characterised the COVID-19 pandemic (Ferrucci et al., 2020), such as anxiety, depression, and stress (Cao et al., 2020; Lakhan, Agrawal, and Sharma, 2020; Mudenda, 2021). I also contributed to the pre-COVID-19 research by showing that online students were intrinsically motivated to learn Italian, as they showed a positive attitude towards learning for pleasure rather than for others' acceptance. The objective of this section was to investigate the students' motivation while studying Italian during Emergency Remote Learning.

Table 5, below, shows all statements sorted according to type of motivation, with the related answers to the statements reported as well. In particular, as for the results before COVID-19, I analysed both intrinsic motivation as the action of learning Italian "because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable" (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 55) and extrinsic motivation, i.e. learning to obtain some reward or external outcome. I also incorporated the L2 Motivational Self System theorised by Dörnyei (2009) which includes the "Ideal L2 self", the "Ought-to Self" and the "L2 Learning experience". The "Ideal L2 self" is an important motivational construct because it represents the L2 learners' ideal image of themselves in the future, therefore it provides a motivational push to learn a language (Peng, 2015). Furthermore, L2 Learning Experience is connected to the learning process, which can intrinsically influence the students' motivations

to learn. Finally, the Ought-to L2 Self has been grouped in the extrinsic motivation section as it concerns the external approval or imposition to learn the language.

Field	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Intrinsic Motivation					
Count (I like Italian language and culture.)				1	14
Count (I think learning Italian is important in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers.)				6	9
Count (I like TV programmes and films made in Italy.)		1	2	9	3
Count (I like/ I'd like to travel to Italy.)			1	2	12
Count (Learning Italian is important to me because I plan to travel to Italy in the future.		1	3	3	8
Intrinsic Motivation and L2 learning process					

Count (I find learning Italian really interesting.)			1	5	9
Count (I really enjoy learning Italian.)	1			8	6
Count (I really like the actual process of learning Italian.)		1	1	6	7
Count (I think time passes faster while studying Italian.)	2	2	4	4	3
Extrinsic Motivation					
Count (Studying Italian can be important to me because I think I'll need it for further studies.)		2	5	6	2
Count (Studying Italian is important to me in order to achieve a personally important goal (e.g.: to obtain a degree or scholarship).)			2	4	9
Count (I have to learn Italian because I don't	3	1	3	5	3

want to fail the Italian course.)					
Ideal L2 self					
Count (I can imagine myself giving a presentation in Italian successfully to the public in the future.)		1	4	4	6
Count (I can imagine myself speaking Italian in the future with foreign friends.)			2	5	8
Count (I can imagine that in the future in a café with light music, a foreign friend and I will be chatting in Italian casually over a cup of coffee.)			3	6	6
Ought-to L2 self					
Count (I study Italian because close friends of mine think it is important.)	5	9	1		
Count (Studying Italian is important to me in order to gain the	9	4	1		1

approval of my family.)					
Count (My image of how I want to use Italian in the future is mainly influenced by my parents and/or friends.)	9	6			
Count (I consider learning Italian important because the people I respect think that I should do it.)	5	7	2	1	
Count (My dreams of how I want to use Italian in the future are the same as those of my parents.)	8	4	2		1

The findings in Table 5 show that students during Emergency Remote Learning remained intrinsically motivated and, as for the results before COVID-19, learners showed “a favourable attitude toward the target language community, possibly a wish to integrate and adapt to a new target culture through use of the language” (Gardner, 1985, p. 54), namely integrative motivation. Students positively responded to the L2 learning experience except for the statement “I think time passes faster while studying Italian”, which showed a variation in the responses. The Ideal L2 Self was also positively scored, reinforcing the results about intrinsic motivation.

Students were also found to be extrinsically motivated, with only the statement “I have to learn Italian because I don’t want to fail the Italian course” providing some variation. Conversely, my findings showed a negative correlation with the Ought-to L2 self, which suggests that students were engaged in the course for academic purposes strictly connected to their personal desire to learn Italian and pursue a studying path within the area of Italian Studies, but not for external approval or due to imposition.

In conclusion, students remained highly motivated both for personal reasons and academic purposes during the pandemic, because their attitude towards the language and integrative motivation were so high that the learning context did not affect their learning process. Students were able to adapt to the context as long as their learning needs were temporarily met and maintained, through fair assessments, assignments and oral practice. Of course, the confidence students had in the role of their tutors and institution was also crucial to keep their motivation high during emergency remote learning. However, if we consider social integration in higher education communities as an important component to the academic engagement of students (Nukpe, 2012), the lack of social interaction for a long period could lead to a decrease in motivation.

It seems clear that, when students’ academic purposes and expectations are met, the temporary learning context becomes less important, provided that institutions guarantee the learning and a certain amount of social interaction. These findings apply well to a learning environment such as higher education, where students are strongly motivated in what they learn and are more “independent by age” and therefore can maintain a high symbiotic level of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. On the other hand, these results do not contribute to the discussion around emergency remote learning and motivation in lower levels of education such as primary and secondary schools, where students are younger and less independent in their learning, and very probably not very driven by a desire to learn (a foreign language or another

subject) in compulsory education. Thus, the implications and recommendations to avoid a decrease in motivation might be harder to formulate, as well as the strategies to be adopted.

7.2.2. Personality during COVID-19

The research objective of this paragraph is to analyse the personality traits of students who were forced to study remotely during the pandemic and compare the findings with those collected before the COVID-19 emergency with the intention of better highlighting the differences between online learning and emergency remote learning and support my research idea about the effectiveness of online language learning when certain requisites are met. Personality was assessed using the shortened version of the Big Five Inventory (Rammstedt and John, 2007), a 10-item inventory ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). There is evidence that personality plays a role in the ways students adapt to new learning settings (Dikaya et al., 2021) and being highly motivated alone is not a sufficient precondition to accepting remote learning. In the previous paragraph I analysed students' motivation and reported that students maintained high levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations during emergency remote learning. In this paragraph I am going to expand the discussion on personality traits and online learning by focusing on the adaptive trait imposed by the transition to online learning during such an uncertain time (Audet et al., 2021). In the interviews, students showed their ability to adapt to remote learning because they had a high level of understanding about the emergency and the need to avoid disruption to their education, therefore they were aware that online learning was the only option available at the time. However, students expressed a clear preference for F2F or hybrid learning, but not online learning. The reasons were mainly connected to their need for social interaction with peers and teachers. These findings paved the way for further investigation by intersecting them with the results on personality traits that I already examined in the "before COVID-19" part (See Chapter Four). Accordingly, due to the high level of adaptation of students during the pandemic as reported in

the interviews, I am going to investigate certain hypotheses on personality traits which might be associated with students' adaptation to online learning.

Starting from the construct that individuals represented by openness to experience are willing to consider alternatives, are intellectually curious, open-minded and open to new situations, the first hypothesis I can re-examine is that:

[H1] individuals with a high score in openness to experience have an aptitude for adapting to online language learning during the pandemic.

Similarly, as conscientious individuals are perceived to be achievement-oriented, efficient, reliable and persistent towards a goal, I speculate that:

[H2] students would score highly in conscientiousness and openness to experience to support their predisposition to respond and adapt better to online learning.

Moreover, as agreeableness is a characteristic of people who appear to be more trusting (Kumar and Tankha, 2022), adaptable and accommodating to unexpected circumstances and changes (Nikcevic et al., 2021; Rivers, 2021), I hypothesise that:

[H3] students, who expressed high trust and reliance towards their institutions and teachers, would score highly on agreeableness.

In contrast, I hypothesise that [H4] students would score lowly in neuroticism, given the fact that neurotic individuals feel anxious, tense, insecure, unstable, have a superficial attitude towards learning and might give up when facing difficulties, so would adapt the least to a transition to online learning.

Finally, in Chapter 4 the findings from the questionnaire showed a low score in extroversion, thereby supporting the hypothesis that introverts prefer an online learning environment, where they can learn at their own pace, whereas extroverts, who are friendly and socially active, might

prefer the company of others which is not feasible in an online context. On these premises, I support the hypothesis that:

[H5] all students who participated in this questionnaire, and who expressed a preference for F2F and hybrid learning, because they felt the need to study in groups and experience a sense of academic community, would score highly in extroversion.

Almost all participants scored highly in all traits. These findings suggest that the high levels of openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness have helped students adapt to emergency remote learning during the pandemic. Previous studies on personality and learning during COVID-19 have focused on the correlation between personality traits and stress, depression, loneliness and other psychological factors (Ikizer et al., 2022; Zacher and Rudolph, 2021; Nikcevic et al., 2021; Kowal et al., 2020) showing positive correlation with higher levels of neuroticism, openness, extraversion and agreeableness, and higher levels of stress during the pandemic (Ikizer et al, 2022). The pandemic has certainly had an impact on individuals' mental health; however, little research has focused on the adaptation of individuals to the new learning modes. Therefore, I can contribute to the research with my findings, which show a positive correlation between higher levels of openness, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness, with the inclination to adapt to the online learning format, but still with bias in favour of F2F learning. In fact, in normal conditions, extroverted students would prefer to study in groups (Lestari et. al, 2013) as already reported in Chapter 4, where I showed that introverts prefer an online learning environment. These findings provide further support for the results of this study, as I can confirm that extraverts prefer F2F classes and the company of others, conditions which cannot occur in an online learning setting.

In terms of H3, about neuroticism, my findings do not support the hypothesis, as most participants scored highly in this trait, therefore suggesting there is no correlation between

students' level of adaptation to online learning and neuroticism. However, we can also examine the findings from another point of view: first, high neuroticism has been shown to have a correlation with high levels of anxiety during COVID-19 (Mengual et al., 2021), as well as with higher stress and feelings of loneliness (Ikizer et al., 2022). More broadly, this trait is strictly associated with mental health (Costa and McCrae, 1992) which has been affected during the pandemic: imposed social isolation and distancing, physical illness and losses, the fear of being infected by the virus and uncertainty about new "normalities" are all aspects which might have influenced individuals' psychological health since the COVID-19 outbreak. The general assumption is that introverts who prefer to stay at home, would score highly in neuroticism. However, this assumption, which sees a correlation between high neuroticism and low extraversion has not been supported by previous research (Malouff, Thorsteinsson and Schutte, 2005). In fact, I could find no correlation between these two traits: in Chapter 4 we found that people who chose to study online before COVID-19 scored highly in introversion, but not all of them scored highly in neuroticism, confirming poor association. Conversely, what my study suggests is the correlation between students' neuroticism and the feeling of *acceptance* of the move to emergency remote learning. Students scored highly in neuroticism, and although they adapted to online learning during COVID-19, they would still not embrace remote learning outside the emergency, which suggests they would not accept the new delivery mode as a permanent solution.

7.2.3. Autonomy during COVID-19

Most students agreed with the statement about being responsible for their own learning (40% strongly agreed, 54% agreed, variation 0), with similar results about trying to resolve a problem by themselves before asking teachers or online peers for help (26.6% strongly agreed, 54% agreed), self-directing their progress by regularly reviewing their learning and checking what they had learned (46.56% agreed) as well as being aware of their weaknesses (54% agreed).

Moreover, the students declared that they enjoy tasks where they can learn on their own (66.6% agreed) and further investigate the culture of the foreign language they are learning (46.6% agreed, 40% strongly agreed). While all these findings would seem to suggest a general good level of autonomy and readiness for self-directed learning, there are also some contrasting statements if we focus on the aspect of self-selecting the learning content. In fact, even provided with the right material, students would prefer not to spend some time studying alone (33.3% would not, 6.6% strongly would not and 26.6% cannot even tell) and the majority of them (47% and 13% strongly) do not read a certain amount of Italian material every day. In terms of F2F time with a teacher, there was no clearly preferred answer: no definitive response surfaced from the statement “I can learn without teacher supervision”. The students’ answers were equally spread across all items; on the one hand, some students, especially those in their first year at university, might feel the need for teacher supervision, but on the other hand the forced online settings might have exposed some other students to the idea of being more autonomous in their learning without further supervision. The findings expressed an unclear stance when compared to the results before COVID-19, where participants were more consistent in believing they did not need any teacher supervision when learning Italian online (63.64% agreed and 6% strongly agreed). Nonetheless, the teacher is considered not *only* as a counsellor, a helper and a guide by most students (53%), who showed they like learning the language on their own, but not because they “know best how to learn” (53%). The last two statements with adverbs such as “only” and “best” might have been perceived as too strong and firm, thus influencing the responses of students who feel they could learn on their own but still acknowledge the role of their teacher.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of students’ perception of their level of autonomy during emergency remote learning. First and foremost, the findings would appear to indicate that these learners feel responsible for their own learning, their progress, and their

weaknesses, which suggest a good level of autonomy and readiness for self-directed learning. However, being independent and responsible is not synonymous with studying at home alone, but rather is “the capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others" (Dam et al., 1990). Students were forced to isolate and distance, renouncing the social dimension of learning within a physical classroom, which might have distorted their idea of being autonomous in their learning. This implication is further confirmed as students appeared to be less autonomous in selecting their learning content, which might imply that the teacher should be responsible for selecting the learning material and content in an academic programme. Yet, the students’ attitude towards the role of their teacher is somehow confused and unclear. The general conclusion is that the switch from F2F to online classes because of the pandemic generated confusion around the idea of “studying alone”, “being alone in their own studying” and the real meaning of autonomy. The learning content, which in the past was handed out, was provided online during emergency remote learning through videos and links on the Canvas platform. The physical presence of teachers had moved online. All these changes contributed to influencing the responses.

7.3. Leadership and teaching in disruptive times: interviews with staff members

In the previous pages I investigated emergency remote learning from the point of view of university students of Italian as an FL at the UoB. All the teaching methodologies, technological tools and assessment changes that students described and experienced during the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 came as a result of actions put in place by educational leaders, “the pinch point in the system” (Harris and Jones, 2020, p. 244), who were asked to implement educational policies quickly in order to address the issue of moving teaching online while maintaining high quality education levels (Chitpin and Karoui, 2021). Teachers were also involved in the implementation of ERL policies (Ahmad et al., 2020), as they adopted online teaching to ensure learning continuity during the pandemic.

The following case study examines how challenges and issues arisen during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK were addressed through the experiences of four participants, all lecturers and teachers in the area of Modern Languages. The recordings of the interviews and their audio transcripts have been stored on Zoom and can be accessed through a link protected by a passcode. Transcripts are also included in the Appendices section. Their participation in the study was voluntary, based on their availability in terms of time, and the interviews were conducted and recorded on Zoom. Participants' contributions and answers provided a better insight into academic decision-making in times of crisis, as well as a better understanding of the students' perception of ERL through the practical perspective of stakeholders who were actively involved in trying to keep education effective and accessible during the COVID-19 emergency.

The questions covered the following areas:

- Government and Institutional crisis management to ensure learning continuity.
- Online teaching practices and methodologies to maintain the quality of education.
- Perception of ERL and future perspectives.

7.3.1. Government and Institutional crisis management to ensure continuity of learning

Even though the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic on 11 March 2020, stay-at-home orders and the closure of schools and universities in the UK arrived later, between 18-23 March 2020, followed by a heterogeneous response to COVID-19 across the four nations of the UK (Tatlow et al., 2021).

Respondents reported very little direction by the Government on higher education and how it should be managed during the pandemic. However, institutional leadership was described as being "much better than the National", and despite the lack of information coming from the Government, the Institution intervened quite promptly by stopping F2F teaching and facilitating

the move to online learning even before Government announced lockdowns all over the country. The Government was generally perceived to have responded slowly to the actual pandemic but, by the time the closure announcement was made, this coincided with the end of the teaching term before the Easter vacation, which gave all staff enough time to prepare for the exam period and to manage the move online in time for the following academic year. This was a considerable advantage when compared to other countries which were still in the middle of the semester at the time of lockdowns, such as Germany and Italy, where teaching had to move from being F2F to online within days, and teachers who were not digitally competent struggled to come to terms with the move to online learning (respondent 1).

On the contrary, according to the respondents, the UoB was partially ready to implement remote learning, because the institution had already embedded some technological tools and platforms (Canvas) into their teaching practice, and the Modern Languages department was "one of the pioneers in the online learning programmes", respondent 4 stated. The university also provided professional development courses in technology and remote education through some helpful short videos set up by the Higher Education Futures Institute (HEFi) Team, as well as meetings and sessions which included different aspects of online teaching in terms of both how to use technology and how to change and to adopt new educational styles and approaches in an online context, which is very different from teaching on-campus, for example through relaxation sections, tips and techniques on how to use voice in online classes, and how to manage time during the online sessions.

Of course, the respondents were all aware that the move from on-campus to online classes needed some adjustments and posed some unpredictable challenges for educational leaders, even in "an innovative institution" (respondent 4) as UoB, when dealing with such unprecedented circumstances.

An early concern which arose very quickly after learning was moved online in order to ensure learning continuity was the issue of data protection and the use of third-party service providers to deliver classes online, in particular Zoom, which in the German educational system, for example, was a big problem, respondent 2 stated. UoB relied on the Data Protection Law (or Data Protection Act 2018), that is the national implementation of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which came into force on 25 May 2018, and "sets out how personal data must be collected, handled and stored to protect people's privacy"[10]. Accordingly, the university could use Zoom as an external video-conferencing tool, for its valuable service in terms of usability and functionality (as reported by David Deighton in the UoB Zoom Guidance on 23/04/2020)[11], in addition to the other standard tools already in use at the institution[12].

Online assessment, inclusivity and accessibility to technology, as well as the use of technology by students and staff members were perceived as the other main challenges to ensure the continuity of education.

7.3.2. Online teaching practices and methodologies to maintain the quality of education

None of the respondents had experience with remote teaching prior to COVID-19. However, they did everything possible to assist students in the move to online learning. The main challenges and actions which were taken during ERL to maintain and guarantee the quality of education concerned the provision of materials and classes online, the well-being and workload of both staff and students, how to guarantee the year abroad, keeping motivation during ERL and how to assess students online.

[10] https://www.itgovernance.co.uk/dpa-2018
[11] See https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/alumni/2020-lockdown/zoom-guidance.pdf
[12] Namely Microsoft Teams, part of the Office 365 service offering, and Skype or Skype for Business.

Provision of online materials and classes

All learning content and materials were uploaded on Canvas, a platform which supported learning and teaching at UoB prior to the pandemic and which the students already had familiarity with. Each course was presented with a welcome video, some guidance to navigate through the contents of the course and extra material for students who could not attend the learning session for whatever reasons (including technical issues). In the analysis of students' interviews, one of the main innovative changes reported by students was the replacement and the breaking of F2F 45 to 50-minute lectures with shorter videos on Canvas, so that the students could engage with one video at a time and re-watch them at their own pace. This is an approach that tutors and learning educators also recognised as effective and which could be retained in future learning practices. As respondent 3 suggested, this approach "is also in line with the way students are learning today, because obviously the deep learning approach is fading. Students are more used to it, kind of a more horizontal approach to learn. […] They are more used to switching from one task to the next in a very rapid way, in a very quick way given to the fact that they are now exposed to online digital technologies that have changed the way we learn. […] In a way it reflects this new way of learning and of dealing with consuming information", a statement which finds evidence in the analysis already explored in the previous pages, were I introduced the concept of "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001) and Gen-Z, a generation of students who need more effective digital learning methods. As a matter of fact, this approach to learning is what Hayles (2007) calls "generational shift of cognitive modes" (p. 197) from the deep attention of focusing on a single item at a time, to the hyper attention of "switching focus rapidly among different task" (p. 187). Broadly speaking, it is the online environment, and not only the generational divide, which promotes such a "hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning" (Carr, 2010, p. 108). Educators need to be fully aware of what internet and technology represent, as was the case with the respondent, in

order to implement new teaching strategies and methodologies with the aim of maintaining the quality of education.

Real-time classes were moved online using the Zoom platform, which the respondents found to be the most efficient of all the conference platforms available, as compared to Microsoft Teams or Skype, for instance. It was perceived as easy to use, even when it had never been used before the pandemic. The breakout room function, for example, allowed teachers to group the students according to their language level and differentiate their tasks, while moving across the groups and monitor their independent work without interfering or putting any pressure on them. We know, as the results from the interviews have shown, that students preferred F2F classes, but from a pedagogical and teaching perspective both students and teachers interviewed agreed on Zoom as an effective online tool which could be retained in future teaching practices.

Well-being and workload

The term of “digital natives”, already mentioned before, was also mentioned by respondent 2 when describing students as “much more at ease with moving to the technology than probably the staff were”, therefore the managing of technology was not perceived as the main concern of students during the first lockdown and ERL, Actions and strategies put in place by the wellbeing team aimed at supporting both students’ and staff’s psychological well-being through sessions where people could talk about their problems during isolation. Considering the pandemic context, the inclusion of well-being and mental health matters with the challenges of online learning by educational leaders and educators is in fact a prerogative of ERL, where people were confined and isolated at home and could not have the support of the community, compared to online learning were none of these elements exists.

The first months of the pandemic clearly involved many changes in terms of policies, information and guidelines on how to use technology, which were communicated quickly and clearly through emails, but respondents perceived the information overload as sometimes overwhelming and time consuming. For example, in the preparation of online lectures, teachers and lecturers had to keep track of all emails received by the School Head of Education and HeFi concerning instructions on how to use the online tools and how to deliver the classes, but producing an online session could also have been too intense for some teachers who are not used to recording themselves knowing that “lots of students will watch that” (respondent 3) and the videos will stay on the platform for the foreseeable future, or do not feel at ease in front of a camera. Specifically, respondent 1 who already had experience of recording for foreign documentaries, and therefore had a personal inclination to be in front of the cameras, recognised that it all depends on the individual’s perspective, just as using technology and online tools depend on a personal aptitude to them.

Another problem related to staff workload was the number of emails received on a daily basis and the need to respond to them “with very quick speed and not letting emails stack up” (respondent 1), as well as guarantee efficient communication with students and being always available. The risk of additional workload was well managed by respondents who set boundaries and tried to respond to emails during the standard hours or, by contrast, on Saturdays and Sundays depending on personal schedules, in order to ensure that students got answers extremely quickly. Positive feedback about the way the interviews’ participants had managed to respond to the large number of emails was given during the interviews with students, where the communication with staff members was perceived to be efficient and quick. The university also provided group tutorial sessions where students could communicate with teachers and tutors.

Year abroad

One of the biggest challenges that higher education institutions faced due to the disruption that COVID-19 brought, especially within the departments of modern languages, was to lead and support students who could not go on their year abroad (which consists of spending up to a full academic year in one or more foreign countries), or students who actually managed to go abroad, but were in lockdown as soon as they arrived. In order to ensure a valuable alternative to the year abroad, the department of modern languages at UoB arranged an online provision to replace the year abroad experience from September 2020. The academic leaders appointed for the role of designing the virtual year abroad, a new option that recreated the year abroad experience but in a virtual context, managed in a very short time to put together a package which involved language cafes and research-based language tutorials led by native speakers of the foreign languages, so that students could engage with the target language with native speakers online. The conversation classes were organised in small groups to allow students to practice the spoken language and encourage them to be more active during the online provision, and because the teaching approach used during the sessions was understanding and very caring about the students' needs, it allowed students to engage in a very relaxed way despite their concerns about their final assessments and fear of being academically in jeopardy. As a matter of fact, in terms of assessing the students, the virtual year abroad was designed to meet the assessment requirements for the completion of the academic year and go into the final year. Moreover, the approach put in place aimed to establish a rapport with the students, making sure it created an "open house" for discussion and for talking which facilitated an atmosphere where people would contribute very freely. Attendance was monitored through an attendance system where tutors had to take the attendance and report it to the academic leader on a weekly basis, which also allowed the latter to have weekly contact and be present for any concerns and issues. In conclusion, the online provision for the year abroad was designed with the intention of being inclusive and to activate the language skills at the same time.

However, if we consider the interviews collected from students critically, they still raised some concerns about the limitations of online provisions when it came to providing students with the F2F or real-life experience of going abroad. The approach put in place in such short time by the university was remarkable, and it addressed the main challenges of ensuring both the continuity and the quality of education, mainly to provide students with the FL speaking practice through inclusive approaches. On the other hand, looking at the bigger picture in terms of ERL and online learning, its effectiveness and how to design an approach which could be used for future perspective, it is important to bear these results in mind for my final discussion.

Motivation

Keeping students motivated during ERL emerged in one interview as challenging, especially among students who had a lower level of language proficiency or were perceived as not completely involved in the online learning process, for example undergraduate students who enrolled in on-campus degrees and suddenly had to move to an online provision. I have previously observed that a decrease or lack of social interaction for a certain period of time can have a negative impact on motivation (Meeter et al., 2020; Faridah et al., 2020). However, the results from students' questionnaires on motivation showed no correlation between ERL and motivation, suggesting that students who were motivated to learn the language kept their level of motivation high during the pandemic. Moreover, students recognised the crucial role that tutors and the institution had during the move to online learning in keeping their motivation from decreasing. As a matter of fact, in higher education communities, "the creation of a challenging but supportive academic environment is also highly important" (Nukpe, 2012, p. 14), as well as a relationship of trust between student and tutor.

In particular, respondent 4, who mentioned motivation as a challenging factor during ERL, was aware that during F2F sessions a more "friendly environment" was perceived, which made

students more engaged and kept them motivated. The teacher felt that all the positive aspects of being on campus and experiencing university life had just disappeared in the move online. Students would keep their cameras and microphones off during the online sessions, or not reply to the teacher's direct questions or express personal opinions. Borrowing Citton's words from his *Ecology of Attention* (2017), "the sharing of presential attention represents an essential dimension of the pedagogical experience" (p. 97) which disappeared during ERL.

In order to keep students motivated, the teacher stated: "I've tried to use as many online tools as possible in order to give each students a chance to have a preferable online tool to use during the online sessions or during the autonomous learning that they were required to do by themselves, so that they could find more personal ways to study, for example." This point of view by the respondent is in line with the answers given by students when they stated their need to live the campus experience, but this time viewed from a teacher's perspective, which allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the matter.

Assessment

When asked if the curriculum and course content were changed due to the COVID-19 crisis, the respondents mentioned changes in the assessment delivery methods and, therefore, evaluation criteria.

When the lectures were moved online in the form of pre-recorded videos uploaded on Canvas, synchronous classes were moved to Zoom and the module specifications remained the same throughout, the assessment outcomes and measures had to go through some changes. The assessment in modern languages involved in-class delivery of test papers in a controlled environment where a large number of students would gather in a large room. Of course, this could not be possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. An identical assessment could not be conducted at home in front of a camera when tutors and lecturers could not realistically control

the environment and what happened behind the other cameras. A take-home paper was therefore decided upon as a replacement, and the rationale supporting this form of assessment was that students had already had so much disruption, especially those in their final year who could not attend their year abroad due to the pandemic restrictions, that it was necessary to avoid any form of negative impact that COVID-19 had had on their ability to perform in an exam and being assessed accordingly.

When moving an assessment online via a paper that needs 48 hours to be completed at home, the abilities to perform the target language without access to any technology cannot be tested anymore, because students could clearly rely on online tools and technologies as aids to support their assessment. Therefore, the content of the course in preparation for the assessments also needed to be adapted and tasks had to be accommodated in order to enhance self-reflection on the language in use. Respondent 3 suggested: “instead of asking the students to do grammar exercises like filling the gaps […] where obviously a students could have found the answer online, we prepared tasks which were more like problem solving and self-reflective, so sometimes they had to explain: what kind of tense was needed and why. So, there were open questions which made the task slightly more robust, but also, I think, more effective in a way, because it really encouraged the students to know what they were doing and to reflect on possible options”.

The take-home paper represented an effective assessment delivery mode during COVID-19 and made it possible to reflect on alternative methodologies for assessing students on different employability skills, in particular problem-solving and self-reflection abilities. By embedding the assessment of employability skills in the HE curricula through a problem-based approach, students are allowed to engage in a meaningful way not only to solve a problem, but also to reflect on the skills they develop (Miller and Konstantinou, 2022).

7.3.3. Perception of ERL and future perspectives

At the end of the tutors' interviews, I made reference to a passage which I have included in Chapter Four, when stating the difference between ERL and online learning:

> The sudden and unexpected transition to online learning during the lockdown from March 2020 was meant to be a "temporary solution to an immediate problem" (Hodges et al., 2020), and was characterised by uncertainty (Bozkurt et al., 2020, p. 4). Accordingly, it is not to be mistaken for online or distance learning per se. In fact, the appropriate term to refer to learning carried out during the pandemic in response to the closure of schools and institutions is "emergency remote learning and teaching" (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020) which Bozkurt et al. (2020) deliberately classify as "a branch of distance education as in the case of online learning, e-learning, m-learning, or home schooling".

In light of the above differentiation, the discussion moved to whether or not COVID-19 had had a negative impact on the perception of online learning.

According to the respondents, the pandemic brought a more open view around online learning than before. At the beginning of the pandemic, the perception around online learning was negative, but because the entire experience of being isolated at home was perceived as negative. The results gathered from both students and staff members' interviews showed a preference for F2F teaching, not related to the online learning potential *per se*, which was perceived to be effective, but rather as a personal preference which, for instance, also depends on the extent of the fees paid by students and their expectations around the campus life they wanted to experience. For teachers, F2F classes are perceived as more authentic, especially when teaching foreign languages. Nonetheless, online learning was not perceived as negative because of the pandemic. On the contrary, its potential has been understood, with some limitations and challenges.

Of course, ERL accelerated the transfer of teaching and learning to educational online settings and many individuals were not prepared for it, but many elements brought by online learning seemed to actually have the opposite effect to negative. For example, ERL provided all stakeholders with the chance to familiarise themselves with different online tools which were not known before either by teachers and learners, which greatly helped and enriched the teaching practice and learning experience, and this can be incorporated in campus teaching especially in modern languages. Moreover, leading educators and tutors were somehow compelled to design assessments which encouraged students so reflect on the language. Flexibility in terms of time management and commuting, the use of digital material instead of paper are some of the positive aspects of online learning.

The COVID-19 emergency changed the way we consider online and distance learning and institutions are changing the way the courses are structured accordingly. If we look back at the questions asked at the beginning of the thesis, which presented online learning as a way to make education more accessible around the world, we can conclude that online provisions are fundamental for the inclusion of many students which could be left out, in developing countries for example, or international students who face travel restrictions due to visa requirements. Online education is not a replacement for campus-based and F2F learning, but, provided that access to technology and the internet is guaranteed, “it does enable institutions to reach spaces that they couldn't reach before”, as respondent 1 suggested.

7.4. Conclusions on the effectiveness of online language learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

The aim of the present chapter was to conduct an exhaustive investigation into the effectiveness of online language learning during the pandemic from the point of view of higher education students and teaching staff who had to move to remote learning during the COVID-19 emergency. Participants’ recruitment, the administration of the questionnaires and the

interviews were conducted online and thus sometimes caused some complication. After more than one year in a pandemic where people were forced to stay at home as much as possible and study remotely, students' willingness to participate in the study might have been negatively affected by the large number of studies on the effects of the pandemic on the student population. I considered this emotional component as a factor which might have affected participation size. Therefore, I prioritised collecting qualitative over quantitative data for the purpose of my research. As stated in the introduction, the main objective was to investigate the effectiveness of online learning of Italian as an FL, but at such an extraordinary time when people had to experience online learning regardless of their personal inclination to study remotely, it was crucial to examine the phenomenon as a whole, to “create a deeper and richer picture of what is going on” (Goodwin and Horowitz, 2002, p. 44), including the differentiation between online learning and ERL during the pandemic, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances. Therefore, the final aim of the second section of my study about COVID-19 was to carry out an analysis which took into account several components: a systematic literature review as a framework to build understanding and awareness of how the pandemic affected education and training, the social perception and opinion of people about emergency remote learning through the analysis of hashtags and tweets, and qualitative interviews with students and staff members during ERL. All these elements lend emphasis to “the quality of the analysis and the dignity, care and time taken to analyse interviews, rather than quantity” (Jensen in Baker and Edwards, 2012, p. 5).

Students’ perception of the negative or positive impact of remote learning and their future wish to opt for online or F2F must be connected to the students’ personal expectation of their university experience, whether they only want to obtain a degree or want to have social interactions with peers. In fact, the findings demonstrated that students in their early years of studies do not doubt the effectiveness of online learning and the efforts made by lecturers and

the Institution, but they would prefer to return to campus because they have never had that type of social experience. In short, the results suggest that online learning is effective, but a certain amount of F2F interaction is still required to fulfil the students' social desires.

To have a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of online learning of Italian as an FL during the pandemic, I collected data through questionnaires for students about the factors involved in the process of learning an FL.

The results showed no correlation between emergency remote learning and motivation, suggesting that students who learn a language because they are intrinsically motivated maintained their level of motivation during the pandemic, as well as their extrinsic motivation to achieve personal and academic goals. The role of the tutors and institutions, as well as students' level of adaptation to the temporary move to online learning were crucial in order to avoid a decrease in students' motivation.

Almost all participants scored highly in all personality traits. The findings showed that students who adapted well to online learning also showed high levels of conscientiousness (which in Chapter Three was also associated with studying for academic purposes), extraversion, openness to experience and agreeableness. I can also confirm a positive correlation between the inclination to adapt to the online learning format, and higher levels of openness, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Moreover, as already stated in Chapter Three, where I reported that introverts prefer an online learning environment, I can confirm the extraverts' preference for F2F classes. Finally, I have made another important contribution to research: participants with high levels of neuroticism, probably exacerbated by the COVID-19 restrictions and feelings of uncertainty, were less inclined to *accept* online learning as a permanent learning mode beyond the pandemic.

Emergency remote learning also posed some changes in the way students perceived the idea of “studying alone” confined in their own room and space at home, with less interaction with peers, which might have wrongly affected their idea of autonomy in learning. On the one hand, the results suggest a good level of learners’ autonomy and responsibility for their own learning process, but students cannot self-select their learning content and their perception of the role of the teacher is unclear. The confused and sudden move to online learning resulted in more unclear perspectives about the role of teachers (who used to teach in person but now teach online) and the learning content. These findings provide some interesting outcomes and suggest further questions and research on autonomy during the pandemic.

Data and experiences gathered from the teaching staff confirmed and further extended the findings from students on ERL. First, educational actions to move learning online and ensure learning continuity were promptly planned at institutional level, and such proactive measures were positively acknowledged by students which recognised the efforts made by all staff members to avoid learning disruption. These included: the provision of short, pre-recorded video lectures on Canvas, which addressed and mitigated the issues around the level of attention while using technology, a problem both presented by previous research (Hayles, 2007; Citton, 2017) and reported by students’ interviews; the use of Zoom, which enabled teachers to continue their synchronous classes in much the same way as in a face-to face class and provided students with the opportunities to practise the language whilst online; the temporary solution of the virtual year abroad which solved the worldwide travelling restrictions forcing students to give up their year abroad programme. This did not replace the experience of living and studying in a foreign country but guaranteed in part the continuity of the experience. Therefore, the role of the Institution and educational leaders in designing and delivering new educational strategies in response to the pandemic crisis has been shown to be essential to the perception of the quality of the learning by both students and teaching staff.

Online assessment, which resulted in mixed perceptions by students about its benefits and reception, was analysed by staff members from an educational point of view rather than personal preference for F2F or online delivery. In planning the take-home paper solution, respondents focused more on *what* and *how* to assess students' language competence, which required a change in perspective in terms of the skills and language knowledge students were asked to focus on in their learning. In my opinion, and in relation to the argument I am developing through this thesis, this is the perfect attitude to approach online teaching: reflecting and thinking innovatively about educational strategies which fit the coming digital changes, instead of remaining firm on one's teaching practices.

The interviews were conducted between 2021 and late 2022, therefore after the initial COVID-19 crisis and sudden move to online teaching which occurred in 2020. The two-year time span had an influence on the perception of all the respondents around online learning and ERL. In fact, the findings showed positive attitudes and understanding towards ERL, which was also perceived as effective. Nonetheless, contrary to the students, 3 respondents out of the 4 educators interviewed expressed their willingness to embrace online learning and digital technology in their future learning practices where possible.

All these comments, expressing both the obstacles and the strengths of emergency remote learning, can serve as a reference to develop potential new learning models for the post COVID-19 era. Both students and educators suggested hybrid learning as a compromise between two modes which have complementary advantages and can be brought together in a single learning pattern.

I have investigated the crucial factors involved in a successful online learning environment and in the conclusion to this thesis I am going to suggest possible new models of learning beyond COVID-19. However, it is important to bear in mind that the first element which contributes to

the effectiveness of an online language learning context is for all stakeholders to have a positive attitude towards online learning.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of this thesis was to investigate the *effectiveness* of online FL learning, from the perspective of students, including their perception and satisfaction with the online FL learning experience, with a particular focus on the Italian language. Therefore, the present study entailed an examination of the characteristics of the potential successful and satisfied FL learner in online contexts, and which factors could help create a positive and effective online learning experience, to inform and ultimately lead to the implementation of high-quality and effective online FL teaching models to meet students' needs and expectations.

It was initially based on three research questions I posed to gain an understanding of the students' perception of, and satisfaction with, the effectiveness of learning Italian through the Internet and to what extent they perceived they had acquired or improved their Italian. The concept of effectiveness of learning was presented in Chapter One as deriving from satisfaction with the online learning experience and positive perceptions of the acquisition and achievement of the language learning outcomes in an online context. However, throughout the thesis, I have demonstrated that positive and negative perceptions about learner performance and academic achievement, in an online environment, largely depend on an individual's attitude towards the online delivery mode. Both groups of students from the *before* COVID-19 and *during* ERL periods, perceived they had acquired the language and found the overall online FL process to have been satisfactory. Yet, students who experienced ERL would not repeat their online experience in the future, but would rather opt for on-campus classes, even though they recognised the effectiveness of their online FL learning experience in terms of satisfaction with the overall experience and positive perception of the acquisition of the academic language objectives. This might sound as a contradiction, but actually it is a significant statement about these students' preference for in-person learning: in fact, they stated that they simply missed the on-campus experience. Therefore, negative feelings were not caused by frustration and a

perception of not accomplishing the learning outcomes or not being successful, as some scholars have argued (Berenson, Boyles, and Weaver 2008; Dziuban et al., 2015). On the contrary, the results make a new contribution to this research area by showing that the concept of *effectiveness* is intertwined with feelings that depend on extrinsic parameters, and a learner's satisfaction with the process of online FL learning might lie in needs and expectations other than academic achievements or learning outcomes, such as the need to experience on-campus life and feel a sense of academic community. In fact, all UoB students interviewed stated that they had adapted to ERL due to extenuating circumstances, but they had enrolled on on-campus HE degrees with all that these entailed, from future career prospects to campus social life and service quality expectations associated with university tuition fees (Khan and Hemsley-Brown, 2021), and therefore were not inclined to continue at a distance. Moreover, ERL and the sudden move to online learning in order to avoid disrupting education due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the following psychological effects of isolation and lack of social interaction have been shown to negatively affect people's perceptions of online/distance learning and its effectiveness, at least in 2020 and early 2021.

I have also analysed some crucial factors involved in language learning, namely motivation, personality and autonomy, in order to outline the profile of a potential successful and satisfied online FL learner. Both cohorts of students showed they had certain characteristics which differed in some ways but were similar in others. Although all students from both periods covered in the thesis were strongly motivated to learn Italian for reasons not strictly related to external gratification or academic examinations, and both scored highly in the personality traits of "conscientiousness" and "openness to experience", the results showed that online students sampled *before* COVID-19 scored more highly in introversion than those who were on-campus students prior to the pandemic. The latter, in fact, showed high levels of extraversion which can explain the need for social interaction and to return to on-campus learning.

I opened Chapter One: Introduction by reporting my personal experience as both an online learner and a teacher, presuming that online learning was not appropriate for everyone and deducing that students interested in learning an FL through technology would tend to be more positive and satisfied about their online experience. I also stated my research intention to explore the characteristics of an ideal online FL learner by analysing motivation, personality and autonomy. Following my investigation, my findings show that my initial speculations have been backed by evidence found.

In Chapter One: Introduction I also compared online and F2F learning through an analogy borrowed from Citton (2017), about the difference between a video of a pizza and a real pizza in the eyes of a hungry person, with the intention of not putting online learning on a pedestal as a substitute for F2F education. On the contrary, technology and the Internet can be a useful addition in and beyond physical classes, including considering how the pandemic has imposed the need for such educational innovation.

My findings and evidence can contribute to the development of possible models to enhance teaching in the post-pandemic era, helping institutions in the design of quality and more effective online FL courses to meet students' and teachers' needs and expectations.

8.1. Possible models to enhance teaching in the post-pandemic era

"We cannot return to the world as it was before" is the first line of the report issued by UNESCO in 2020, which puts forward nine ideas for the future of education in a post-COVID world. As a matter of fact, the temptation to return to F2F education as it was before is high (Bellei et al, 2021; Jones and Joseph, 2021; UVM Health Network, 2020). However, the challenges posed in the aftermath of the pandemic cannot be ignored. The nine concrete actions proposed in the report broadly invite practitioners to rethink education with a priority on human interaction and well-being. But above all, the International Commission responsible for the publication

acknowledges “technology, particularly digital technology that enables communication, collaboration and learning across distance, […] [as] a formidable tool, not a panacea but a source of innovation and expanded potentials” (p. 8). The nine ideas promoted in UNESCO’s report comprise some of which are close to my findings, such as ideas 1, 5 and 6 in the report: “1) value the teaching profession and teacher collaboration”, “5) protect the social spaces provided by schools”, “6) make free and opensource technologies available to teachers and students”. The following paragraphs explore each characteristic for possible models in online and distance learning practices.

8.1.1. Ensuring social and human interaction

Preserving the social spaces provided by schools was supported in the interviews by students who experienced ERL, who stated that online learning has been shown to be effective, but some F2F interaction is still required to fulfil their social and course expectations. Students adapted to but did not completely accept online learning as a future educational delivery mode. They all stated that, on a future occasion when full, on-campus provision could be guaranteed, they would rather opt for hybrid learning as a compromise option.

A misconception around online learning environments, which emerged from the questionnaires and interviews, is that they do not facilitate interaction among people. While pre-COVID, online students were unanimous in reporting a lack of interaction and speaking practice in their online FL learning experience, where teachers were not present, as a consequence of the platforms and apps they chose to study on (for example Duolingo, Babbel, YouTube), ERL participants were influenced by the “stay at home” prevention measures, which caused isolation and lack of social interaction totally unrelated to the ERL experience *per se*. As a matter of fact, classes and seminars moved to Zoom and Canvas, thus the opportunities to interact with others and practise speaking were still provided.

Moreover, a learning environment that guarantees interaction does not depend on online or offline provision, but on what Citton (2017) classifies as the “Maxim of size appropriateness”: social interaction and opportunity for conviviality lie in the size of a learning space, which needs to be kept within a limit, “beyond which it becomes impossible to constitute a ‘unified system of reciprocal beings’” (p. 99). In other words, a F2F university lecture with hundreds of students, where no learner-teacher and learner-learner interaction is guaranteed, provides a less interactive learning space than an online class on Zoom with a limited number of students.

Therefore, a possible model in the post-COVID era should first and foremost ensure social and human interaction beyond the formal concept of the “physical” classroom, including activities and methods of learning which prioritise social exchanges, not only within the physical space of a classroom, but also outside the institution and educational time. The next paragraph outlines a practical example of how to guarantee interaction both online and on-campus and include social aspects in the teaching practices.

8.1.2. Building a sense of community in online contexts

The lack of actual social interaction mentioned in the previous paragraph and already explored in Chapter Two can lead to an increased sense of isolation. This differs from what happens in F2F teaching environments and was felt even more during the pandemic, which exacerbated the feeling of being socially isolated. I also observed that the lack of social interaction in HE can result in decreasing motivation in learning. In fact, the questionnaires administered to students who experienced ERL whose results were in line with hypothesis [H5], showed that students who scored highly in extroversion and who expressed a preference for F2F, and hybrid learning felt the need to study in groups and experience a sense of academic community.

Building and promoting a sense of community (SoC) is recognised as a good strategy to reverse such feelings of isolation and consequently enhance students’ satisfaction with their

learning experience (Rovai, 2002). When students possess a strong SoC, they commit to and persist in learning more than those who feel isolated and alone (Tinto, 1993). The sense of (classroom) community was defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). Rovai (2002) expanded this definition in terms of four dimensions which are essential within a classroom, in order to promote an SoC: spirit (the feeling of being connected and bonded as friends), trust (among the members of the community), interaction and commonality of learning expectation and goals (when members of the community share a common learning purpose and “feel that their educational needs are being satisfied through active participation in the community”, p. 5). Moreover, the social dimension (Trentin, 2008) or *social presence* (Benigno and Chifari, 2007; Garrison et al., 2000) of members who built an SoC is a crucial characteristic to create a community of learning (*comunità di apprendimento).* Specifically in an online community of learning, active interaction among members is the value added (Rivoltella, 2005), and educational technologies can help create communities of learning and practice more easily and in more effective ways than traditional learning, (La Grassa and Troncarelli, 2016) in both synchronous and asynchronous modalities, through certain strategies and activities. For example, before the beginning of the course, instructors can encourage students to meet virtually, through email presentation exchanges or by uploading short video presentations. During the course, interaction correlated with SoC can be promoted through asynchronous online discussions (Liu et al., 2007; Rovai, 2001) and synchronous small-group activities such as collaborative group projects and peer teaching works (Shackelford and Maxwell, 2012).

In sum, a potential new model of learning, beyond COVID-19, should include promoting a sense of community, both in synchronous and asynchronous online settings, as well as in

hybrid contexts, to help decrease the feelings of isolation which might occur during distance learning.

8.1.3. Implementing teams of tech experts among teachers and staff members

Other concrete ideas proposed by the 2020 UNESCO report include the provision of free and open-source technologies to teachers and students, as well as promoting collaboration among teachers. In Chapter Four (literature review on ERL) and Chapter Six (results of interviews on ERL), I reported the teachers' and students' lack of digital competence and skills as challenges of ERL. In particular, many teachers experienced problems during ERL due to their lack of familiarity with using digital and technology tools, or poor or insufficient professional development and IT support, resulting in increased workload and stress. Likewise, students faced difficulties in accessing ICT infrastructure and were inexperienced with ERL. Apart from arranging courses and training for students and staff members, each institution should establish internal commissions or groups of experts, specialised in technology and remote learning, which can provide regular, expert digital support to teachers and students, suggesting platforms and online materials to rely on, assisting through tips and encouraging collaboration among teachers and students, for example by helping to build the SoC previously discussed. The UoB showed it had accomplished such a goal through the Higher Education Futures Institute (HEFi) Team, which was able to respond promptly to the challenges posed by the sudden move to ERL, and ensure professional development, alternative teaching modalities and the continuity of learning.

Implementing a team of teaching and technology experts also means providing innovative teaching methods and strategies, other than those we are used to. An example was the take-home paper, which was set up during ERL to assess students through alternative skills, such as problem solving and students' reflection on language. The virtual year abroad, which allowed students to engage in conversations with native speakers online, is another example.

8.2. The effectiveness of digital tools in FL teaching practice: planning a lesson using WebQuests

The main aim of this paragraph is to provide a practical example of how to apply the characteristics listed in the previous one to an effective digital lesson plan. Aside from implementing a committee of tech experts, social and human interaction and building an SoC can be achieved by using many digital tools and online teaching approaches, including the computer-based, teaching and learning model called WebQuest (Halat, 2008, p.109).

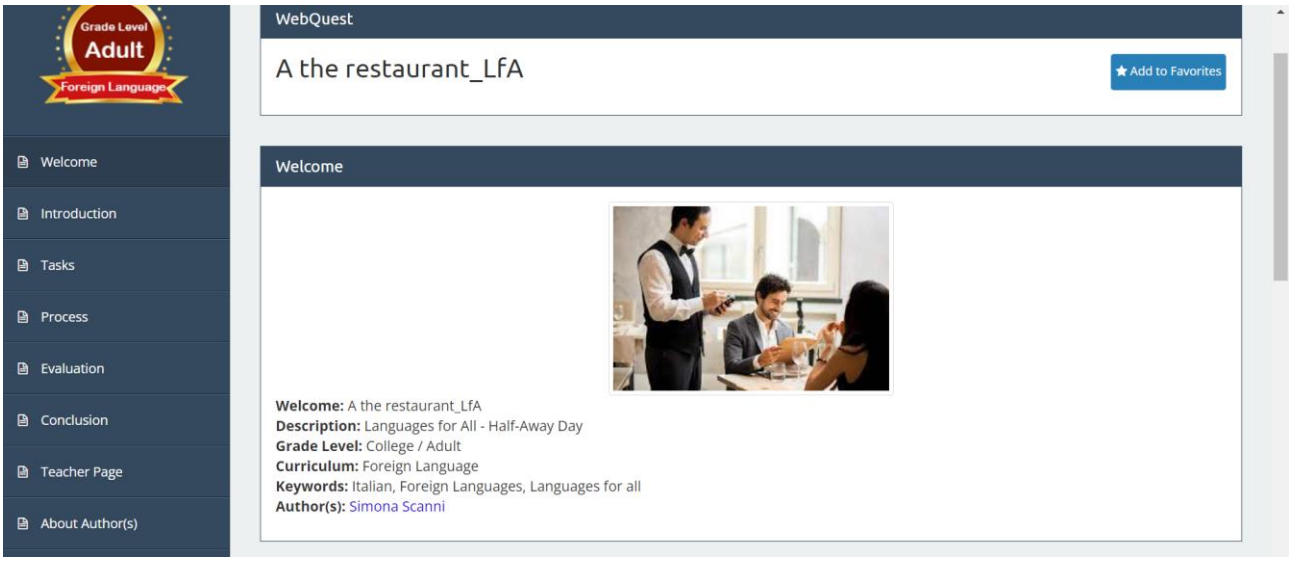
WebQuest was initially developed by Bernie Dodge (1997) of San Diego State University, as "an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet, optionally supplemented with videoconferencing" (p. 1). The definition was later expanded by Dodge's collaborator, Tom March (2004), as "a scaffolded learning structure that uses links to essential resources on the World Wide Web and an authentic task to motivate students' investigation of a central, open-ended question, development of individual expertise and participation in a final group process that attempts to transform newly acquired information into a more sophisticated understanding" (p. 2). The first feature we can deduce from these definitions is the optional combination of both asynchronous and synchronous modalities, as WebQuest requires the accomplishment of a task with the use of the Internet, which can be done asynchronously, and the possible synchronous use of videoconferencing. Moreover, WebQuest can be experienced both in a classroom equipped with proper technology, or at a distance. Therefore, the switch from F2F to online delivery, or the coexistence of both provisions during a lesson, for example through hybrid learning, is supported.

In terms of its structure, WebQuest is presented as a lesson plan in the form of a simple webpage (Kelly, 2000) with 6 components: an introduction, a task, the process, resources, evaluation and conclusion. Thanks to its well-guided and controlled format, WebQuest can

feature in all education curricula, from a younger age to HE. Moreover, as Kelly (2000) points out, such a lesson can be modified and individualised to meet students' needs, so it can also be applied with students with special needs or disabilities. The teacher provides all information through the six steps and can personalise each component. For instance, the teacher page provides instructors with the opportunity to introduce themselves.

In sum, during a lesson which relies on WebQuests, the type of learning delivery mode becomes less important, which means that, in a scenario of unexpected shift to online learning and vice versa, the continuity of teaching is guaranteed by simply switching from one provision to the other.

Figure 1, below, shows an example of the welcome page of a WebQuest, which I personally created on Zunal (launched in May 2001), an online platform for creating WebQuests.

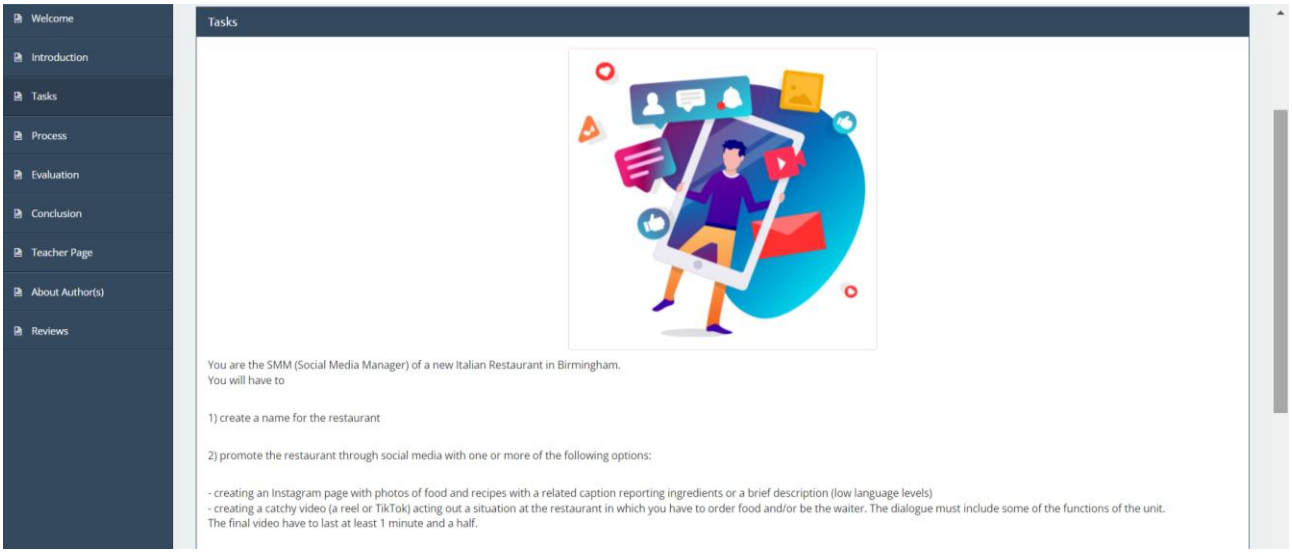


In terms of promoting an SoC and social interaction, WebQuest can also provide an opportunity to socialise, by engaging the students in small-group activities or pair work. For example, in a hypothetical, online Italian language course, assuming that students are already acquainted with each other from personal introductions before the beginning of the course, the reinforcement of SoC and social interaction can take place through the virtual or physical meetings of students, in order to complete the learning tasks. In fact, depending on their

location, students working in groups or pairs can decide whether they prefer to meet in person or online, so are given the opportunity to fulfil their needs to socialise and have an on-campus experience.

WebQuests also engage students in authentic tasks through activities which enhance some employability skills, such as the ones required in the take home paper assessment experience, described in Chapter Six. Such “authentic, applicable, relevant, real-world tasks” (Levin-Goldberg, 2014, p. 81) can be greatly motivating (Dudeney, 2003) and can increase student engagement (Kobylinski, 2014).

Figure 2, below, shows an example of an authentic task.



Lastly, because of the standardised format of WebQuests, teachers can design and plan lessons using technology even with limited digital competence, just as students can easily perform a given task. Accessibility and availability of ITC structures can also be overcome, as WebQuests can be displayed on any kind of digital device, including informal education ones such as mobile phones and iPads.

8.3. A contribution to research around online learning of Italian as an FL

Considering the literature on teaching/learning Italian language online, there is plenty of research on MOOCs (Incalcaterra Mclaughling and Villarini, 2018) and FL learning apps such as Duolingo (Pederzoli, 2018; Troncarelli, 2016) to learn Italian as an FL. However, when it comes to putting together online and in-person learning, some scholars claim that the two learning modes are not comparable to each other and need to remain separated (Fallani and La Grassa, 2019). Consequently, they argue it is unlikely that a teaching model which embraces both classroom-based and digital learning can be implemented (La Grassa, 2021). Of course, if we consider only some diametrically opposite aspects such as the different roles of a tutor in an online environment, compared to a teacher in a physical classroom (Villarini, 2016), or the “immovably digital nature” of some “didactic objects” (La Grassa, p. 31) which make it hard to convert them into physical shape, the two learning contexts, online an in-person, cannot be integrated. In the previous pages, I have demonstrated how the 2 modalities, online and F2F, can co-exist through the correct use of technology and digital competence. Therefore, the present thesis can contribute to research around online learning of Italian as an FL.

8.4. Limitations of my research

My research may have some limitations. The first relates to the recruitment of participants, the administration of questionnaires and the interviews, which were all conducted online. In the pre-pandemic section, the main difficulty was how to retain participants for the follow-up questionnaire, but the participants’ responses remained adequate in terms of quantity of data collected for the purpose of the study. The interviews and questionnaires of the section about ERL were conducted and administered throughout 2022, after more than 2 years in a pandemic. The proliferation of research investigations on the effects of the pandemic on education and requests to take part in many surveys and studies might have had a negative effect on the students' willingness to participate in my study. Despite this limitation, I made the

recruitment appealing by conducting the interviews in Italian, thus providing the incentive of practising the language with a native speaker. Students were interviewed in groups, which can be seen as a limitation (Krueger, 1994), since participants can influence each other's opinions. However, I analysed the data considering this limitation, and consequently I changed the perspective from a limitation to possibilities for the method (Smithson, 2000), such as to stimulate participation and elicit answers, or "to develop ideas collectively" (Smithson, 2000, p. 116). Participants were also allowed to switch to English when they had difficulty explaining their thoughts and opinions. Moreover, in terms of participation size and number of responses, I focused on collecting qualitative over quantitative data.

However, other concerns arise from the self-selection nature of the online recruitment (Luth, 2008) which might result in sampling bias. In fact, participants in the *before* COVID-19 case study might not be seen as an accurate representation of the entire population, since respondents who mainly had a positive experience with learning Italian online were more likely to take part in the study. I consider this self-selection sampling bias of respondents as an opportunity to start from a homogeneous sample subset and gain insights that might be representative of a larger population involved in online FL learning, which by its very nature, cannot include the entire population but only those who study an FL and in online environments or using digital platforms. Furthermore, I used open-ended questions to encourage participants to leave their own answers, with the intention of gaining a more complete perspective and more helpful data. Moreover, learners, in the *before* COVID-19 case study, used different learning platforms and tools, which might result in different learning experiences and learning outcomes. However, because the study investigates the effectiveness of FL learning, based on individuals' perceptions, of the learning experience online, and not the effectiveness of each teaching methodology, the respondents' answers can still be put on the same level in terms of validity of data.

Another potential limitation is that I was unable to assess the possible models and the lesson planning using WebQuest on a sample of one or more classes, thereby testing the feasibility of the models/WebQuest lesson. However, this limitation provides an opportunity to expand this research by implementing effective digital tools in online/hybrid/blended FL teaching following the same potential model proposed in this thesis.

8.5. Significance, implications and contribution of my findings

This research provides new perspectives in thinking about online and distance education as a complement to, rather than a substitute for traditional learning. Specifically, it will benefit the following:

- *Future researchers*: the investigation of the internal factors involved in the process of online learning of Italian as an FL, not just for academic purposes, extends the knowledge of the effectiveness of learning an FL online. Moreover, these findings add to an existing literature which ended with the advent of COVID-19 and started a new perspective on the future of online learning beyond the pandemic. However, these results should still be retained and analysed because they create a bridge between two inseparable, historical and social periods, which need to be compared and investigated. Therefore, data from each historical period can be separately reported as a single study, or as a comparative study by exploring the parallels between students who freely decided to learn online before COVID-19, and students forced to move to ERL, with a consequential expansion of the current literature.
- *Educational institutions and teaching professionals*: by building the potential successful and satisfied online FL learner's profile and outlining possible models to enhance teaching beyond COVID-19, educational institutions, instructors and educators may gain and spread awareness about the effectiveness of innovative digital tools and alternative approaches to include in curricula and teaching practices.

- *Students, parents and the educational community*: depending on age, school or academic year, and level, all people involved in the process of learning can benefit from this research. This study will contribute to make society aware of how to make the most of an unexpected situation and prevent future disruption in education by reaching an understanding about the effectiveness of, and value added by, online learning tools and technology in education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Information Sheet and First Online Questionnaire with results

Information sheet

I would like to ask you to help me with my PhD research at the University of Birmingham, UK to better understand the thoughts and beliefs of learners of Italian in online environments by answering the following questions.

These questionnaires are not a test so there are no “right” or “wrong” answers and you do not even have to write your name on it. I am interested in your personal opinion.

The questionnaire is divided into 4 parts:

Part I is about general information with both open and closed-ended answers.

Part II is composed of 20 questions to assess your motivation in learning Italian online.

Part III is composed of 10 questions about personality.

Part IV is composed of 13 questions about autonomy in learning.

Within the next four months I will contact you again for the final questionnaire about your perception of learning Italian online and progress with the language.

Please, note that this is a study in progress, therefore I do not give any permission to use my questionnaires.
The results of this survey will be used only for research purposes so please give your answers sincerely, as only this will ensure the success of this project. If you decide in the end that you would prefer not to participate in this survey, you will be free to opt out without any consequence. All data collected to the point of withdrawal remains part of the study database and will be used for the research. Thank you very much for your help!

Part I - General information

Please provide the following information by ticking in the box or writing your response in the space.

Your age (in years):

Gender: F M

Nationality:

Which platform(s) do you use to learn Italian? (e.g. Duolingo, MOOCs, websites, Facebook groups) *(more than one answer allowed. Be as specific as possible providing the name of – for example – the online course or website address)*

Have you ever had or do you have now a teacher of Italian (F2F or via internet) in support of your online study?
Yes
No

Have you spent a long period (at least a total of one month) in Italy (e.g., travelling, studying)?
Yes
No

What is your highest educational qualification?
Secondary school diploma
University degree
Post-graduate degree

What is your current employment status?
Student
Worker
Other

How would you self-evaluate your level of Italian so far?
Beginner
Intermediate
Advanced

Part II - Motivation Questionnaire
In this second part, I would like you to tell me how far you agree or disagree with the following 20 statements by simply clicking on a number from 1 to 5, where: 1 is Strongly disagree, 2 is Disagree, 3 is Neither agree nor disagree, 4 Agree, 5 is Strongly agree
Please do not leave out any items.
1----------2----------3----------4----------5
Strongly disagree *Strongly agree*

1. I like Italian language and culture.
2. Studying Italian can be important to me because I think I'll need it for further studies.
3. I think learning Italian is important in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers.
4. I can imagine myself speaking Italian in the future with foreign friends.
5. I like TV programmes and films made in Italy.
6. I study Italian because close friends of mine think it is important.
7. Studying Italian is important to me in order to gain the approval of my family.
8. I like/ I'd like to travel to Italy.
9. I can imagine myself giving an Italian speech in public successfully in the future.
10. I really like the actual process of learning Italian.
11. Studying Italian is important to me in order to achieve a personally important goal (e.g.: to obtain a degree or scholarship).
12. My dreams of how I want to use Italian in the future are the same as those of my parents.
13. I find learning Italian really interesting.
14. I think time passes faster while studying Italian.
15. I consider learning Italian important because the people I respect think that I should do it.
16. I can imagine that in the future in a café with light music, a foreign friend and I will be chatting in Italian casually over a cup of coffee.
17. Learning Italian is important to me because I plan to travel to Italy in the future.
18. I really enjoy learning Italian.
19. I have to learn Italian because I don't want to fail the Italian course.
20. My image of how I want to use Italian in the future is mainly influenced by my parents.

Part III – Personality

In this third part, I would like you to tell me how far you agree or disagree with the following 10 statements by simply clicking on a number from 1 to 5, where: 1 is Strongly disagree, 2 is Disagree, 3 is Neither agree nor disagree, 4 Agree, 5 is Strongly agree
Please do not leave out any items.
1----------2----------3----------4----------5
Strongly disagree Strongly agree
How well do the following statements describe your personality?
I see myself as someone who…
…is reserved
…is generally trusting
…tends to be lazy
…is relaxed, handles stress well
…has few artistic interests
…is outgoing, sociable
…tends to find fault with others

…does a thorough job
…gets nervous easily
…has an active imagination

Part IV – Autonomy

In this part, I would like you to tell me how far you agree or disagree with the following 13 statements by simply clicking on a number from 1 to 5, where: 1 is Strongly disagree, 2 is Disagree, 3 is Neither agree nor disagree, 4 Agree, 5 is Strongly agree
Please do not leave out any items.

1----------2----------3----------4----------5
Strongly disagree *Strongly agree*

1. I can learn without teacher supervision.
2. If I had the right materials, I'd prefer to spend some time studying alone.
3. In language learning I enjoy tasks where I can learn on my own.
4. I prefer to read books, magazines, newspapers all by myself without the teacher telling me what to read.
5. The teacher should only be a counsellor, a helper and a guide.
6. I like learning the language on my own because I know best how to learn.
7. I regularly review my Italian learning and check what I have learned.
8. I read a certain amount of Italian material every day.

9. When I have a language problem, I first try to solve it myself and only if I can’t manage it, I turn to teachers or online peers for help.
10. I also investigate the culture of the foreign language I am learning.
11. I like learning Italian words by looking them up in a dictionary.
12. I know my weaknesses and go for it.
13. I am responsible for my own learning.

The survey is over. Well done! Within the next four months I will contact you again for the final questionnaire about your perception of learning Italian online and progress with the language. Thank you again for your cooperation!

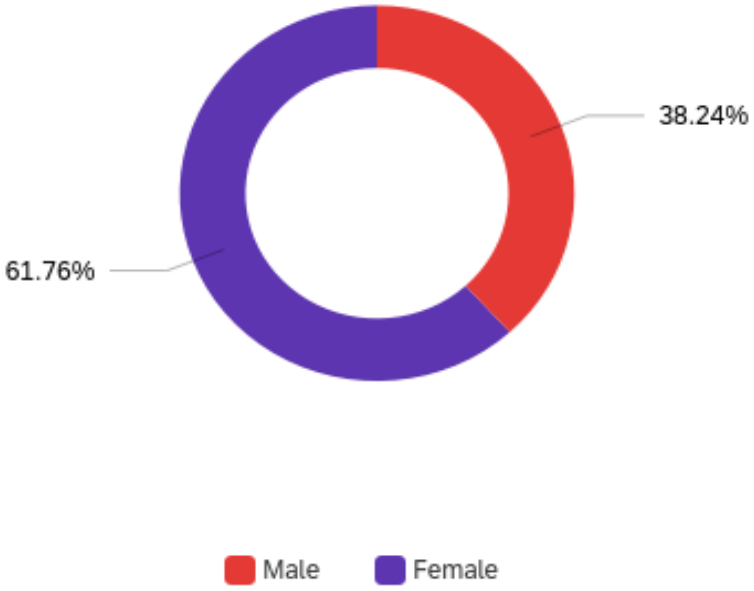
Results of the First questionnaire

Your age (in years)
28
21
19
19
20
18
18
37
39
50
19
19
22
19
55
18
25
65
58
66

21
69
19
44
21
22
20
73
19
46
29
50
33
68

Gender

#	Answer	%	Count
4	Male	38.24%	13
5	Female	61.76%	21
	Total	100%	34



Nationality

English
British
British
British
British
British
British
Italian
Brasileira
Argetinian
British
British/Russian
British
English

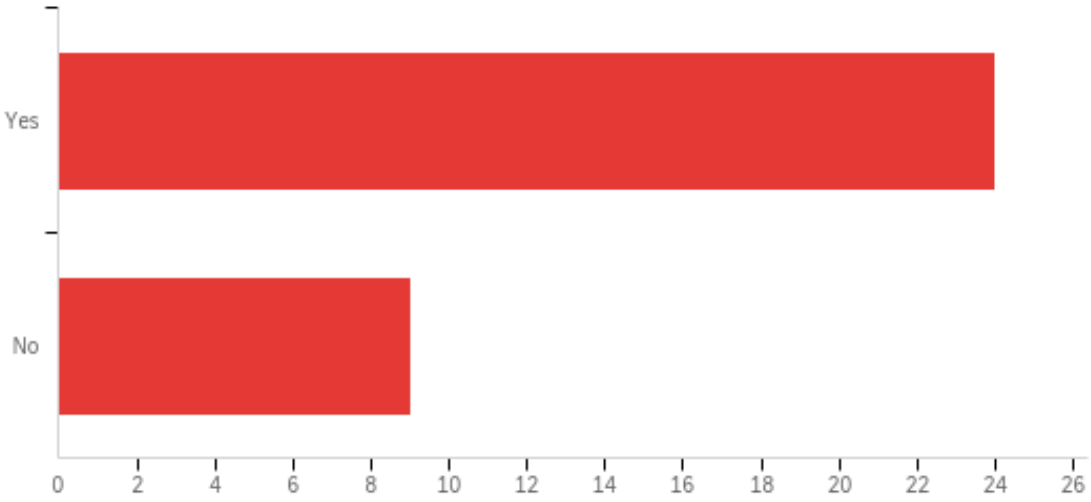
BRITISH
british
USA
British
British
British
Italian
Israeli
British
british
English
Peruvian
French
Israeli
White British
Peruvian
British
Irish
Taiwan
israeli

Which platform(s) do you use to learn Italian? (e.g. Duolingo, MOOCs, websites, Facebook groups) (more than one answer allowed. Be as specific as possible providing the name of – for example – the online course or website address)

Which platform(s) do you use to learn Italian? (e.g. Duolingo, MOOCs, websites, Facebook groups) (more than one answer allowed. Be as specific as possible providing the name of – for example – the online course or website address)
10 Bell Barn Road
Youtube (Learn Italian with Lucrezia); Fluent Forever (Italian pronunciation training), "Foreign Language Exchange" Facebook group
Duolingo, Quizlet, Memrise
Duolingo and Memrise
Duolingo, facebook groups, Babbel app

Duolingo, Busuu
Duolingo
via a.merini 4/c
Open University
Quizlet, WordReference, Italian-Russian Dictionary.
Duolingo, but only at the start
Duolingo, Youtube, oneworditaliano
Duolingo, La Repubblica, Quizlet
NONE
Duolingo
Books, Youtube, Duolingo, various free online lessons
OU modules for Italian. OU Italiano Facebook group. easyitalian news (via email, with voice clips)
Italian online
Open University, Beginners Italian. Duolingo.
YouTube
Duolingo
Memrise, Netflix Series and other online Video and Music
family members, italian meetup group
Onlines quizzes, watching Italian TV series
I learned at home with my italian family
Netflix (movies and shows), Youtube (songs), Canvas (Italian lessons)
Online with a private teacher
YouTube videos, duolingo, wordreference
Duolingo
Duolingo
Open University Beginners Italian module
facebook: Impariamo l'italiano, 毎日義詞 Italiano una parola al giorno
I do use facebook group to enrich my knowledge

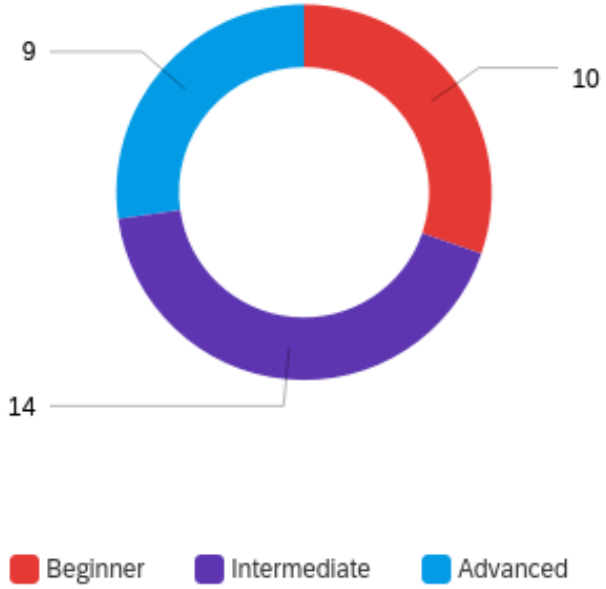
Have you ever had or do you have now a teacher of Italian (F2F or via internet) in support of your online study?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	72.73%	24
2	No	27.27%	9
	Total	100%	33

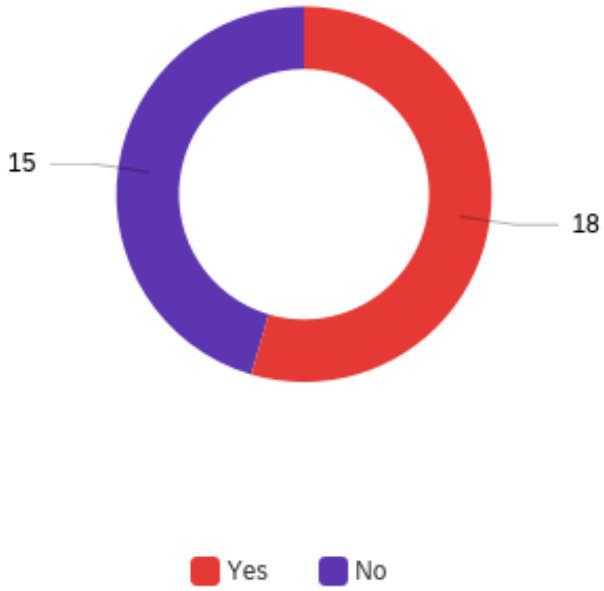
How would you self-evaluate your level of Italian so far?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Beginner	30.30%	10
2	Intermediate	42.42%	14
3	Advanced	27.27%	9
	Total	100%	33



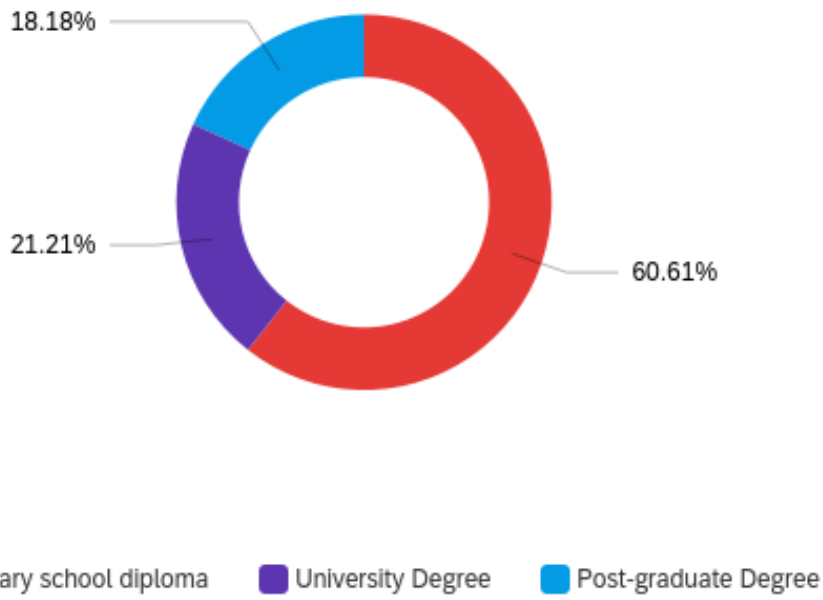
Have you spent a long period (at least a total of one month) in Italy (e.g., travelling, studying)?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	54.55%	18
2	No	45.45%	15
	Total	100%	33



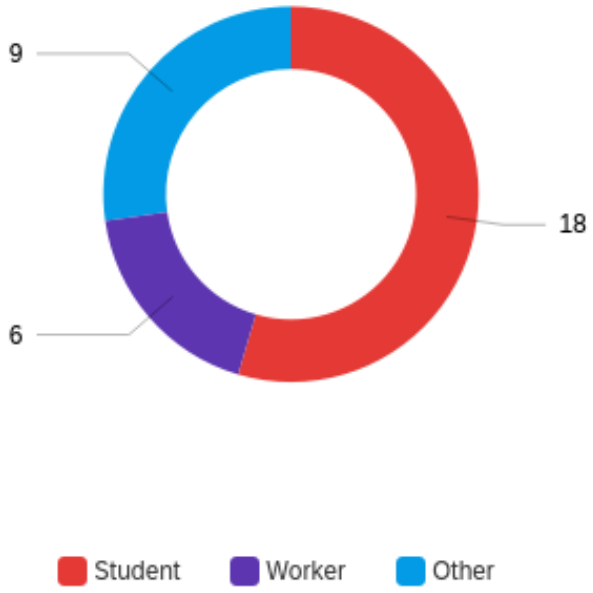
What is your highest educational qualification?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Secondary school diploma	60.61%	20
2	University Degree	21.21%	7
3	Post-graduate Degree	18.18%	6
	Total	100%	33



What is your current employment status?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Student	54.55%	18
2	Worker	18.18%	6
3	Other	27.27%	9
	Total	100%	33



In this second part, I would like you to tell me how far you agree or disagree with the following 20 statements by simply clicking on an option. Please do not leave out any items.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I like Italian language and culture.	1.00	5.00	4.56	0.83	0.68	32
2	Studying Italian can be important to me because I think I'll need it for further studies.	1.00	5.00	3.31	1.16	1.34	32

3	I think learning Italian is important in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers.	3.00	5.00	4.34	0.54	0.29	32
4	I can imagine myself speaking Italian in the future with foreign friends.	2.00	5.00	4.41	0.78	0.62	32
5	I like TV programmes and films made in Italy.	2.00	5.00	3.94	0.79	0.62	32
6	I study Italian because close friends of mine think it is important.	1.00	5.00	2.59	1.09	1.18	32
7	Studying Italian is important to me in order to gain the approval of my family.	1.00	5.00	2.13	1.14	1.30	32
8	I like/ I'd like to travel to Italy.	4.00	5.00	4.78	0.41	0.17	32
9	I can imagine myself giving an Italian speech in public successfully in the future.	1.00	5.00	3.22	1.14	1.30	32
10	I really like the actual process of learning Italian.	2.00	5.00	4.06	0.75	0.56	32
11	Studying Italian is important to me in order to achieve a personally important goal (e.g.: to obtain a degree or scholarship).	1.00	5.00	3.97	1.05	1.09	32
12	My dreams of how I want to use Italian in the future are the same as those of my parents.	1.00	5.00	1.94	1.00	1.00	32
13	I find learning Italian really interesting.	3.00	5.00	4.47	0.56	0.31	32
14	I think time passes faster while studying Italian.	1.00	5.00	3.63	1.11	1.23	32
15	I consider learning Italian important because the people I respect think that I should do it.	1.00	4.00	2.22	1.22	1.48	32
16	I can imagine that in the future in a café with light music, a foreign friend and I will be chatting in Italian casually over a cup of coffee.	1.00	5.00	3.94	1.00	1.00	32
17	Learning Italian is important to me because I plan to travel to Italy in the future.	3.00	5.00	4.38	0.74	0.55	32
18	I really enjoy learning Italian.	3.00	5.00	4.59	0.61	0.37	32

19	I have to learn Italian because I don’t want to fail the Italian course.	1.00	5.00	2.63	1.43	2.05	32
20	My image of how I want to use Italian in the future is mainly influenced by my parents.	1.00	5.00	1.78	0.99	0.98	32

#	Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total
1	I like Italian language and culture.	3.13%	1	0.00%	0	3.13%	1	25.00%	8	68.75%	22	32
2	Studying Italian can be important to me because I think I’ll need it for further studies.	6.25%	2	18.75%	6	31.25%	10	25.00%	8	18.75%	6	32
3	I think learning Italian is important in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	3.13%	1	59.38%	19	37.50%	12	32
4	I can imagine myself speaking Italian in the future with foreign friends.	0.00%	0	3.13%	1	9.38%	3	31.25%	10	56.25%	18	32
5	I like TV programmes and films made in Italy.	0.00%	0	3.13%	1	25.00%	8	46.88%	15	25.00%	8	32

6	I study Italian because close friends of mine think it is important.	15.63%	5	34.38%	11	31.25%	10	12.50%	4	6.25%	2	32
7	Studying Italian is important to me in order to gain the approval of my family.	37.50%	12	31.25%	10	15.63%	5	12.50%	4	3.13%	1	32
8	I like/ I'd like to travel to Italy.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	21.88%	7	78.13%	25	32
9	I can imagine myself giving an Italian speech in public successfully in the future.	6.25%	2	21.88%	7	31.25%	10	25.00%	8	15.63%	5	32
10	I really like the actual process of learning Italian.	0.00%	0	6.25%	2	6.25%	2	62.50%	20	25.00%	8	32
11	Studying Italian is important to me in order to achieve a personally important goal (e.g.: to obtain a degree or scholarship).	3.13%	1	6.25%	2	18.75%	6	34.38%	11	37.50%	12	32
12	My dreams of how I want to use Italian in the future	40.63%	13	34.38%	11	18.75%	6	3.13%	1	3.13%	1	32

	are the same as those of my parents.											
13	I find learning Italian really interesting.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	3.13%	1	46.88%	15	50.00%	16	32
14	I think time passes faster while studying Italian.	6.25%	2	6.25%	2	31.25%	10	31.25%	10	25.00%	8	32
15	I consider learning Italian important because the people I respect think that I should do it.	40.63%	13	21.88%	7	12.50%	4	25.00%	8	0.00%	0	32
16	I can imagine that in the future in a café with light music, a foreign friend and I will be chatting in Italian casually over a cup of coffee.	3.13%	1	6.25%	2	15.63%	5	43.75%	14	31.25%	10	32
17	Learning Italian is important to me because I plan to travel to Italy in the future.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	15.63%	5	31.25%	10	53.13%	17	32
18	I really enjoy learning Italian.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	6.25%	2	28.13%	9	65.63%	21	32

19	I have to learn Italian because I don't want to fail the Italian course.	31.25%	10	21.88%	7	12.50%	4	21.88%	7	12.50%	4	32
20	My image of how I want to use Italian in the future is mainly influenced by my parents.	50.00%	16	31.25%	10	12.50%	4	3.13%	1	3.13%	1	32

In this third part, I would like you to tell me how far you agree or disagree with the following 10 statements by simply clicking on an option.Please do not leave out any items. How well do the following statements describe your personality? I see myself as someone who…

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	…is reserved	1.00	5.00	3.25	1.06	1.13	32
2	…is generally trusting	1.00	5.00	3.78	0.96	0.92	32
3	…tends to be lazy	1.00	5.00	3.19	1.04	1.09	32
4	…is relaxed, handles stress well	1.00	4.00	2.63	1.14	1.30	32
5	…has few artistic interests	1.00	5.00	3.06	1.30	1.68	32
6	…is outgoing, sociable	2.00	5.00	3.44	0.97	0.93	32
7	…tends to find fault with others	1.00	4.00	2.75	0.90	0.81	32
8	…does a thorough job	2.00	5.00	3.78	0.78	0.61	32
9	…gets nervous easily	1.00	5.00	3.66	1.21	1.48	32
10	...has an active imagination	2.00	5.00	4.06	0.79	0.62	32

#	Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total
1	…is reserved	9.38%	3	15.63%	5	18.75%	6	53.13%	17	3.13%	1	32
2	…is generally trusting	3.13%	1	9.38%	3	12.50%	4	56.25%	18	18.75%	6	32
3	…tends to be lazy	3.13%	1	28.13%	9	25.00%	8	34.38%	11	9.38%	3	32
4	…is relaxed, handles stress well	21.88%	7	25.00%	8	21.88%	7	31.25%	10	0.00%	0	32
5	…has few artistic interests	15.63%	5	21.88%	7	15.63%	5	34.38%	11	12.50%	4	32
6	…is outgoing, sociable	0.00%	0	21.88%	7	25.00%	8	40.63%	13	12.50%	4	32
7	…tends to find fault with others	6.25%	2	37.50%	12	31.25%	10	25.00%	8	0.00%	0	32
8	…does a thorough job	0.00%	0	9.38%	3	15.63%	5	62.50%	20	12.50%	4	32
9	…gets nervous easily	3.13%	1	21.88%	7	12.50%	4	31.25%	10	31.25%	10	32
10	...has an active imagination	0.00%	0	6.25%	2	9.38%	3	56.25%	18	28.13%	9	32

In this part, I would like you to tell me how far you agree or disagree with the following 13 statements by simply clicking on an option. Please do not leave out any items.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I can learn without teacher supervision.	2.00	5.00	3.66	0.77	0.60	32
2	If I had the right materials, I'd prefer to spend some time studying alone.	2.00	5.00	3.25	0.97	0.94	32
3	In language learning I enjoy tasks where I can learn on my own.	2.00	5.00	3.47	0.90	0.81	32

4	I prefer to read books, magazines, newspapers all by myself without the teacher telling me what to read.	2.00	5.00	3.13	0.86	0.73	32
5	The teacher should only be a counsellor, a helper and a guide.	1.00	5.00	3.06	0.97	0.93	32
6	I like learning the language on my own because I know best how to learn.	1.00	4.00	2.59	0.86	0.74	32
7	I regularly review my Italian learning and check what I have learned.	2.00	5.00	3.09	0.88	0.77	32
8	I read a certain amount of Italian material every day.	1.00	5.00	2.69	1.01	1.03	32
9	When I have a language problem, I first try to solve it myself and only if I can’t manage it, I turn to teachers or online peers for help.	2.00	5.00	3.97	0.64	0.41	32
10	I also investigate the culture of the foreign language I am learning.	2.00	5.00	4.19	0.81	0.65	32
11	I like learning Italian words by looking them up in a dictionary.	1.00	5.00	3.53	1.22	1.50	32
12	I know my weaknesses and go for it.	2.00	5.00	3.63	0.65	0.42	32
13	I am responsible for my own learning.	2.00	5.00	3.97	0.59	0.34	32

#	Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total
1	I can learn without teacher supervision.	0.00%	0	12.50%	4	15.63%	5	65.63%	21	6.25%	2	32
2	If I had the right materials, I'd prefer to spend some time	0.00%	0	31.25%	10	18.75%	6	43.75%	14	6.25%	2	32

	studying alone.											
3	In language learning I enjoy tasks where I can learn on my own.	0.00%	0	18.75%	6	25.00%	8	46.88%	15	9.38%	3	32
4	I prefer to read books, magazines, newspapers all by myself without the teacher telling me what to read.	0.00%	0	28.13%	9	34.38%	11	34.38%	11	3.13%	1	32
5	The teacher should only be a counsellor, a helper and a guide.	6.25%	2	21.88%	7	34.38%	11	34.38%	11	3.13%	1	32
6	I like learning the language on my own because I know best how to learn.	6.25%	2	46.88%	15	28.13%	9	18.75%	6	0.00%	0	32
7	I regularly review my Italian learning and check what I have learned.	0.00%	0	31.25%	10	31.25%	10	34.38%	11	3.13%	1	32
8	I read a certain amount of Italian material every day.	6.25%	2	50.00%	16	15.63%	5	25.00%	8	3.13%	1	32
9	When I have a language problem, I	0.00%	0	3.13%	1	12.50%	4	68.75%	22	15.63%	5	32

	first try to solve it myself and only if I can't manage it, I turn to teachers or online peers for help.											
10	I also investigate the culture of the foreign language I am learning.	0.00%	0	6.25%	2	6.25%	2	50.00%	16	37.50%	12	32
11	I like learning Italian words by looking them up in a dictionary.	12.50%	4	6.25%	2	15.63%	5	46.88%	15	18.75%	6	32
12	I know my weaknesses and go for it.	0.00%	0	6.25%	2	28.13%	9	62.50%	20	3.13%	1	32
13	I am responsible for my own learning.	0.00%	0	3.13%	1	9.38%	3	75.00%	24	12.50%	4	32

Appendix 2: Final Questionnaire with results

Dear student,

This final questionnaire aims at exploring your idea and perception regarding the use of online tools to learn Italian. Please, click on the statement that best describes your response to each question or write your opinion where required.

1) Your Italian has improved:
   a. A lot.
   b. Quite a lot.
   c. A little.
   d. Not at all.

2) Your Italian language skill that has improved most online is:
   a. Reading.
   b. Listening.
   c. Writing.
   d. Speaking.

3) How much time did you dedicate to learn Italian online?
   a. Less than 3 hours per week.
   b. Between 5 and 10 hours per week (or at least 1 hour per day).
   c. More than 10 hours per week.

4) Do you still feel motivated about learning Italian online?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Less motivated
   d. More motivated

Explain why (*facultative*)

……
……

5) Please, describe how you think your level of Italian has changed over the past months: *(You can answer in Italian, English or your first language)*

……
……

6) In your opinion, what are the advantages of online language learning? *(You can answer in Italian, English or your first language)*

……
……

7) In your opinion, what are the limitations of online language learning? *(You can answer in Italian, English or your first language)*

……
……

8) Based on your experience, do you think you will continue learning Italian or other languages online?
   a. Yes.
   b. No.
   c. Not sure.

Please, explain why *(facultative)*:

……
……

9) On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “poor”, 2 is “fair”, 3 is “good”, 4 is “very good” and 5 is “excellent”, how would you rate you overall experience?

1 2 3 4 5

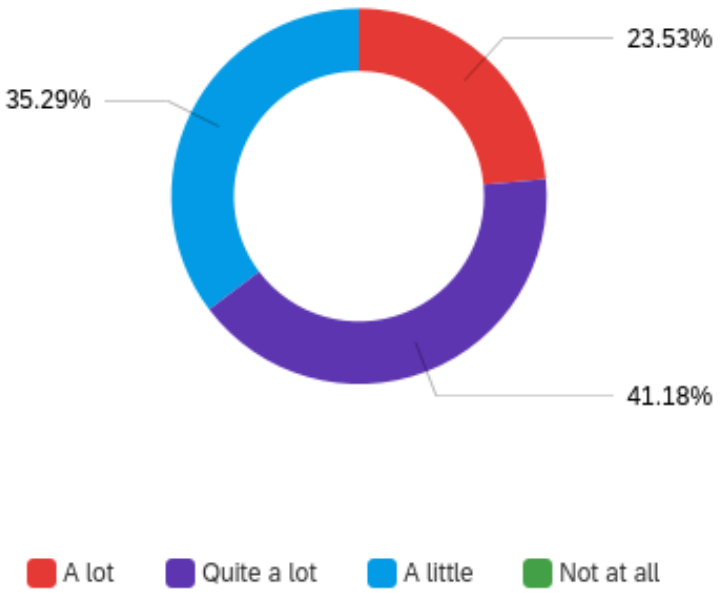
Thank you for kindly participating in this survey. I greatly appreciate your valuable time and efforts that you have spent in completing all the questionnaires.

Results of the final questionnaire

Q1 - Your Italian has improved:

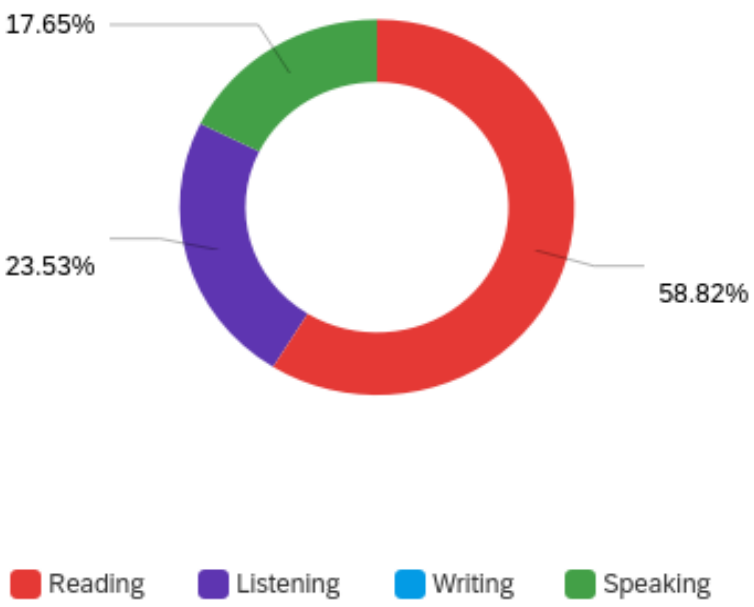
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Your Italian has improved:	1.00	3.00	2.12	0.76	0.57	17

#	Answer	%	Count
1	A lot	23.53%	4
2	Quite a lot	41.18%	7
3	A little	35.29%	6
4	Not at all	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	17

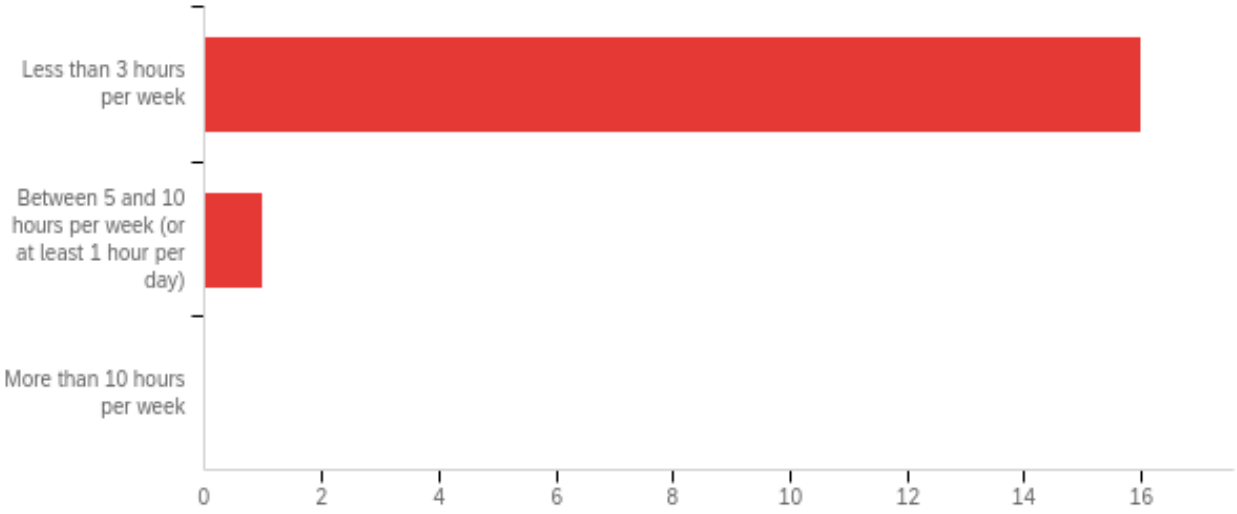


Q2 - Your Italian language skill that has improved most online is:

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Your Italian language skill that has improved most online is:	1.00	4.00	1.76	1.11	1.24	17



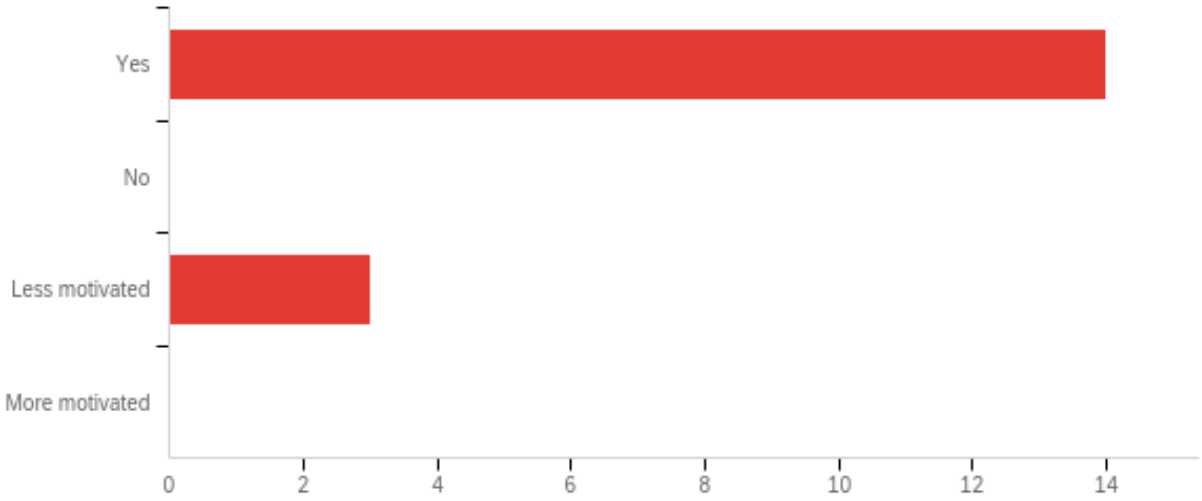
Q3 - How much time did you devote to learning Italian online?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How much time did you devote to learning Italian online?	1.00	2.00	1.06	0.24	0.06	17

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Less than 3 hours per week	94.12%	16
2	Between 5 and 10 hours per week (or at least 1 hour per day)	5.88%	1
3	More than 10 hours per week	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	17

Q4 - Do you still feel motivated about learning Italian online?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do you still feel motivated about learning Italian online?	1.00	3.00	1.35	0.76	0.58	17

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	82.35%	14
2	No	0.00%	0
3	Less motivated	17.65%	3
4	More motivated	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	17

Q5 - Explain why (optional)

I am still motivated because I want to keep my Italian up to a good standard to be able to take a job that uses Italian, in translation particularly
It is convenient , there are any options , I can do it anytime
Getting better but wish I could spend more time learning.
Because my other module with the OU is more demanding and as Level 3, more important to my degree classification.
I love to listen and speak Italian
I have finished my Open University course. I will continue with Duolingo
It's the language of my forefathers
Part of my heratage
It’s a cheap and easy system - access anywhere
Because I feel that if I stop learning I might forget what I have learned.

Q6 - Please, describe how you think your level of Italian has changed over the past months: (You can answer in Italian, English or in your first language)

Please, describe how you think your level of Italian has changed over the past months: (You can answer in Italian, English or in your first language)
It has mostly stayed the same, because although my classes are over, I have been watching Italian programmes and reading Italian articles
more or less the same , not improved not worsen
I can understand more words than before.
Improved in reading and listening
It improved.
I had never learnt any Italian so my Italian and confidence has definitely improved
I am now able to form a sentence and understand simple converstations, where before I knew nothing
I feel that it has improved in terms of comprehension and sometimes in production, the more exposure to native grammatical structures makes it easier to reproduce them. My vocabulary has widened slightly.
I have learned some useful communication skills, and I can read bits of Italian info online and make some sense of it, whereas before I knew none.
No change since I have not dedicated time to improve

Vocabulary improved. Managed to have a decent conversation with a native speakder on a recent visit to Italy.
La mia capacità di comprendere altre persone che parlano italiano è migliorata, soprattutto nel caso dei cittadini italiani.
I am not fully active in learning italian since I also study various other ones but when ever an opportunity comes, I will learn a few extra words.
Better at listening and reading mainly
I’ve learned more words and sentences
Especialy speaking skills.
Due to the fact that I had to read a lot, I think that my reading skills improved. It is now easier for me to read a long test in Italian

Q7 - In your opinion, what are the advantages of online language learning? (You can answer in Italian, English or in your first language)

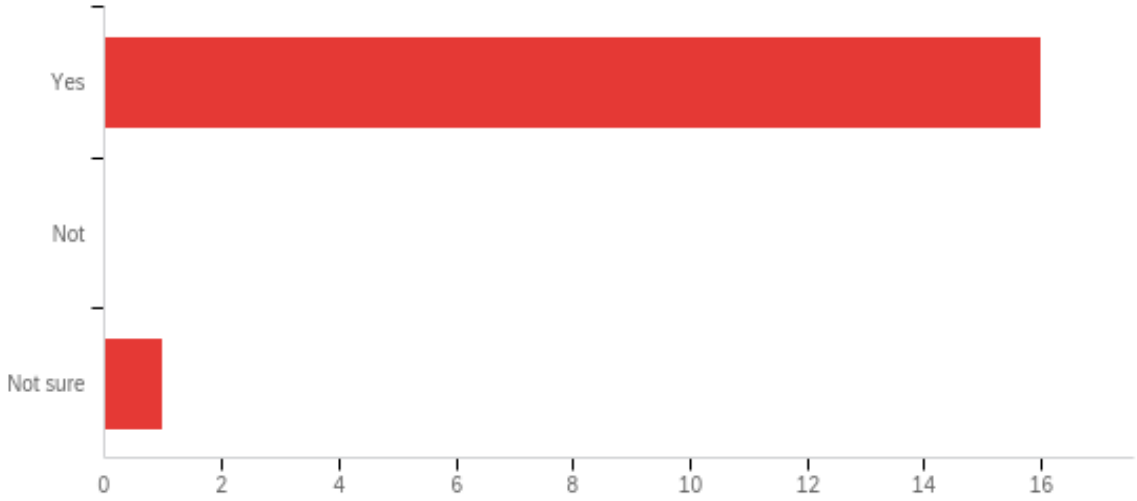
In your opinion, what are the advantages of online language learning? (You can answer in Italian, English or in your first language)
You can do it anywhere at any time and this makes it suitable for a much larger group of people who wouldn't be able to get together in a classroom in the conventional way
No need travel, flexible time management
Can complete at times to suit without pressure
Advantages - time place flexibility
Its for me to decide when to learn.
You can work in your own time and you can access your learning whenever you want.
There is more freedom to choose your own syllabus
Authentic target language content is easily available , interaction with native speakers is possible even when not in the country and also apps like duolingo or quizlet have games which makes it more engaging.
Learning from home, the amount of material available online, both written and audio.
you can do it anytime at any place
Learning at my own pace.
Lo studente non ha limiti di tempo per le lezioni e può svolgerle ogni volta che lo desidera.
Learning at your own pace, and some online programs make the lessons and teachings fun.
Advantages - ease , cost, good for receptive skills
it can be done anytime, anywhere
1. It's private. 2. It's by far less expensive 3. Ocassion to meet Foreigner nice people and spesk their language 4. Possibility to do it in my own time

We can work whenever we want, and we already know what we want to improve and what to work on

Q8 - In your opinion, what are the limitations of online language learning? (You can answer in Italian, English or in your first language)

In your opinion, what are the limitations of online language learning? (You can answer in Italian, English or in your first language)
Lacks opportunity to practice speaking with another person in the same organic way that it would F2F, people might have difficulty expressing themselves in words rather than in speech
need strong will power to do written homework
No substitute for face to face with a native speaker- no good for speaking practice
Don't see any.
You can’t ask questions like you would in class.
Limited capability for learning speaking
It is still limited by the fact it is not fully immersive and that sometimes online exercises lack explanations for your mistakes or you are required to create (sometimes bizarre) sentences you would never actually use in real life.
It's hard to practice speaking. I know there are apps and websites where I could find a conversation practice partner, but I haven't done that because I find the "conversation just to practice speaking" concept quite difficult.
you need to be very motivated to do the work since you have no class and friends to talk to
Not enough face to face interaction with native speakers
L'interazione con altri compagni di classe è più importante per imparare una lingua, ma non è presente nell'apprendimento online. Inoltre, lo studente deve essere una persona molto organizzata e avere una grande motivazione, e questo non è il caso di molte persone.
No personalised learning, nor the one-to-one question and answer teachings from the teacher to the student. Plus, a teacher won't be around the correct the learner.
Lack of progress in speaking and writing skills- or slower progress
For me, the pronunciation matters. Sometimes the resolution of PC would be very bad, then it becomes difficult to understand.
I don't see any.
I think the lack of advice from a native speaker

Q9 - Based on your experience, do you think you will continue learning Italian or other languages online?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Based on your experience, do you think you will continue learning Italian or other languages online?	1.00	3.00	1.12	0.47	0.22	17

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	94.12%	16
2	Not	0.00%	0
3	Not sure	5.88%	1
	Total	100%	17

Q11 - Please, explain why (optional):

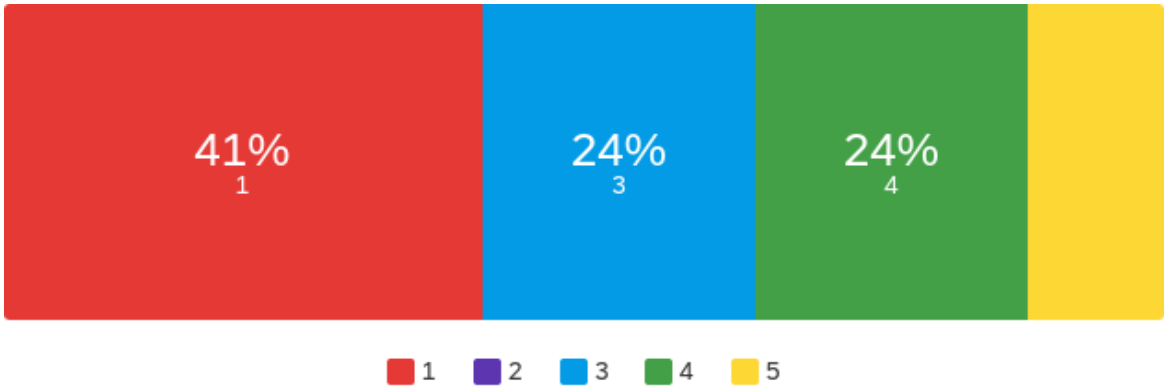
I like the Italian language , I like to travel to Italy , enjoy talking to people and admire the culture
My wife is Italian, my children are starting to learn Italian so I need to understand them.
I will pursue blended learning
Since I am an auto didactic person and prefer to do everything possible online.
Because it's better than any other options I have available to me.

I can do it from home, office , coffee place
Learning online is often cheaper than going to classes - no transport needed etc.
Because I can go at my own pace and I can decide when and where to take my lessons. In addition, it's much cheaper.
I have a huge interest in learning them
As well as lessons with my personal tutor to improve speaking and writing skills
If time and money are available, I prefer learning languages face to face
It is fascinating to me.

Q12 - On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “poor”, 2 is “fair”, 3 is “good”, 4 is “very good” and 5 is “excellent”, how would you rate you overall experience?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “poor”, 2 is “fair”, 3 is “good”, 4 is “very good” and 5 is “excellent”, how would you rate you overall experience?	1.00	5.00	2.65	1.49	2.23	17

#	Answer	%	Count
1	1	41.18%	7
2	2	0.00%	0
3	3	23.53%	4
4	4	23.53%	4
5	5	11.76%	2
	Total	100%	17


41%
1
24%
3
24%
4
1
2
3
4
5

Appendix 3: Information sheet, written questionnaire and oral interview to Students

Information sheet

I would like to ask you to help me with my PhD research at the University of Birmingham, UK to better understand the thoughts and beliefs of learners of Italian in online environments by answering the following questions. These questionnaires are not a test so there are no “right” or “wrong” answers and you do not even have to write your name on it. I am interested in your personal opinion. The questionnaire is divided into 4 parts:

Part I is about general information with both open and closed-ended answers.

Part II is composed of 20 questions to assess your motivation in learning Italian online.

Part III is composed of 10 questions about personality.

Part IV composed of 13 questions about autonomy in learning.

Within the next days, I will contact you again for the interview which aims at assessing students’ perception of the pedagogical changes they have experienced during the pandemic and remote learning. The interview will be administered through VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) technologies (such as Skype, Meet…) and recorded in accordance with the IT/Legal Services advice to ensure DPA compliance. I will do the transcription and data analysis by myself, so the recordings will be accessible to only me. A copy of the interview questions will be provided at the end of the consent form.

The results of this survey will be used only for research purposes so please give your answers sincerely, as only this will ensure the success of this project. If you decide in the end that you would prefer not to participate in this survey, you will be free to opt out without any consequence. All data collected to the point of withdrawal remains part of the study database and will be used for the research. After completing the study, you will have 30 days to request the withdrawal of your data. Thank you very much for your help!

Contacts for further information

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First section: written questionnaire

Part I - General information

Please provide the following information by ticking in the box or writing your response in the space.

● Your age (in years):

● Gender F M Other

How would you self-evaluate your level of Italian so far?

Beginner

Intermediate

Advanced

Part II - Motivation Questionnaire

In this second part, I would like you to tell me to how far you agree or disagree with the following 20 statements by simply clicking on a number from 1 to 5, where:

1 is Strongly disagree, 2 is Disagree, 3 is Neither agree nor disagree, 4 Agree, 5 is Strongly agree

Please do not leave out any items.

1. I like Italian language and culture.
2. Studying Italian can be important to me because I think I'll need it for further studies.
3. I think learning Italian is important in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers.
4. I can imagine myself speaking Italian in the future with foreign friends.
5. I like TV programmes and films made in Italy.
6. I study Italian because close friends of mine think it is important.
7. Studying Italian is important to me in order to gain the approval of my family.
8. I like/ I'd like to travel to Italy.
9. I can imagine myself in the future giving a presentation in Italian successfully to the public in the future.
10. I really like the actual process of learning Italian.
11. Studying Italian is important to me in order to achieve a personally important goal (e.g., to get a degree or scholarship).
12. My dreams of how I want to use Italian in the future are the same as those of my parents.
13. I find learning Italian really interesting.
14. I think time passes faster while studying Italian.
15. I consider learning Italian important because the people I respect think that I should do it.
16. I can imagine that in the future in a café with light music, a foreign friend and I will be chatting in Italian casually over a cup of coffee.
17. Learning Italian is important to me because I plan to travel to Italy in the future.
18. I really enjoy learning Italian.

19. I have to learn Italian because I don’t want to fail the Italian course.
20. My image of how I want to use Italian in the future is mainly influenced by my parents and/or friends.

Part III – Personality

How well do the following statements describe your personality?

I see myself as someone who…

…is reserved

…is generally trusting

…tends to be lazy

…is relaxed, handles stress well

…has few artistic interests

…is outgoing, sociable

…tends to find fault with others

…does a thorough job

…gets nervous easily

…has an active imagination

Part IV - Autonomy

1. I can learn without teacher supervision
2. If I had the right materials, I'd prefer to spend some time studying alone
3. In language learning I enjoy tasks where I can learn on my own
4. I prefer to read books, magazines, newspapers all by myself without the teacher telling me what to read
5. The teacher should only be a counsellor, a helper and a guide
6. I like learning the language on my own because I know best how to learn
7. I review regularly in Italian learning and check what I have learned
8. I read certain amount of Italian material every day
9. When I have a language problem, I first try to solve it myself and only if I don't manage to do it, I turn to teachers or online peers for help
10. I also investigate the culture of the foreign language I am learning
11. I like learning English words by looking them up in a dictionary
12. I know my weaknesses and go for it
13. I am responsible for my own learning

The survey is over. Well done! Within the next four months I will contact you again for the final questionnaire about your perception of learning Italian online and progress with the language.

Thank you again for your cooperation!

Second section: Oral interview with open-ended questions

1) Have your on-campus classes been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes, in what way has the organisation of classes changed and which forms of online lessons have been provided? For example: Online in real-time (videoconference); online with a video recording (not in realtime); written communication - forums, chat, etc.); the use of breakout rooms in zoom.
2) In your opinion, in what way do online classes differ from on-campus classes? (For example, difficulty focusing or paying attention to remote/in-person instruction or activities, being at home and getting distracted/concentrating, personal issues that impact student performance, lack of interaction). Please, specify any weakness or straightness/ pros and cons.
3) How was your experience with technology? (for example: Adequate knowledge to effectively navigate canvas, lack of familiarity with required technologies or applications, access to resources/internet/hardware etc).
4) What is your opinion regarding access and inclusion of remote learning?
5) What is your general experience with online assessment? (for example, preference in preparing an exam or assessment from home or not, final grade expectation,). Have tutors/lecturers/professors informed you on what exams will look like in this new situation?
6) Did you notice any differences in formative assessment? Were tutors able to provide in-progress evaluation and feedback during the online lessons?
7) Were assignments and instructions clear? In what way did they differ to in-person ones?
8) How would you describe the communication and relationship with tutors, professors and lectures during the last months online, and how would you compare it to the pre-covid situation? (Was for the communication good and in a timely manner? Have they been open to students' suggestions and adjustments of online classes?)
9) In the light of the comparison among the two modes, do you have a personal preference for F2F learning or remote learning?
10) How would you describe your overall experience?

Appendix 4: Interview to Staff

Impact of COVID-19 on education policies - Leadership roles

Part I – General information

Name of Institution:

Position of the respondent:

Part II - Governance

1. *Does your national government have an education policy on crisis management?*

Yes/No/ Other (Specify)/ I don't know

Comment:

2. *Did your national government give instruction on how to proceed during the emergency?* Yes/No/Other (Specify)/ I don't know

Comment:

3. *Did/does the education authority make teachers and school administration staff complete professional development courses on remote education and technology?* Yes/No/Other (Specify)/ I don't know

Comment:

4. *In the COVID-19 crisis management, is there any support from authorities that you/your institution have found to be lacking?*

Comment:

Part III (a) - Institutional reaction and actions (short-term)

5. *Did your institution promptly intervene to manage the emergency and how would you evaluate the Covid-19 crisis management?*
6. *Was your institution ready to shift to Remote Education?*
7. *Have certain activities been completely stopped and resumed after few months (or not resumed at all)?*
8. *What have you been doing since the COVID-19 outbreak to assist instructors in the move online, either on or off campus?*
9. *What have you considered as the biggest challenges involved during COVID? (examples: Faculty digital training, mental health support for students*, *Emergency financial support for students*, *Maintaining academic standards, Implementing Technology needed for remote education, increased workload)*

Part III (b) - Institutional reaction and actions (long-term)

10. *Did your institution introduce alternative delivery modes? Which one(s)? (examples: hybrid, online, in-person, mixed).*
11. *What are the preventive and safety measures carried out by your institution to reopen on-campus operations and activities, or to avoid education disruption? (Social distancing,*

compulsory masks, limited class-sizes, Regular temperature screening, Mental health support for students, implementing online programs)

12. *What are the priorities and concerns of your institution during and after the pandemic?*

Part IV – Inclusion and access

13. *What do you say about the problem of students who don't have the same access to the technology and equipment necessary for online education? How does/did your institution support those students?*
14. *Has your institution recommended strategies aimed at improving equity and inclusion gaps?*

Conclusion

The sudden and unexpected transition to online learning during the lockdown from March 2020 was meant to be a "temporary solution to an immediate problem" (Hodges et al., 2020), and was characterised by uncertainty (Bozkurt et al., 2020, p.4). Accordingly, it is not to be wrongly mistaken for online or distance learning per se. In fact, the appropriate term to refer to learning carried out during the pandemic in response to the closure of schools and institutions is "emergency remote learning and teaching" (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020) which Bozkurt et al. (2020) deliberately classify as "a branch of distance education as in the case of online learning, e-learning, m-learning, or homeschooling".

15. *In light of the above differentiation between distance learning and Emergency remote learning, do you think the COVID-19 emergency has had a negative impact on the perception of online learning? And to what extent?*
16. *To what extent, if any, would you consider online/distance learning as a way to make education more accessible around the world?*

Impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning

Part I – General information

Name of Institution:

Position of the respondent:

Part II – Crisis management and University policies

1. *Did your institution promptly intervene to manage the emergency and how would you evaluate the Covid-19 crisis management?*
2. *Was your institution ready to shift to Remote Education?*
3. *Have certain activities been completely stopped and resumed after few months (or not resumed at all)?*
4. *Did your university provide professional development courses in technology or remote education?*

Part III – teaching practices and methodologies

5. *What have you been doing since the COVID-19 outbreak to assist students in the move online, either on or off campus?*
6. *Did you already have experience with remote teaching prior to COVID-19?*
7. *What do you see as the biggest challenges involved in online teaching?*

8. *What pieces of technology or programs do you think would be most beneficial dealing with this situation?*
9. *What do you say about the problem of students who don't have the same access to the technology and equipment necessary for online education? How did/does your institution and how did/do you, as a teacher, support those students?*
10. *Did you recognise the importance of equity and inclusion in your teaching practices online?*
11. *Have the curricula and course content been changed due to the COVID-19 crisis management?*
12. *Have assessment measures changed?*
13. *Was the communication between teachers and students effective during the pandemic?*
14. *Did you attend professional development courses in technology and online teaching on your own initiative?*
15. *How would you evaluate online teaching in terms of workload and well-being?*
16. *In the aftermath of the emergency remote learning experience, what are the effective/positive teaching strategies and approaches which have been introduced during the pandemic and you would consider keeping in your future teaching practices?*

Conclusion

The sudden and unexpected transition to online learning during the lockdown from March 2020 was meant to be a "temporary solution to an immediate problem" (Hodges et al., 2020), and was characterised by uncertainty (Bozkurt et al., 2020, p.4). Accordingly, it is not to be wrongly mistaken for online or distance learning per se. In fact, the appropriate term to refer to learning carried out during the pandemic in response to the closure of schools and institutions is "emergency remote learning and teaching" (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020) which Bozkurt et al. (2020) deliberately classify as "a branch of distance education as in the case of online learning, e-learning, m-learning, or homeschooling".

17. *In light of the above differentiation between distance learning and Emergency remote learning, do you think the COVID-19 emergency has had a negative impact on the perception of online learning? And to what extent?*
18. *To what extent, if any, would you consider online/distance learning as a way to make education more accessible around the world?*

Appendix 5: Consent Form

Thank you for reading the information sheet about the project. If you are happy to participate then please complete and sign the form below. Please tick the boxes below to confirm that you agree with each statement:

	Please tick the box:
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. All data collected to the point of withdrawal remains part of the study database and will be used for the research. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.	☐
I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	☐
I understand that I have the right to request the withdrawal of my data within 30 days after completing the study.	☐
I agree that my anonymised data will be kept for future research purposes such as publications related to this study after the completion of the study.	☐
I agree to take part in this interview (*by ticking the box, I sign the form*).	☐

Appendix 6: Interview Transcripts

Students' interviews: Group 1

Simona Scanni: Allora la prima domanda riguarda le lezioni in presenza: sono state cancellate a seguito della pandemia da covid-19? se sì in che maniera l'organizzazione delle lezioni è stata modificata, quali modalità di lezioni online sono state messe in atto (per esempio conferenze live oppure dei video registrati, comunicazioni scritte, forum, chat, email, l'uso di Breakout su zoom… chi vuole iniziare a rispondere?

Student #1: praticamente non è comodissimo come diciamo magari la prima generazione che studia all'università con il covid, ha anche dovuto cambiare tutto intorno all'insegnamento online specialmente nel primo semestre del primo anno. L'università ha comunque provato ad avere un certo misto dentro entro alcune prestazioni che erano comunque in presenza che però erano molto disperse perché, ecco, per un certo periodo la società stessa non sapeva ancora come agire con il covid nell'ambito dell'educazione e quindi, per esempio, quando siamo stati nelle classi ci è stato detto di essere molto allontanati di distanza, di ovviamente portare sempre le mascherine, però si sentiva che anche se siamo stati nel nella stessa classe, in sostanza era comunque una sensazione un po' strana specialmente per le lingue. Comunque anche avvicinarsi alla persona con la quale parli per me è una cosa molto difficile ed è stata poi con le mascherine vedere le reazioni Non so come dire però tipo le reazioni nella faccia delle persone perché comunque quando parli con una persona tendi a prendere tante informazioni da come si muove il viso, come si muovevano gli occhi e anche leggere la bocca. Ovviamente con le mascherine per me per in italiano non è stato così tanto un problema, neanche per francese, però per le lezioni di spagnolo ho iniziato solo cioè lo studio solo da un anno e mezzo adesso specialmente le prime lezioni erano abbastanza difficili perché prima cosa tutte le professoresse erano di parti diversi della Spagna, anche sud America, e quindi tutti gli accenti già variavano ed era un po' difficile identificarlo, poi non vedere proprio come ho detto prima muoversi la bocca a vedere come parlavano era una cosa abbastanza difficile all'inizio ma dall'altra parte devo dire che sono stata impressionata dal fatto come o quanto ci siamo abituati velocemente a tipo… non so come dire in italiano, ma con tipo poter vivere in questa situazione e adattarci a quello che c'era; anche dopo tre settimane quattro settimane l'anno scorso tutte le lezioni si sono messe online per un certo periodo quando il covid era abbastanza grave e da lì in poi ci siamo adattati. Devo dire che credo che come umanità siamo molto predisposti ad abituarci a qualsiasi tipo di situazione che ci viene data quindi credo che ci siamo adattati abbastanza velocemente anche a questo insegnamento on-line e la cosa che a me fa un po' paura o ha fatto un po' paura e quanto sia facile, e quanto sia difficile poi tornare nella modalità di insegnamento in persona perché comunque quando sei on-line puoi tipo spegnere il microfono, alcune persone non accendono la telecamera, è molto più tipo non è così interpersonale. Cioè se sei da sola Comunque nel tuo ruolo nel tuo mondo non c'è così tanta interazione e anche con il fatto che qualche volta la connessione non funziona.

Simona Scanni: Mi hai risposto a molte domande [...] voi siete d'accordo su quello che ha detto Student #1? Che tipologia di lezioni sono state fatte online rispetto in presenza? Ci sono state delle lezioni online oppure dei video registrati?

Student #2: era un po' strano in Francia perché l'Università l'anno scorso era sempre on-line quindi su Zoom ma non tutte le persone sapevano come usarlo quindi era un po' difficile per gli insegnanti e gli studenti quindi per le lingue non era tanto semplice perché non potevano parlare insieme, quindi il professore parlava e si faceva solo lezione frontale. [...] Qui invece (UoB) è più facile parlare con gli invitati e interagire con le persone quindi è un uso migliore di zoom

Student #3: Anch'io penso che all'inizio ci siano stati dei problemi con le lezioni online perché erano una cosa nuova per tutti però come diceva Student #1 noi siamo stati i primi e abbiamo appunto iniziato così e quindi ci siamo più o meno abituati ad avere questo tipo di lezioni. Quando siamo tornati in campus eravamo un attimo spaesati perché era una cosa nuova. Abbiamo avuto il problema contrario. E poi appunto alcune lezioni continuavano ad essere online quindi dovevamo andare in campus per alcune lezioni e poi su Zoom per altre…era un po' una confusione, era difficile ecco.

Simona Scanni: Prima Student #1 ha detto una cosa abbastanza interessante cioè il fatto che appunto in casa connettersi fare una lezione online è diversa dalla lezione in presenza per tanti aspetti anche se poi la lezione in presenza mettiamo la mascherina Insomma è sempre un po' problematico; quindi secondo voi Quali sono o le differenze tra una lezione in presenza e una lezione online? non lo so magari per esempio stare in casa crea più occasioni di distrazione oppure come avete detto la mancanza di interazione… Quali sono secondo voi poi i punti di forza e di debolezza dell'apprendimento on-line oltre quelli che Student #1 ha detto.

Student #1: però magari online sia tu che magari la gente sia più predisposta anche. Cioè questo è un pochino il contrario di quello che ho detto prima però magari siamo un po' più disposti a parlare perché magari quando una persona fa un errore di grammatica o un errore Proprio quando il professore Chiede delle domande puoi mettere "mute" su zoom, è come se non ci fossi più quindi è questo tipo opportunità che se non vuole rispondere se non vuoi tipo esserci hai questa possibilità, che non è proprio molto gentile però ecco la possibilità di dire "Ok io non ci sono, faccio parte per quanto voglio io però nessuno mi può costringere" non è come in classe se per esempio la docente parla e dice "Cosa pensi di questa cosa?" e io devo rispondere perché sono là in quel momento e la miglior cosa che posso dire è che va bene ok Non lo so però faccio il mio meglio. Su Zoom credo che questo fatto di dover rispondere di più per essere sempre più contento sia un po' di meno perché hai questa possibilità di una certa maniera nascondersi. Poi cioè si è parlato anche non nel nostro corso però in altri corsi di persone che magari facevano finta che non gli funzionava il microfono che non avevano connessione o altro. Quindi cioè ti obbliga molto meno ad essere tipo in presenza e interagire.

Simona Scanni: Ottimo punto ecco questo sì si sa che si può mettere muto però in effetti non avevo mai considerata da questo punto di vista. Voi che cosa ne pensate volete, aggiungere altro?

Student #4: ho altre cose negative…non sceglierei mai Zoom se potessi scegliere ma dobbiamo farlo. Con i problemi di Internet, se hai problemi per esempio quest'anno il nostro proprietario di casa non ha aggiustato bene il nostro provider di internet, e così per esempio l'ultima settimana non ho avuto internet e questo è stato per me molto difficile. Potevo andare in campus se trovavo una stanza libera, ma non è sempre così e devi andare da una parte all'altra perché se hai una lezione su Zoom e poi devi camminare verso l'aula in campus per fare una lezione non è conveniente. [...] (connection is unstable and not clear, I cannot understand the student).
Simona Scanni: a parte zoom, l'apprendimento online in effetti abbraccia molte altre modalità per esempio su Canvas il docente inserisce dei video invece di fare la lecture mette dei video quindi voi potete Quando volete visionare i video anche più volte questo per esempio voi lo mettete come un aspetto positivo?

Student #4: Si può fare la lecture anche in persona. Sono registrati quindi puoi guardarli anche dopo ma è sempre meglio avere la lezione in persona perché se non capisci puoi chiedere al professore lì invece di mandare una email (unstable connection).

Simona Scanni: ok sì sicuramente il fatto di avere un feedback immediato dal docente è un aspetto che su zoom si può avere però nel momento in cui ci sono delle problematiche legate a internet in un computer in effetti s… Ok, volete aggiungere qualcosa? Un aspetto positivo un aspetto negativo

Cioè non lo so… fatto di stare in casa, di potersi connettere anche all'ultimo minuto non dover prendere i mezzi per andare all'università può essere un aspetto positivo oppure si diventa un po' più pigri perché magari all'ultimo minuto mi devo connettere? Qual è il vostro stato d'animo rispetto a questo?

Student #2: per i mezzi per andare all'università molto più facili perché in Francia potevo prendere il bus e un altro bus per un'ora e mezza quindi era molto più facile andare su Zoom senza prendere il bus.

Simona Scanni: La domanda successiva con la tecnologia diciamo come è stata la vostra esperienza con la tecnologia? Eravate pronte comunque a l'utilizzo della tecnologia?

Student #3: Riguardo il discorso di prima sono d'accordo con gli altri Students, cioè magari ci sono dei lati positivi e altri negativi. Anche io preferisco la lezione su zoom per motivi di trasporti eccetera eccetera perché non vivo in campus. Però appunto c'erano anche dei lati negativi come la connessione oppure sì non so magari l'interazione che è diversa da quella in persona per cui capisco…invece per quanto riguarda ila tecnologia devo dire che io ho avuto problemi a volte perché non sono molto per queste cose online, tipo per esempio quando eravamo in esame è successo che dovevo usare Panopto per esempio caricare un video ci ho messo un po',,, Quindi queste cose qua siamo riusciti diciamo così.

Simona Scanni: Grazie mille, volete aggiungere qualcos'altro in questa esperienza sulla tecnologia? No? Ok abbiamo parlato già per quanto riguarda l'accesso più Insomma nell'apprendimento online e secondo voi l'apprendimento online è inclusivo oppure cioè il fatto di potersi connettere sempre da internet è più inclusivo oppure al contrario è limitante per alcuni categorie di persone?

Student #1: tutta la gente ha sempre accesso a internet che sia sempre predisposto a tipo non so, non solo avere accesso a internet però anche tipo avere accesso a un computer appena acceso portatile che comunque non è sempre così facile… e poi cioè da una parte è molto Impressionante il fatto che lavori così bene ma dall'altra parte è anche un po' non so È tipo il fatto che che si presume che questa cosa non faccia dei problemi a nessuno specialmente non parlo di noi che vabbè è normale però magari la gente che già ha dei problemi di tipo relazioni sociali o altro che poi tramite… cioè avere di nuovo una cosa che mette una distanza tra noi e l'altra gente è tipo cioè come persone ci siamo allontanando sempre di più e specialmente sul livello di lingue non credo ci sia una buona cosa perché è molto cioè il fatto che possiamo tipo scriverci su WhatsApp possiamo fare il Facetime possiamo fare tutti quelle cose, inoltre a questo ancora le lezioni su Zoom, tra qualche anno non è che ci vedremo più in presenza per niente…a me, ho sentito quando siamo tornati in presenza che è proprio mancata questa cosa di sentire che c'è qualcun altro nella stanza, di vedere tipo il metodo di comunicazione e tipo vedere le emozioni, le reazioni delle persone è molto diverso in persona [...] ridere se sbaglia qualcosa, questa connessione che credo che è una delle delle ragioni per le quali mi piace così tanto la comunicazione e studiare la comunicazione in se stessa che è una cosa molto umana e la comunicazione tra umani è iniziata in persona e nessun altro tipo di comunicazione potrà mai essere così bella che quella che si fa faccia a faccia, ecco.

Simona Scanni: i praticamente hai introdotto un elemento importantissimo cioè l'inclusione che io in realtà lo intendevo molto come inclusione soprattutto per quanto riguarda determinate categorie di persone anche a livello di disabili, invece tu hai creato un'altra tipologia di inclusione cioè l'inclusione relazionale inclusione anche a livello psicologico…

Student #4: a parte presumere che tutti hanno accesso grazie alla tecnologia corretta se hai soldi o alla connessione a internet, o che tutti hanno spazio sicuro per fare lezione online. Perché molti non hanno avuto spazi sicuri durante lockdown per fare lezione. Per esempio, chi ha coinquilini che possono interrompere la lezione o persone che hanno salute mentale non molto bene non è molto

inclusivo…sei chiuso in gabbia e già ci sono prove che persone possono concentrarsi di più in spazi fatti per l'apprendimento e che tutti sono allo stesso livello quando sono nello stesso posto, perché uno studente che ha una casa grande e nessuno che interrompe si può concentrare di più di uno studente che ha uno spazio piccolo e persone che interrompono. Non è lo stesso livello quando sono tutti e due nella stessa classe, sono al pari. Non credo quindi che è inclusivo.Si può dire che persone da altri paesi possono venire su Zoom e quello è inclusivo, o persone che non possono viaggiare o camminare tanto possono…

Simona Scanni: Ok allora Invece per quanto riguarda la valutazione quindi l'assessment online Vorrei un vostro parere cioè secondo voi i docenti Innanzitutto c'è stata una comunicazione oppure diciamo l'assessment on-line è stato secondo voi organizzato bene? vi chiedo anche un parere per quanto riguarda la valutazione formativa cioè il fatto di avere un feedback immediato dai docenti durante la lezione online e anche su quelle che sono le consegne i compiti assegnati quindi che qual è la vostra opinione in merito? [...]

Student #2: Una buona esperienza con l'assessment online perché è un po' più facile penso di essere a casa e di essere concentrati sull'esame, rispondere alle domande per l'esame orale è più facile parlare, un po' meno stressante perché sono solo io nella mia camera quindi posso giusto parlare con qualcuno con meno di stress.

Simona Scanni: invece per quanto riguarda le modalità che sono state trovate per diciamo comparare l'assessment online rispetto a quello che in presenza, secondo voi sono state trovate delle modalità giuste?

Student #4: Con l'assessment su zoom ci sono dei problemi per me. Per esempio la stanza dove si faceva prima l'assessment non aveva distrazioni ed era silenziosa, era tutto calmo. Su zoom la connessione internet non è lo stesso per ogni persona e poi nella stanza ci sono distrazioni e le persone possono avere più notte per copiare e truffare, leggere cose per aiutarsi. Quindi non è lo stesso livello, tutti non sono messi al pari nell'assessment.

Student #1: Ho pensato al fatto che l'assessment online comunque Allora in primo luogo aiuta tantissimo veramente Credo che non si può negare che si prendono dei voti più alti con l'assessment online perché ovviamente come ha detto Student #4 ti da tempo per fare della ricerca e pure il fatto gli gli esami siano stati di 48 ore che comunque ti da abbastanza tempo per fare prima delle ricerca poi per vedere cosa vuoi scrivere e poi perfezionare quello che vuoi scrivere per prendere il miglior voto possibile però allo stesso tempo Credo che ci sia anche il fatto che se ci sono questi assessment on-line non credo che sia giusto dall'università per esempio di pretendere che noi con persone che siamo entrati nel primo anno di non fare assessment online il primo anno adesso ci hanno comunicato che ci saranno poi nel secondo anno poi noi andremo all'anno all'estero e Nel quarto anno ci vogliono gli esami in persona questo non lo trovo giusto per niente non Si può pretendere di un gruppo di persone che non ha mai a un livello universitario di fare gli esami più difficili cioè quelli dell'ultimo anno per laurearsi in presenza senza aver mai avuto un'esperienza simile quindi e Là il mio problema, perché se poi diciamo Ok va bene facciamo degli esami online anche nel quarto anno allora va bene perché è giusto. Però continuare a farci assessment in questo modo e di non farci vedere nessun altro modo di assessment, non darci neanche una prova per farli perché anche tutti queste prove che facciamo non è che hai tutto il tempo che vuoi tu per farli, cioè bene perché hai un voto migliore però tornando al discorso dell'ultimo anno, per me per esempio non so cos'altro può essere fatto…

Simona Scanni: per esempio i mock test […] per quanto riguarda invece la relazione e la comunicazione con i docenti molto brevemente Secondo voi c'è stata una comunicazione buona e tempestiva? cioè io mando un'email e ricevo subito una risposta sì? e invece alla luce quindi del

confronto tra la modalità di apprendimento online e in presenza qual è la vostra personale preferenza? Cioè se poteste scegliere preferireste la modalità online o la modalità In presenza?

Students: In presenza.

Student #4: in presenza imparavo di più.

Simona Scanni: student #1 dicevi anche appunto l'interazione che è importante giusto? per l'accesso a internet e anche perché c'è possibilità di comunicare, di essere proprio presenti realmente durante la lezione quindi sei anche obbligato in qualche maniera ad essere attivo durante la lezione? Student #2 invece tu forse hai un'esperienza diversa dimmi…

Student #2: Si perché l'anno scorso ero sempre su Zoom quindi non era tanto difficile per me ma in persona va bene anche quindi non so…non le due allo stesso tempo forse perché troppo complicato.

Simona Scanni: per esempio una modalità ibrida, potrebbe essere?

Student #4: io solo in presenza!

Simona Scanni: Va bene allora ultimissima domanda brevemente come valutereste la vostra esperienza online in generale la valutiamo comunque positivamente o con qualche riserva.

Student #1: è abbastanza frustrante perché alla fine c'è sempre qualcosa che non funziona o non puoi accedere, o c'è il professore che vuole condividere un documento e non ci riesce [...]. Per esempio se io penso a oggi, ho la lezione di spagnolo prima che è in un posto dove non ci sono posti per studiare e non ho il tempo di andare dalla lezione di spagnolo in un altro posto dove fare il meeting di zoom in quel tempo che mi rimanere tra una lezione e l'altra. dopodiché devo pensare che devo comunque portarmi i libri…è tutta una cosa che per me è uno stress che non finisce più. O tutte le lezioni sono online e va bene o tutte le lezioni sono in presenza, però questa cosa che si mischia…a me creano uno stress che mi ruba cioè mi ruba tantissimo tempo che potrei utilizzare per fare altre cose.

Student #4: Se stavo facendo un corso piccolo ed era tutto online sarebbe ok per me, e non per tanto tempo potrei farlo, ma non un corso universitario di anni tutto online è troppo per me, troppo stressante e trovo molto difficile imparare e avere interazioni con le persone, per la salute mentale…ma direi che la mia esperienza su questo corso online è ok, anche perché non c'era scelta. Tutti hanno fatto come potevano, però mi piace di più in persona.

Student #2: la mia esperienza era positiva quindi non posso dire che era stressante o altro, ma ibrido per me non funziona quindi o online o in presenza per me.

Students' interviews: Group 2

Simona Scanni: parto con la registrazione in maniera tale che insomma le vostre opinioni che sono veramente molto importanti per me le possa in qualche modo possa prendere spunto da quello che ci diremo in questa mezz'ora. Allora L. (the teacher) mi ha detto che vi aveva inviato le domande sia in italiano che in inglese ma ovviamente noi ne parleremo in italiano; allora la prima domanda è a le vostre lezioni in presenza sono state cancellate a seguito della pandemia COVID-19 in che maniera l'organizzazione delle lezioni è stata modificata e quali modalità di lezioni online sono state messe in atto? Per esempio una volta online avete avuto dei video registrati su canvas da poter visionare oppure le lezioni sono state spostate su zoom a l'uso di breakout rooms oppure di chat per la

comunicazione scritta, quindi in cosa si è modificato rispetto all'organizzazione on campus l'organizzazione online? Chi vuole iniziare?

Student #1: per noi è un po' complicato, la situazione è un po' complicata perché durante il nostro secondo anno tutto è stato cancellato completamente perché era il 2020 però il prossimo anno era il nostro anno all'estero quindi dipende da questo, per esempio per me per il secondo semestre studiavo all' università di Bologna però tutto online, quindi utilizzavamo Teams per fare tutto ma per gli esami abbiamo utilizzato anche Zoom, […] tutte le lezioni erano online.

Simona Scanni: invece quest'anno che siete tornati in presenza che cosa avete notato per esempio sul canvas di diverso?

Student #1: tutto organizzato in modo più chiaro direi che è più, non so, più dettagliato ci sono più opzioni se forse non poi andare alla lezione in presenza è molto più facile di recuperare ciò che hai seguito.

Simona Scanni: perfetto, grazie. Qualcun altro vuole aggiungere qualcosa? Rispetto alla propria esperienza nell'anno all'estero o se siete d'accordo con quello appena detto.

Student #2: per me era l'anno all'estero ma non ho avuto contatto con le mie professoresse, ho fatto lavoro con 2 scuole durante l'anno all'estero quindi non ho esperienza con l'università durante questo periodo. Però soprattutto quest'anno è molto facile, l'atmosfera è più sicura, e l'opzione di avere la lezione in linea o in presenza per me è molto sicuro avere questa opzione perché alcuni giorni per la salute mentale è difficile dormire, pensare e vivere in generale e quindi è molto importante per me avere l'opzione. C'è un'atmosfera di sicurezza specialmente quest'anno.

Simona Scanni: volete aggiungere qualcos'altro? Domanda successiva: vado allora secondo voi in che cosa le lezioni online si differenziano dalle lezioni in presenza, per esempio magari c'è una maggiore difficoltà a concentrarsi o a prestare attenzione alle spiegazioni se siete online oppure se siete in presenza lo stare a casa crea più occasioni di distrazione oppure c'è mancanza di interazione quali sono le differenze e i pro e i contro dell'online e in presenza?

Student #1: io personalmente trovo che essendo a casa sono molto più distratta però se le lezioni sono registrate tornare indietro, sono molto utili per studiare, o mettere pausa se non sei riuscita a scrivere quello che ha detto la professoressa.

[…]

Student # 3: si è vero ci sono distrazioni a casa però a volte tipo durante le lezioni in presenza se non andiamo veloce poi a volte penso avrei potuto fare tutto a casa più veloce e ripassato la grammatica o imparato nuovo vocabolario che in presenza non possiamo fare perché siamo un gruppo più grande. O tipo cammino all'università ci metto una mezzoretta e poi devo ritornare e forse avrei potuto fare di più a casa mia.

Simona Scanni: siete d'accordo? in effetti hai detto delle cose interessanti anche sul periodo sul tempo impiegato per andare all'università, anche quelle che sono le attitudini personali con lo studio quindi magari c'è qualcuno che riesce più velocemente a studiare chi ha bisogno di più tempo quindi il fatto di poter essere più indipendenti nello studio da casa o anche in presenza… voi siete d'accordo oppure no? secondo voi in presenza rimane comunque una certa autonomia?

Student #1: trovo che più facile per me concentrarmi online perché in aula ci sono distrazioni per esempio è più facile parlare con gli amici durante la lezione.

Simona Scanni: per quanto riguarda la mancanza di interazione, voi cosa ne pensate? perché comunque voi studiate una lingua straniera quindi in teoria l'interazione e la comunicazione è importante. Secondo voi online c'è la stessa interazione che si può avere in presenza

Student #3: secondo me è difficile perché non sai quando qualcun altro vuole parlare, vuole aggiungere qualcosa… c'è una sorta di pausa quando tutti aspettano che qualcun altro dice qualcosa è molto difficile intendersi se qualcuno vuole raggiungere qualcosa.

Student #4: Credo che online è più facile tenere muto e spegnere la telecamera e ascoltare (unstable connection, I can't hear the student).

Simona Scanni: allora purtroppo non stiamo sentendo bene… credo eh infatti credo che ok ti abbiamo perso un attimo non si sentiva bene quindi dicevo questo possiamo mettere tra le problematiche dell'online quindi questo in effetti lo hai detto ed è successo quindi in effetti ne abbiamo la prova. ok allora invece come valutereste la vostra esperienza con la tecnologia? cioè voi con la tecnologia come ve la cavate? Bene, così così…

Student #2: la mia esperienza con la tecnologia è stata buona perché come generazione siamo molto tecnologici quindi usare zoom non è stato un problema, e ho capito come usare la piattaforma universitaria online dopo due anni e quindi ha funzionato bene.

Simona Scanni: poi qual è invece la vostra opinione circa la questione dell'accesso alla tecnologia e l'inclusione cioè tutti quanti hanno lo stesso tipo di accesso a Internet ai dispositivi online o secondo voi l'online learning crea delle difficoltà di accesso e di inclusione? cosa ne pensate?

Student #1: durante il primo lockdown sono stata a casa con i miei in spagna però ho perso lezioni perché la connessione se ne andava e non potevo riconnettermi, e questo era difficile perché la prof non voleva recuperare la lezione e non c'erano registrazioni e poi con tutti a casa può essere difficile lavorare perché potevo sentire mio padre che parlava con i colleghi. Specialmente se cerchi di imparare una lingua senti la lingua che la prof parla e poi i tuoi o tua sorella che sta parlando in inglese oppure la mamma che sta passando l'aspirapolvere e quindi è difficile parlare a casa per chi non ha la connessione veramente è difficile.

Simona Scanni: siete d'accordo su questo? Quindi l'online learning per certi aspetti e inclusivo per altri meno oppure non è per niente inclusivo cioè in che cosa secondo voi comunque si può dire che l'online learning è inclusivo? Per esempio il fatto che chiunque può studiare un determinato corso di laurea anche se non può venire on-campus, quindi anche le persone disabili…penso questo. Per quanto riguarda invece l'assessment online, qual è stata la vostra esperienza e soprattutto com'è cambiata la situazione rispetto all'assessment in presenza, cosa è cambiato cosa preferite tra l'assessment online e l'assessment in presenza?

Student #3: il secondo anno oppure il primo facevamo gli esami in campus allora venivamo sempre in dei centri all'università, delle aule aperte, mentre quest'anno e anche l'anno scorso abbiamo avuto gli esami che erano gli esami da portare a casa per 48 ore e quindi sì c'è stato eh per me personalmente era o è un cambio diciamo enorme perché cioè siamo abituati così tanto agli esami nella stanza con altre persone e adesso quest'anno invece tutti soli a fare l'esame a casa e quindi si era diverso e anche l'esame orale e credo che è comunque l'esame orale quello che è più secondo me ha avuto più conseguenze il cambiamento perché c'è un senso di distacco mentre prima lo facevamo per esempio faccia a faccia con il professore che ci faceva le domande mentre adesso sembra un po' come indiretta, è come parlare allo schermo e certe volte mi chiedo "perché sto parlando con lo schermo da sola?" e quindi è un po' sempre diverso.

Simona Scanni: siete d'accordo?

Student #1: si, secondo me l'esame orale…preferisco in presenza sicuramente perché non mi sono ancora abituata a parlare davanti allo schermo, ho bisogno di qualcuno davanti a me. Però gli esami scritti da portare a casa in 48 ore sono migliori perché riflettono di più quello che sarà richiesto da noi quando inizieremo a lavorare, secondo me.

Simona Scanni: per quanto riguarda il voto, invece, secondo voi ci sono state dei cambiamenti sul voto che si ha in un assessment on campus e il voto che invece si ha in un esame fatto da casa?

Student #3: secondo me quest'anno siccome possiamo usare Google e altre risorse i professori si aspettano di più perché dovrebbe essere quasi perfetto però ovviamente non siamo madre lingua e quindi ci saranno sempre un paio di errori che si anche se è possibile controllare tutto, qualcosa sfuggirà…non so come gli altri hanno trovato gli esami, io ero un po' sorpresa della severità rispetto agli anni precedenti sì.

Simona Scanni: c'era da parte dei professori un'aspettativa più alta sicuramente? siete d'accordo?

Student #1: per quanto riguarda lo scritto si c'era una differenza debole, però per quanto riguarda l'orale era abbastanza lo stesso secondo me però non lo so sì nello scritto in effetti come diceva Student #3 il fatto che si può usare google si può cercare sia il tempo necessario ovviamente hanno considerato questo.

Simona Scanni: invece per quanto riguarda il rapporto con I docent, quindi per quanto riguarda il feedback costante del docente e la comunicazione, secondo voi la comunicazione online con i docenti cioè durante l'online learning è stato diverso rispetto a prima? è stato uguale è stato migliore… come cioè il fatto anche magari di mandare un'email e di ricevere una risposta ditemi un po' le vostre esperienze in merito.

Student #3: oh allora il secondo anno abbiamo avuto…cioè io ero all'estero e ho anche avuto un gap year e poi sono tornata quest'anno dopo due anni di non essere all'università e quindi molti dei professori che avevo negli anni precedenti sono cambiati anche e quindi la mia prima comunicazione con certi professori erano su zoom o erano via email e quindi era per me era un po' difficile connettermi oppure anche a iniziare la comunicazione fare domande perché non gli avevo mai visti non ci avevo mai parlato prima di persona e quindi c'è un po' questo distacco. Però tutti rispondevano, non c'erano problemi. […]

Student #2: ci sono alcuni professori che non rispondono anche su cose importanti quindi è un po' frustrante aspettare e aspettare per avere una risposta. Però allo stesso tempo capisco che c'è un limite professionale e personale, alcuni professori non vogliono rispondere alle 8 o alle 9 di notte. E' frustrante. Preferisco parlare con un professore in persona, ma si è un po' difficile.

Student #1: non so se è una caratteristica dell'università italiana, ma quando si scriveva ai professori non mi sembravano molto disponibili o comunque non c'era molta comunicazione con loro e quando rispondevano la risposta era corta e fredda e magari ti ripetevano quello che c'era già scritto, non è che c'era tanta disponibilità.

Simona Scanni: ultime due domande. Innanzitutto, vi chiedo un confronto tra l'apprendimento online e l'apprendimento in presenza, quale delle due modalità preferite oppure se magari valutereste anche una forma ibrida quindi online e in presenza tutti e due insieme qual è la vostra opinione?

Student #2: credo che sia meglio il metodo ibrido perché per gli studenti è molto importante avere una scelta. È frustrante e crea rabbia quando non è una scelta. E questo metodo permette a tutti gli studenti di scegliere se vogliono andare all'università, restare a casa, e in generale crea un'atmosfera di sicurezza per la persona. Preferisco scegliere.

Student #4: Secondo me ci sono problema con la modalità ibrida per quanto riguarda avere persone online e in aula perché è difficile gestire tutti. Le persone online magari non possono sentire quello che le persone in aula stanno dicendo perché non c'è il microfono, o il prof non può vedere se qualcuno online vuole aggiungere qualcosa. Però per me l'idea di avere una modalità ibrida sarebbe meglio perché io sono sempre malata e contraggo ogni malattia e quindi è molto più facile per me.

Student #1: Io preferisco in presenza ma solo perché non mi piace studiare da casa. Ho bisogno del distacco mentale casa e studio però ovviamente quella è una preferenza personale però sono più per l'ibrido perché se devo tornare a casa o sono malata p più possibilità di partecipare. Però devi avere una motivazione per non andare in presenza e mi sembra giusto. (unstable connection).

Simona Scanni: non ti sentiamo più…in effetti ibrido ma con delle regole.

Student #3: e ero d'accordo con Student #1 ciò che ha detto che nell'ibrido con certe regole nel senso che avere certe lezioni prestabilite in campus e certe proprio online per tutti perché sarebbe più facile per il professore da gestire e comunque non tutto online perché ci sarebbe Eh sì ci sarebbe un po di ci sarebbe quel muro tra professore e gli studenti ma anche studente con gli altri studenti e quindi credo che le ore in classe e comunque servono anche per gli studenti per chiedere domande, essere più rilassati se hanno qualsiasi domanda che possono fare al professore magari a fine lezione oppure all'inizio lezione quindi è più facile anche, però comunque certe volte cioè per me personalmente anche il io sono una studentessa che abita a casa e ci vogliono quasi un'ora e mezza per arrivare all'università e certe volte cioè io ne ho uno solo un'ora di università lunedì martedì mercoledì ho solo un'ora di lezione e quindi 5 ore della mia giornata sono avanti e indietro e 50 minuti di lezione quindi cioè anche quello un po' frustrante per me.

Simona Scanni: ultima domanda, come valutate la vostra esperienza in generale con l'apprendimento online? secondo voi andata bene così così?

Student #3: per noi questa cosa è successa in metà corso e ora stiamo all'anno finale siamo stati quasi non cavie però quasi come…i professori hanno anche hanno imparato molto e sono sicura che con tutto quello che loro hanno imparato ora sapranno organizzarsi meglio per i prossimi anni e sicuramente sarà più facile per i prossimi studenti del' primo anno mentre per noi era un po' difficile gestire e cambiare il nostro ambiente anche a casa. È stato molto difficile passare da in persona a online ma sono sicura che con il tempo sarà molto più facile e sicuramente per gli studenti sarà la normalità ma per noi è stato diverso.

Student #2: Per me in generale l'università ha fatto "schifo" ma mi piace avere la scelta ed ora so la differenza tra lavoro online e in presenza. Era un cambio difficile per adattarmi in principio, ma ora è molto facile scegliere tra le opzioni per cambiare la mente anche se una lezione è in presenza o in linea rispetto al lavoro che devo fare.

Student #1: sono d'accordo, all'inizio ho fatto molta fatica e la maggior parte delle lezioni erano pre-registrate e avevo questa mancanza di struttura dei giorni, sapevo che erano lì e potevo farlo oggi o domani, ed era sempre domani…e questa mancanza mi ha un po' scombussolato ma però mi ci sono abituata e ora tutte le mie lezioni sono in presenza quindi anche se fossero online magari mi ci sarei abituata rispetto all'inizio che è stato uno shock.

Students' interviews: Group 3

Simona Scanni: le lezioni in presenza sono state cancellate a seguito della pandemia covid? se si quindi in che maniera l'organizzazione delle lezioni è stata modificata e quali modalità di lezioni online sono state messe in atto? per esempio sono state fatte delle videoconferenze live zoom

oppure dei video registrati comunicazione scritta all'uso di su zoom quindi qual è la vostra che cosa potete condividermi rispetto alle modalità cambiate durante e dopo diciamo l'arrivo del covid?

Student #1: allora subito dopo il covid non c'era niente non avevamo nessuna lezione hanno semplicemente cancellato le lezioni a termine e poi noi dal quarto anno a settembre l'anno scorso abbiamo cominciato l'anno all'estero in teoria allora io ero abbastanza fortunata e sono riuscita a seguire le lezioni online dell'università italiana allora la mia esperienza non è quella degli altri diciamo perché ho seguito le lezioni online dell'università iulm a Milano ma abbiamo seguito le lezioni su teams e 1 giorno alla settimana una volta la settimana potevo anche andare in presenza allora non era obbligatoria cioè potevi scegliere se andare o no.

Simona Scanni: invece quest'anno che sei tornata che tipo di di modalità ci sono cioè quindi c'è zoom ovviamente ma poi vengono non lo so vengono caricati dei video su canvas che tipo di il lavoro cioè rispetto per esempio l'utilizzo di canvas come viene fatto adesso rispetto al pre covid?

Student #1: ora siamo tornati in presenza ma un paio di volte mi è successo che sono stata malata e la mia prof di francese mi ha permesso di seguire le lezioni online tramite zoom, in più alcune professori come quelli di italiano che abbiamo noi hanno le registrazioni dell'anno scorso che hanno messo su canvas così se perdiamo una lezione se non abbiamo capito qualcosa possiamo anche andare e vedere la la registrazione su canvas così possiamo anche ripassare quello che abbiamo studiato

Simona Scanni: oK mentre prima nella fase pre covid non c'era questo?

Student #1: c'erano i video online diciamo da poter c'erano ma meno perché avevano fatto sempre questi registrazioni e non dei seminari come facciamo noi oggi mentre parliamo ma se per esempio presentavano qualcosa una volta alla settimana era a volte registrato, ma c'erano tanti professori che erano contro questo dicendo che se fanno troppe registrazione un giorno perderanno il lavoro perché useranno le registrazioni. Oggigiorno è troppo tardi, ormai ci sono le registrazioni.

Student #2: ho vissuto 2 anni sabbatici quindi non ho vissuto il covid e le lezioni online. […] Per me non è cambiato molto perché la maggior parte delle lezioni sono in presenza adesso. Vivo lontano dall'università quindi alcune lezioni online sarebbero più utili per me.

Simona Scanni: secondo voi in cosa le lezioni online differiscono dalle lezioni in presenza? (per esempio c'è più difficoltà a concentrarsi o prestare attenzione online oppure stare a casa può creare le occasioni di distrazione o c'è mancanza di interazione…) quindi quali sono secondo voi le differenze e quali sono eventualmente i punti di forza o di debolezza di uno e dell'altro?

Student #1: oggi direi che vedo a entrambi i vantaggi e svantaggi, perché a casa mi sento più comoda cioè posso anche fare le lezioni in pigiama se voglio, nessuno mi giudica e ho più tempo libero perché andando all'università poi tornando cioè aggiunge un'oretta ogni giorno, un'altra ora ogni giorno in cui anche studiare qualcosa così un po' più comoda, prendere il pranzo a casa invece di forse comprare qualcosa all'università. Allora in questo senso mi piace essere a casa perché sono a mio agio no? sono nella mia zona e allora funziona meglio; e per i seminari è così mentre parliamo può essere meglio online perché io riesco a vedere tutte le vostre facce per esempio, e così posso capire se qualcuno è stato per parlare invece a lezione dove si può non lo so guardare tutte le persone per vedere se qualcun altro vuole rispondere e non sei mai sicura allora a volte meglio essere online, ma questo funziona solo se tutti hanno le videocamere accese ovviamente. Poi se non è una lezione così dove chiacchieriamo, parliamo insieme, se stiamo parlando di qualcosa dove la mia professore presenta un tema è molto facile distrarti perché praticamente non c'è bisogno di seguire ogni singola parola, invece in presenza anche se non stai seguendo la lezione fai finta di

seguire la lezione, se sei a casa trovi qualcos'altro da fare spegni la videocamera è facile distrarti ma per me direi che ci sono più vantaggi forse perché mi piace avere questo tempo in più di vedere tutte le persone allo stesso momento. Ma dipende anche dall'internet che oggi fa schifo.

Simona Scanni: ma invece la mancanza di interazione secondo te c'è di più online? […]

Student #1: sì c'è interazione e non è forzata online, una cosa che mi piace e che è molto difficile in classe. Per esempio lo scorso semestre avevamo un sacco di italiani nella nostra classe di italiano che non hanno bisogno di imparare l'italiano…sono italiani! E quindi parlare davanti a loro ci faceva vergognare anche se sei brava e conosci bene la lingua, comunque è strano parlare davanti a una madrelingua. Con la nostra professoressa è diverso, online almeno puoi non guardarli, puoi far finta che non ci sono…non so…e poi io posso scegliere l'interazione che voglio io, se c'è un progetto di gruppo e siamo online posso scegliere le mie amiche poi dico ci vediamo in città e possiamo farlo insieme, o se sono persone che non conosco molto bene dico ok facciamo uno zoom questa settimana… posso scegliere io il livello di interazione, invece in class è proprio forzato parlare e a volte molto stressante, per me è sempre un po' preferibile scegliere il livello di interazione.

Student #2: per me è più difficile concentrarmi a casa, ma forse è più probabile che le lezioni su zoom fossero registrate e sarebbe utile per me. Però se sono nello stesso spazio tutto il giorno per me è difficile concentrarmi. Quindi ci sono vantaggi e svantaggi. […] In presenza per me è più facile interagire, non so veramente perché.

Simona Scanni: invece come valutate la vostra esperienza con la tecnologia? Come ve la cavate con la tecnologia?

Student #1: male! Sono un po' una nonnina con la tecnologia. Allora abbiamo questo codice residenza che abbiamo da ottobre ed ho scoperto come si fa tre settimane fa perché ogni volta che lo facevo sbagliavo qualcosa! Il link sbagliato, non lo so, è una cosa stupida e infatti non è troppo complicato però era complicato allo stesso modo non lo so dipende anche dall'internet qua la nostra Internet fa schifo e allora per esempio per fare questa chiamata devo chiudere tutte le altre applicazioni sul computer, devo avere attaccato alle prese perché sennò non va, non sento niente allora in pratica non è ideale la situazione su zoom per questa ragione; io preferisco piuttosto fare gli appunti a mano per esempio che non cambi niente qua perché se parliamo così e faccio gli appunti a mano lo faccio qua sul tavolo non è un problema ma piuttosto trovo che semplicemente per andare in classe prima ci davano tipo le pagine che stampavano loro all'università ora devo portare io il computer con tutto sul canvas per esempio perché non stampano più le cose per noi perché c'è il covid e per questo devo portare ogni giorno il computer all'università. […] dipende dalla persona, conosco persone che a casa non hanno internet a casa ovviamente che è una cosa malissimo perché non hanno le cose per studiare, io sono fortunata me ne rendo conto, per me è solo una scelta personale in base alla mia personalità, poi ci sono persone che non hanno le mie possibilità, e questa è un'altra cosa.

Student #2: Per me [internet] funziona quasi sempre ma c'è il rischio che non funzioni ed è stressante in questo caso.

Simona Scanni: collego al discorso che faceva Student #1 per chiedervi qual è la vostra opinione sull'accesso e l'inclusione dell'online learning? cioè tutti quanti hanno lo stesso tipo di inclusione e di accesso oppure come dicevi già Student #1, e Student #2 cosa ne pensi? Secondo te tutti possono avere o hanno lo stesso tipo di inclusione online?

Student #2: no perché dipende dalla situazione finanziaria, io sono molto fortunata perché mio padre mi ha comprato un laptop molto buono ma gli altri studenti forse non hanno questa opzione. Ma le cose come poter cercare vocaboli molto velocemente, ed è time saving e fa la differenza. […]

Simona Scanni: per quanto riguarda l'assessment online come valutate la vostra esperienza cioè preferivate l'assessment in presenza oppure quello online, comunque secondo voi va bene così com'è è stato fatto? quali sono i vostri, Student #2 qual è la tua opinione?

Student #2: eh in generale riesco più in presenza ma dopo il mio anno sabbatico ho trovato gli esami online un po' più facili perché possiamo accedere ai dizionari mentre di solito sarebbe più difficile [in presenza] ed è difficile ottenere un voto buono.

Simona Scanni: quindi la valutazione online è cambiata?

Student #2: Si..they mark it more harsly online.

Student #1: sono d'accordo. Certamente hanno cambiato i criteri di successo, perché prima se riuscivi a far bene nel parlato o nello scritto, ma facevi tanti errori anche dei verbi e dei tempi, ma scrivevi in un'aula da sola due ore senza dizionario, e anche con errori grandi potevi prendere un buon voto, Ma con l'accesso ai dizionari online vogliono veramente che sia perfetto, non puoi sbagliare nemmeno una cosa piccola […] è più difficile ormai prendere i voti più alti ma è anche più facile perché abbiamo accesso a queste cose. Io preferisco la modalità che avevamo prima [in persona] perché parlo spontaneamente e prendo quello che prendo, perché era la mia preparazione personale, le mie capacità personali e non quello di cercare su internet per esempio.

Simona Scanni: avete notato delle differenze nella valutazione formativa? Cioè sarebbe il feedback degli insegnanti durante anche le lezioni, cioè la valutazione in itinere, si chiama così, oppure quel tipo di valutazione è rimasta uguale online? O qualcosa è cambiato?

Student #1: per me è lo stesso perché quando facciamo la presentazione in classe o online dopo abbiamo una email dove ci dicono come possiamo migliorare. Sui compiti scritti, per esempio, che abbiamo sempre fatto, riceviamo il feedback online.

Student #2: si si sono d'accordo.

Simona Scanni: invece la comunicazione con i docenti online com'è? Buona, veloce, tempestiva oppure è cambiato qualcosa?

Student #1: è cambiato in senso buono perché ci sono dei professori che non rispondono mai ma ho notato che questi stessi docenti ora ti rispondono perché sanno che devono, non c'è scelta perché non li puoi vedere di persona. Se volevi una risposta veloce prima dovevi andare di persona.

Student #2: Non ho avuto difficoltà con le e-mail, ho sempre una risposta.

Simona Scanni: alla luce del confronto tra modalità di apprendimento online e modalità di apprendimento in presenza, vi chiedo qual è la vostra personale preferenza? cioè voi preferite l'online, in presenza, oppure un ibrido?

Student #2: preferisco in presenza.

Student #1: non so forse ibrido nel senso che ci sono tanti vantaggi di studiare online ma è vero che a volte hai bisogno di avere persone intorno. In Inghilterra, per esempio, dove siamo tutti fuori sede, abbiamo bisogno di questa comunità quindi se non vai in presenza in classe, chi vedi? Non hai questa opportunità di vedere le persone. […] si ibrido. Io sono una persona molto socievole, mi piace stare con le persone e parlare e fare amicizia.

Simona Scanni: ultima domanda. Come valutate la vostra esperienza in generale con l'online learning? Positiva, negativa…?

Student #1: Positiva. Non so se lo farò ancora, ho intenzione di far seguire una magistrale e ho intenzione di farlo in presenza perché comunque voglio questa esperienza di studiare in presenza perché non l'ho avuta. Mi è piaciuta, non so se lo rifarò ma i vantaggi che ho avuto soprattutto l'anno scorso quando ero in Italia erano perfette per me in questo momento della mia vita.

Simona Scanni: e se ti dessero la possibilità di fare la magistrale, ti dessero tre opzioni online, in presenza e ibrido, quale delle 3 opzioni sceglieresti?

Student #1: ah ibrido, subito perché mi piace avere l'opportunità di andare all'università a volte o essere indipendente nello studio o seguire a distanza così ho più tempo in quei giorni.

Student #: sceglierei ibrido perché l'opzione di essere in presenza o online sarebbe utile perché in questo caso possiamo vivere d'dappertutto se vogliamo ma trovo le lezioni in presenza abbastanza utili e sarebbe quindi utile avere anche questa opzione.

Staff interviews: Respondent #1

Respondent #1: I'm the academic lead for English as a modern foreign language which we abbreviate to Emfl. and my role is to oversee the design, the development, and the delivery of this brand new program that's been introduced alongside the existing languages that we have here in the Department of Modern Languages, and the department of modern Languages is part of the School of languages, cultures, art, history, of music, and that's part of the College of Arts and Law. So in terms of the structure of the one University i'm at departmental level as an academic lead. on top of that we have a school level, and on top of that we have a college level. So that's my role. One at the University of Birmingham, one in Germany. During the pandemic I lived during the entire pandemic in Germany, so I have the perspective of being within country during that time work at an institution called xxx, whose English translation would be the Yada University of Applied Sciences. and this is a institution. That is not a traditional university in the true sense of the word. Instead, it's near equivalent is probably a polytechnic. The old polytechnics that we had here and my role there is of lecturer but not in the English sense of the word. The sense is able to teach maximum of 15 hours, 14/15 h per week. During the pandemic I taught a range of English language courses in a range of departments. so I taught English conversation to the International Office. I taught technical English in the department of what is called Tgm. […] There were the delivery of specific English language, content to the respective students in those cohorts some of the programs so some of the modules are compulsory, some are optional. So the ones in the International Office are optional. 150 classes stroke modules that the students can take, whilst others are compulsory parts of their degree with credit, bearing features of those individual modules. So those are my 2 roles, Simona, during the Covid pandemic.

Simona Scanni: Okay, we have the same lecturer role in Italy. "Lettore". First question: Did your institution, so your institutions, promptly intervene to manage the emergency? and how would you evaluate the COVID-19 crisis management?

Respondent #1: so obviously i'm going to come from a a comparative perspective, Simona. So i'll look at both institutions because I was very much at the I would say the beating heart of things in both institutions at the same time, because obviously the 2 institutions in question closed down at around about the same time. the prompt intervention obviously is very much dependent on the Government's guidance. So from a British perspective. Here, at the University of Birmingham the government was generally perceived to have responded slowly to the actual pandemic that was unfolding in Italy. So I recall the very last week of teaching which would have been in the March of

2020 it seems a long time ago now, but if you look at the grand scheme thing, because it's not all that long we go, and it was the sixteenth of March, when Boris Johnson announced that there would be a lockdown, a national lockdown following the developments particularly naturally, but in other countries the University made it optional here in Birmingham to come in and teach on the days there, after I made the decision to come in on the Tuesday, and attendance had evaporated with very few students on campus, with very few students in class. So average German class is around about 10 or 12, reduced down to 2, and by the twentieth operations were wound down here in Birmingham even though interestingly, that coincided with the end of our teaching term, there would be no more teaching than actually until the following September and because of how the semester system worked, by the time March came along, So it was actually the last week of teaching before the Easter vacation, The University itself issued very in depth guidance via email there wasn't a face to face crisis meeting within the department because we were coming to the end of our teaching. But once the announcement was made, the University had been keeping an eye on developments, and had informed Staff of potential measures that might need might need to be taken. They were eventually taken, but the delays were very much based on Government decisions. and the slow response of the Uk Government, and it was generally perceived to be a slow response, not least because the week prior staff were already talking about, we should be closing down. By the end of the week. There was surprise that even on the sixteenth one the University hadn't decided to close, but they were basing their assessment on what the government was saying, which is very much the line that the that the government of the University takes when it comes to government guidance. So it goes on. What the government's saying is in London, and then follows accordingly. So that is, in terms of the institutions Management, or more specifically the informing of what was going to go. So it was a group i'd say it was a gradual process of there was generally a the perception of we're probably going to close other countries looking towards other countries, they they are closing down their institutions, their schools. and their universities. Will we be next? And then finally, By the time the twenty-third came around, which was either the last but one or the last week of teaching 101 it was really a natural process that for them, for the University to close here in Birmingham. In Germany this is slightly different, and the questions are written from a national perspective. In Germany. The laws governing infectious diseases and pandemics is actually run at a more local level. So there is a considerable amount of local observation of what the situation is. and for local mayor's, and if it's on the State by State Federal level, then local states would make certain decisions as they see fit, according to the to use the Germany. In fact, you want to. So the difference in Germany is, it's on a Federal more localized level versus here in England on a national level from London there is the element of the federalization of that sort of a advice and guidance to the devolved assembly is in Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland. But initially London took the forefront and told the whole country so the 4 nations of the United Kingdom to close down. So in that respect there are similarities with regards to what would then happen later on. The biggest difference in terms of how it was managed and handled was the closure of campus and in Germany. I got back on the Thursday. the Thursday evening I received an email to say that the campus would be open on the Friday for anyone to collect anything that they might potentially need for teaching in the following week, bearing in mind that teaching was ongoing because their semester was actually in its infancy. I say, in this infancy they have 16 week long semesters, whereas we only have 10 in terms of 16 weeks. They would have been in the eighth week. So in other words, they would have been in the middle of their semester and I was doing a spot of teaching online. Not much, but just to spot online as I was commuting between the 2 countries up until that point which then obviously things changed. And then individuals were in lockdown. So on the twentieth of March we were informed by email the emails were different in tone and different in nature between Birmingham and the the other horse shoulder emails were considerably shorter and easier to get your head around, whereas the emails that we got from the University of B. were heavily bulk down in all sorts of language. And it's because of the size of the institutions, of course, but they are very worthy, and do have headlines, but you have to control through lots and lots of information to actually see what was relevant for you, whereas in the smaller institutions, such as the out of horseshoe, which is probably a 20% of the size of this institution. it was obviously easier to understand, easy to access.

The decision making process seem to trickle down much quicker than, for instance, a large institution, such as Birmingham. So, in terms of the evaluation of the crisis management management, I think, under the circumstances given, that this was the first time these systems had to be activated. I would rate them both as effective and good under the circumstances in which they were operating. and it was all obviously a big surprise, but the messaging got out. People reacted accordingly, and from a teaching perspective different approaches then had to be taken because of the different institutions. so did it intervene promptly? I'd say yes, but because of government decision making in the Uk, it was probably slow in the Uk. How would I evaluate it? I'd say good to effective

Simona Scanni: What happened, for example, in September?

Respondent #1: So the outbreaks happened in March. This presented itself as a huge problem. The huge problem in Germany was that in the middle of the semester the teaching had to go from being face to face to online within days. The Germans are not digitally advanced as we are here at the University of Birmingham. So that applies to the entire education system. It's something that comes out quite a lot in interviews that I do with German students. It comes out a lot with talks that I have with Staff, that there is a huge gap between the provisions that we have available here already before the Pandemic versus provisions that they don't have in Germany. For Germany, it was a huge challenge and it's so. Professors going into retirement who are still using chalkboards. I mean, we're looking almost twentieth century. Here, possibly from nineteenth century, you could argue were not very aware of the possibilities of online platforms and online systems. You had even good practitioners in the classroom struggling to come to terms with this switch to an online presence and the digital infrastructure in so many instances was simply not there and the digital infrastructure not being there is one thing, even if you acquire the infrastructure in a short space of time individuals are going to have to be trained in how to use it. This requires Internet access at home, where some students in remote rural areas had little to no access with Internet dropping out quite frequently. This also applied to teachers because of the geographical area where the university is located, actually goes into its cohort, would come from very agricultural regions, with very to next to no broadband connection, or Wi-fi connection. And this meant that there was a disenfranchisement of those students who were living in rural areas that didn't have either. Well, we're not even talking 5G or 4G. Even the limited sparse 3G networks which really didn't do the job in terms of them dialing into the sessions. The other big problem that actually came about very quickly in the German system was the question of data protection, which is a German historical factor that certain institutions won't allow you to use zoom because it's an American domain, with all of the information being transferred to America. And those zoom was the ideal option for so many because of its ease of use. Things like teams, or since has developed skype questionable with regards to again the American dimension of it. So other platforms had to be introduced. They eventually decided on adobe Reader, because I think they found a way to bypass some of those data protection questions, because I think adobe would have accepted the fact that we'll put these service in Germany. So one of the conditions was this: information had to remain in Germany, not be transported without the consent of the individual user in question, but actually also the consent of the German Government, or German Parliament. So that caused a whole range of other issues. When it came to the transfer onto online learning. But the question was similarly you asked about September. By the time September came around, the Germans had already had the rest of their semester to get their act together and to trial run, including myself. I'd already done a a semester long of teaching, because I was on the back end that second summer semester, whereas Birmingham Hadn't actually started, and it was just marking assessments and working out how the assessment were to be delivered and working out 150 contingency measures for the delivery, the emergency delivery of teaching online but they could look to experiences from other countries and other institutions, and and that to a certain extent, but that would have been new in September for Birmingham, whereas in Germany. They've already gone through at least a few weeks of having to deal with the quick change

over, though it was very disruptive and it didn't necessarily bring the right results. So all sorts of issues with regards to the assessment but those problems could be hammered out, for then to go into September, where Germany was toying with the idea of potentially having open campuses, but they decided not to, based on the levels of Covid infections that were now starting to rise. So the rise actually for exponential levels in November. And then the whole thing had to be closed down completely, and the measures were November of 2020. They were heightened so in terms of the curve, what tended to be the case was Britain would see a spike, so i'll be watching this from the outside, and Germany would have a less stringent measures and then, when Britain's case number started to fall. There was then, not to say that they directly correlated because travel was restricted, but the there was then a spike. So from a teaching perspective. I was seeing what was going on in either systems. I would then say to your second question, Simona, that's Britain would have been already from a digital perspective in terms of the change over because of the various platforms and the money that it has at its disposal to buy in various products and the rather law approach to data protection when it comes to things like zoom. whereas Germany was prepared in the sense that they had a head start because they already gained experience before the September, the latter end of their summer semester. We, in some cases the summer semester might have just got started in the traditional university. So by the time September came around, at least they had some form of one online covid-based experience. So that's to do with systems, and how they the term and the semesters structured and or how it's not structured here in the in the Uk.

Simona Scanni: Okay, so you basically, answered the second and third question. About the fourth one did your university provide professional development courses in technology on remote education?

Respondent #1: I'm sure they did, but I didn't attend them. So I I saw myself as being proficient in zoom by the time we got to September that I could deliver the content online. Our higher Education Futures Institute called Hefi they would have definitely done courses for this very purpose, and issued guidance as the University's emergency, resilience, framework for teaching and learning would have been put in place, and that would have been supported by Hefi, so it would have involved colleagues over in Hefi, putting together very short mini courses: so can test them, continued professional development courses that staff could access freely via Youtube. I'm sure these are regularly available. But, say I, I didn't actually attend those modules of those courses. As for Germany, they tended to do this on a more local departmental level and discuss what sort of things they would be doing within the subject specific areas so that that could be perceived as professional development. But it would be more ad hoc, and it would be more organized around departments. So you would get certain members of staff who were very energetic, that would have done this, but you would have probably seen departments that were a a bit laid back about it all and waiting for this Covid to go away and to return back to the classroom, which didn't happen for quite some time.

Simona Scanni: So what have you been doing since the COVID-19 outbreak to assist students in the move online either on or off campus?

Respondent #1: So one of my roles, Simona, during the Covid pandemic from Germany with Birmingham was to lead and support students who could not go on their year abroad. So one of the biggest challenges that we faced as a department was the huge disruption that Covid brought to. Okay, the University. But it's obviously contained within a campus, but part of our degree programs here at the University of Birmingham. If you're doing modern languages, is to spend time in that country that is part of the learning experience. That's part of the module description part of the module specification and this was an interesting experience for me, because it was around my fortieth birthday and I remember on September the fourth of 2020 something that was the day, was it? There was a fine, I remember that it was a day that I was at a meeting of students whose year abroad was disrupted and anyone studying French or Spanish they were in that meeting. Anyone

that was doing German might have just made it to Germany. So there were some students that actually made it, but they were in immediate lockdown as soon as they arrived but the vast bulk of the cohorts were there around about 180 students. and we had to put in place in very short time, because we then knew the extent of travel restrictions. In other words if any students could travel, very, very few managed to make it out. They needed some sort of online provision to replace their year of broad experience. So my role was to design that online provision and I was given a blank sheet of paper on September the fourth. I was even told John's been working very hard on this. Well, I hadn't up to that point, because it only just been given the role on the 31st of August and between the fourth of September, Simona, and let's say, the tenth of October we managed to put together a package for our students that involved language, cafes and research-based language tutorials which will come later. But the language cafes got started. All of those students had provisions from the start of October to engage with the language with native speakers online. Many were dialing in from bedrooms, from dormitories, but they had weekly conversation classes in very small groups, so it allowed them to practice the language and encouraged them to engage with the provision that we had, because there was absolutely nothing in terms of going abroad. So in terms of the assistance to move online it was the creation of a of these language cafes and the principles that governed them. The principles were small groups, as much interaction as possible, and only in the target language. The tutors were all target, and were all native speakers of those languages. They were from those countries. We had 10 different languages, with between one and 3 tutors in those languages I coordinated all of those I trained the teachers. The training had to be done very quickly.But it was all about simply giving them the opportunity to speak and have some form of interaction that would be authentic as if they were on their year abroad. So I designed the language cafe, developed its rationale trains the teachers oversaw the registration of the students, and this was done extremely effectively and without too many problems or too much hassle. I monitored attendance through an attendance system, so the teachers had to mark attendance, and that was fed to me on a weekly basis. It also allowed me to have weekly contact with the tutors. and they would raise any concerns. And, in fact, there were very, very few concerns because of the nature of the actual sessions that we were offering, and it allowed students to engage in a very relaxed sort of way because of the methodology that we use of relaxed conversational classes to those students who's your board was disrupted. We had to be very understanding and very caring about the students needs because their entire degree was from their perspective, also in jeopardy because they thought they wouldn't meet the assessment outcomes. But that was something very early on that, we said, you will do, and there will be alternative assessment arrangements which were put in place. These provisions fed into those alternative assessment arrangements that were put in place in that they had to reflect critically on the learning of languages digitally. So in terms of assisting the students. It was also in assisting them to look at the assess, to look at the digital provision with a critical eye, and see for what it is. its benefits, but also its drawbacks and the drawback. Of course, the fact that they couldn't engage in country with the year abroad, but at the same time could still meet the the assessment requirements for the completion of that year, and to go into the final year. So that was my end. From the British perspective, from the German perspective, it was to adopt a approach that in language teaching you can run the risk of it being one way like this interview is obviously you asking me questions, and i'm giving you lots of information. I made sure it did take up some learning time away from the actual content itself. But to establish a report with the students, and to know them by name, and to make sure the cameras we want and make sure we're having a a dialogue and conversation with everyone involved that facilitated an atmosphere where people would contribute very freely if it were done very strictly at the start. They realized that this is of an open house for discussion and for talking, and that everyone would be involved. So the idea of being all inclusive, and to activate those language skills. So from a from a macro level, the organization of a system here in Birmingham, or it was online. But it was for Birmingham to help students with their year abroad. So putting in an alternative mode of learning in place in Germany by September that was already in place. But, to use a pedagogical approach, which was informed, I suppose, with this virtual year abroad; but it was also developed, as I was going through March and April and May through that particular semester, the summer semester of 2,020, and to be all inclusive, and tried to

ensure that all of the students are engaged, irrespective of what time of day the lessons were that they all had to go at speaking. They all spoke about their own personal life. I was checking in with them about how they perceiving Covid, how it's affecting their learning, and then to adapt my teaching accordingly. So that's what I did from the British perspective and the German perspective, Simona.

Simona Scanni: Did you already have experience with remote teaching prior to COVID-19?

Respondent #1: yes, so I had worked a trial lesson for Chinese company for an interview for a job which I went on to get, but didn't. I decided not to take it that was prior to Covid but very minimal. So nothing in the sense of teaching entire courses online. My existence before starting in German and British Academia was, I ran a school in Germany so as the head teacher of the school as a director of studies of an English language school, and we tried the numerous times to get online teaching off the ground. But we always hit with those sorts of big questions of that interest among the population was relatively small, the expectation that they wanted it for free or for less money than they would get if it were face to face teaching one the technical difficulties that we would have encountered had we'd implemented it, the the resistance amongst the teachers who preferred face to face and that meant that my attempts at that trying to in introduce an Institute online learning from a language school perspective was was always destined to failure. We got as far as bringing in someone from China once but that to hits a a brick wall because of the completely different cultures from which we were coming. Chinese teach very open and very wooding and able capable of doing it as a Canadian national, Whereas, we had so much, so many stumbling blocks in the way for him that it actually it didn't work, and it failed in the end. So I'd say, very limited to experience with remote teaching beyond the odd lesson, but nothing more.

Simona Scanni: And what do you see as the biggest challenge involved in online teaching?

Respondent #1: I think it's the inclusivity. I'm bringing everybody in. I think that remains the biggest challenge inclusivity in the sense of those individuals who initially Don't have the it competencies and experiences inclusivity in where the individual actually lives and the Internet connection they have. So you you have individuals from particularly poor socioeconomic backgrounds, who don't have access to glass fiber cables, but are reliant on some dodgy internet connection. And it's very difficult to actually include them. Not because you don't want to. It's just because the technology call infrastructure is not there to do so. I think the the challenge to given the fact that we have had a number of semesters with online teaching is fatigue and tiredness among some of the students of looking at the screen all the time they want to be back in the class, or large numbers want to be back in the classroom. Depends on the timetable, I suppose. I suppose if you've got a session at 8 o'clock in the morning on a Friday it might be best if you or late in the evening, on a Friday in the lesson of the day, and just to go in for that. And if it could be done online, then perhaps that might be more favorable to their own weekend and their own time planning. So I think fatigue is now a a big challenge but that, too, ties into inclusivity in the sense of some want it and some don't. So it's this: non homogeneous attitude towards online now today versus it's a necessity. We have to do it because of the corporate pandemic, on the other hand. So I' the biggest challenges or the biggest challenge. Actually, i'll say, will be inclusivity the including everybody in anyone, and using methods and approaches on a lesson-by- lesson basis but also thinking too, about those critical considerations that not everyone has a faster Internet connection. Not everyone has Internet speeds that are a really quick, and people are going to drop out of the lesson and how to include those sort of missed content how to follow up; how to connect those students with similar sort of abilities or similar sort of interests, and making them all included.

Simona Scanni: and that brings us to the… I want to skip the eighth question I mean to the Nineth. Because about inclusivity. How did your institution or you as a teacher, support those students who had who struggled accessing the technology?

Respondent #1: from a German perspective. I recorded the lectures, and that was quite controversial, initially because it went against the guidance that we can't record without the written consent of all of the students. Because of the nature of the emergency including myself individuals that saw it as a necessity to actually record entire sessions. I did get the students consent beforehand but it wasn't necessarily the written consent. So in recording the sessions and uploading the sessions for later viewing was something that I had to do now. The digital infrastructure in Germany wasn't there. So it was a recording downloaded which took an awful long time and then uploaded onto their respective learning platform with a password. So those students at a later stage could access the lecture, even if they haven't attended so recorded contents was one of the approaches that I used for my classes in Germany. So my work was very much with the year abroad. The virtual year abroad. Simply offering that provision was supported its own right, because there are many institutions that didn't have anything in place for quite a long period of time. Birmingham was set to leading. in in that respect we ended up with an award at the end from our own institution, recognizing the support that we offered to these students but across both Birmingham and both the both Birmingham and the other. So it both in Germany and in Britain I had to be on top of emails and emails, provided the it support that wasn't necessarily available as quickly from it services in those respective. So it did mean I tried to get emails, even checking them on Saturdays and Sundays and ensuring that students got responses extremely quickly. That was something that did come through, especially in the feedback in Germany. that emails were responded to very effectively and very quickly. The German academic Culture is not as email driven as the British academic culture. You wouldn't expect the same level of emails in a German university inbox as you would here in the Uk. I think there is far more in the way of communications that sent via email whereas German universities just communicate with their students in a very, very different way. So I think those those elements of recorded lectures, seminars, and sessions once that with an uploaded that could be viewed as a later stage. But there were data protection implications on the one hand and then on the other just putting in place that those support provisions for the virtual year abroad and across both of the institutions emails and responding to emails with very quick speed and not letting emails stack up. So it could well be that I was sending or responding to anything up to in both institutions 100 emails a day. I'd say at the top end of the lower end sort of around about 20, but it would be very rare that it would go below that perhaps on holiday days, but because I was working in 2 institutions, and they obviously have different holidays, so I'd I'd get emails all the time, even on on holiday days and Bank Holiday days.

Simona Scanni: Okay. So back to to the previous question, what pieces of technology or programs, do you think will be most beneficial of dealing with this situation?

Respondent #1: both institutions in question do have platforms. So the University of Birmingham, the virtual learning environment platform is canvas on which all courses it's actually called a canvas course, but all modules have a canvas course. Sometimes the wording is a bit complicated, so these canvas courses, all of the materials were uploaded. I say, all of the materials we uploaded I can't speak on behalf of all members of staff, but I have actually adopted that in my teaching. Now, even though I have a face to face classes. So I put all of the materials and what we've discussed online. So I've I've adopted, and my practice from Covid and that sort of come through into today. I do some online teaching in Germany and and that that, too, went on to their equivalent platform, which is called moodle. So I think those platforms are very beneficial, the beneficial because they were already there. It's not as if the students were introduced to something new. They were already known, and I think that was half the battle so many regards is, if something is already there, and it's known it can be built upon introducing something new, and then something new again, and new

systems and new technologies one led to a lot of confusion about. They go to technology or to go to place. So I think, having few platforms that are already known and established in in existence, and using those as opposed to using new ones. Otherwise you get a proliferation of platforms which would make it less beneficial or the least beneficial in dealing with the situation. so a platform for organizing content so that's content management the management of teaching resources. the management of any form of student outputs that could be showcased to the the classes. And then, of course, some form of communication method that communicates the classes to the students in the comfort of their bedroom or home, or wherever they might be sitting. Zoom was, in my view, the best of all of the platforms. Microsoft teams a bit more fiddly. Skype, I think, tried and failed, and very few things were happening on Scot, unless it was the one to one basis. I did end up having Skype interviews with German students. That sort of Easter. But I I don't think the sky was effective as the other one. So I think in summary i'd say content management system plus a system where you can actually deliver online classes such as zoom.

Simona Scanni: have the curriculum and course content been changed due to COVID-19?

Respondent #1: How's it been changed. I think, from where I'm sitting as academic lead for English as a modern foreign language it's become more diverse. The curriculums now more diverse because it has to factor in these sorts of scenarios and experiences that I had during Covid. And I was also fortunate because something I haven't told you. Similar is I work for German television. So I was able to travel during the Covid pandemic and make a documentary for German television the reason why i'm saying this is because that experience during Covid, which Isn't directly related to Covid as well during Covid gave me skills that I could then use in the classroom, so I was very fortunate to so many respects, because I did a lot of traveling during Covid. It wasn't always sort of locked down for me, but because of the nature of my work I was able to travel. So I think it's it's dependent on person to person. So i'm looking at this here from the perspective of an individual teacher who had quite a privileged ride through the Covid pandemic, and it's crisis management, and that, of course, influences. What I then went on to put into the curriculum which I was building in Germany at the same time. So yes, I think it's it. It changed me, Covid, obviously. And the experience that I had on German TV change my understanding communication and that, of course flows into the curriculum. but that's a very personal story, and it probably a very rare one of that. My gut instinct would tell me that the attempts to get back to normality. Some form of normality is also to try and push Covid out the way and resume what the content was prior to when we started with Covid, because it was an emergency system that was put in place. But the module specifications remained the same throughout. it was just that it was the the the assessment outcomes have to be a thought about and measures put in place, but it sort of reverted back to Pre Covid. Times, I would say, most instance, unless there are colleagues that do work on the language, or communicating with and by and for Covid, for instance. But I don't know of too many examples of those.

Simona Scanni: And what about the assessment? Have assessment measures changed?

Respondent #1: Yes. So this is an interesting question because of the nature of assessments. Pre pandemic The assessment in modern languages involved in house in class delivery of test papers in a controlled environment which, of course, was not conducive to the Covid restrictions, so that had to be immediately changed. Because you couldn't have large numbers of people gathered in halls, or in a hall, or in a large room changing over to Covid. It was then take home papers which couldn't be controlled in terms of the environment. because you can't have an invitation, and everyone else's house. And even if you turned on the camera, it's very difficult to actually control and check what's going on. So the take home paper was instituted The Take home, all know the yes, take home paper, take home assessment exercises and also the all exams were all of a sudden, no longer to be held face to face in house, even though this was just meant to 1, 2, 3 people Instead, they were to be done online. Now, the stance of the university on that has actually been to keep

them there. The the rationale for that is the individuals that are going through. Let's say, the final year. Now they've had so much disruption to the way that they do exams that it's thought that the best way to offset any form of negative impact that Covid had on their ability to do an exam that they would continue with that system. in this particular year, because if you think last year they would have had some form of effect on their year abroad. The prior to that they would have had issues with regards to disruption, to teaching and learning and exams. so that has continued into the present day. There are discussions and debates about the viability of continuing that forward into the next academic year, so I can say, for with great certainty that we have that in place for this year my module that I leaned for call 6, which is for finalists. They have actually recorded a presentation on zoom, even though they've done practices in the classroom. That's from Covid that wouldn't have happened before and they are also going to do the so-called take-home paper which would have been done in a the controlled environment. At the end of the first semester of their final year, on campus that's no longer on campus that's off-campus. So the take-home paper has become at least still is, even though it's subject to discussion debate a part of our assessment mode.

Simona Scanni: Okay, so you Basically, answered the the other question about communication between you and your students and number for things as well. So how would you evaluate online teaching in terms of workload and well-being? We're talking about answering emails all the time.

Respondent #1: Yeah. So I was single during the Covid pandemic and because of that fact I could invest the time as I didn't have family obligations, and I stayed in the apartment where I live in Germany on my own, so I could manage the workload extremely well indeed, and keep on top of emails and the work. I didn't see it as being overbearing not least as i'd run a school in Germany before that had much heavier demands than I. I have with my workload, both in the both institutions both in Germany and working for the University of Birmingham online. It was, however, telling when sitting in on departmental meetings that I think I got off lightly. So it's. It's a very personal story of the nature of my contracts, one the work that I was doing, and by September of 2020 I was doing considerably more teaching for the German University and not necessarily for Birmingham. But I was because my program was delayed we didn't get students coming in until after the after the restrictions were relaxed in actually in September the 2021. So I was actually using that time for the the documentary, but also doing this virtual year abroad and designing the program so my workload had been reduced down to 0.4 during the pandemic, but that was because of the documentary it was a bit of coincidence, but also the fact that no students had enrolled on the program that I was leading so that that meant no work for me to do, and I simply reduced my and it was approved. discussions took place in the August of the first August of the pandemic and because of that, I think it was just the off chance that I was able to balance workload between Birmingham, the University of Birmingham, Germany, and to do this documentary, which was the main motivation for me to change my contractual basis at the University of Birmingham, and I, To be honest, I I never felt better. I would go and have a massage. I would cycle. I would do a lot of walking and being in one space considering the fact that I will be commuting every week to and from Germany. Which involved a a journey of 6 h there 6 h back. Prior to the pandemic, because i'll be working both institutions. This actually was a godsend, so in other words, it for me it was a blessing in disguise. But I think I will be a minority view in this broader picture of what Covid was about. Because I didn't have a family. I didn't have to look after children within a very small apartment even though I live in an apartment on the ground floor at the small space, would have been extremely challenging to have another person there, because of the nature of the work. If that other person worked as well, that would have been challenging. So it was actually quite conducive to people living single lives that had lived them and knew how to live them. because it was just a continuation of that life. But you couldn't travel as much so for me in terms of evaluating workload workload was manageable and my well-being is never seen as much of a high. But once again I know that i'm a very, very special circumstances, so I don't take this as proportionately.

Simona Scanni: in the aftermath of the emergence, remote learning, experience what are the effective positive teaching strategies and approaches which have been introduced during the pandemic, or you have introduced during the pandemic, and you would consider keeping in your future teaching practices?

Respondent #1: I do like the idea, and I emphasize the word idea of hybrid teaching and I think it does have some form of future in some form of space. But it is extremely difficult to manage a screen with a number of students on, and a classroom with a number of students on Not only do you need technological experience to manage both spaces at the same time even if you were very effective at doing it You would struggle to, especially if you got very, very large groups. You would struggle to effectively be speaking to the 2 audiences that well, not just the 2 different geometrical space. If you're talking about multiple spaces, if they are, although scheduled all over the world all over the place. But I think talking about inclusivity and accessibility, I think, to access learning and dialing in remotely can bring a lot of benefits for but for the delivery of language. So it's talking about my own area language provisions and broaden the audience wide in the audience and internationalize the audience. But I think we're still far away from any form of effective system, even though the technology is there to do it. The training is not there. research has not been undertaken extensively on the effectiveness of a hybrid teaching. But I think it's there and I would perceive it in the future to be effective, and positive, especially given Birmingham's very special make up and set up in that it has a Dubai campus. and also a campus here in Birmingham, and for the exchange of that information, knowledge, expertise lesson, seminars, lectures, tutorials to happen in both spaces. Obviously the timetable would be very difficult with a time difference. But I think that that could well be a positive that comes out of it but that Hasn't been introduced so that sort of an ideal Utopian world, I suppose, in terms of what has been introduced. I think the culture of meetings online amongst teachers has allowed for a more effective use of time and back to back meetings in particular. So you don't have to dash over from one campus to another, or from one building to another on on campus and that also extends into personal tutorial meetings with students, so they can be a more effective use of time and that is very much beneficial for the students who have got really tight timetables to use their time more effectively the and to have the option of doing it face to face or doing it online. So I think that allows for a different setting to happen to emerge and for students to engage with both. And I think there are students that want to do something online which is good, and that's okay. And for us to have the facilities, the resources to do that, I think is extremely good for the the positive student experience. So that's the so. The effectiveness and the the positivity. that's more meeting culture in terms of teaching strategy that some ofers into personal tutorial meetings with students specifically in class teaching strategies and approaches. I think the greater engagement with online resources and materials. Make it easier to present it to the students, and they understand the value of those materials much more now particularly the remote access of them. I think this probably been an uptaking that Simona, whereas the before not to say that they were closed to digital resources, materials, and accessing things digitally, and of course the intent was a huge resource. But the the openness of using them and seeing their value. and with this generation of students now going through. They'll also see for the value of if we can't access it on campus in the University Library. The likelihood is, it's probable that it's online. So there's a huge acquisition of ebooks. And in terms of teaching strategies that saves a lot of money by buying paper based volumes puts it online. It's more accessible as long as you've got the passwords and codes and everything to factor authentication and everything else that it'd ask you to access those materials but the the range of resources that were then made available to supplement teaching a exploding in in number online because of the because of the pandemic, and that is something that is extremely impact full. for the student experience and in terms of teaching practices, it does make literature lists less. Rely on time. Students having to go to libraries, even though when issues do like going to library, is very good to go to libraries. But They can do it from the comfort of their own home. They have.

Simona Scanni: In the conclusions I wrote something about knowing the difference between online learning, set and emergency remote learning, which is what we've been. I mean, the experience we have with COVID-19 was basically called emergency remote to burning. So it's not the same as for online learning. So in light of the above differentiation between distance, learning, and emergency, remote learning, do you think the COVID-19 emergency has had a negative impact on the perception of online learning.

Respondent #1: No, I think the opposite and I draw this conclusion based on what I said earlier about leading the school where I tried and failed, I think, on 3 separate occasions to institute and introduce an online learning. So this was before the pandemic before we had heard of COVID-19 and lockdowns, and all the vocabulary links to it. Now from a German perspective. Now, individuals will be more open to online learning than they were before so the perception has actually gained in traction and gained in positivity and i'm not sure whether individuals will, As time goes on, and Covid starts to migrate to the back of the ahead and into the back of memory. Whether it will be directly linked to emergency, remote learning so emergency, remote learning, I think, is the accelerator that has transferred more teaching and learning engagement irrespective of the educational setting online. So it's the moment it's the events that pushes online learning yet further and accelerate it to encompass new and new forms of delivery in in different settings. It's can market itself on flexibility. Agility on the digital.So the devices that people carry around with them on a daily basisor have contact with on a daily basis. I think those elements seem to actually have the exact opposite effect of being negative. So to summarize emergency, remote learning is was still is to a certain degree the accelerator that's put more stuff online and has made it more socially acceptable as a form of teaching and teaching, delivery and learning.

Simona Scanni: have you ever heard the term emergency remote learning before?

Respondent #1: Well. The term that we used here was about the resilience framework. So the term that made the rounds in Birmingham was this the the of resilience that the systems in place were resilient enough for us to deliver our teaching in terms of emergency, remote learning as a term, I mean, I hesitate here. I'm trying to think if I have heard of it.

Simona Scanni: do you think online learning outside the pandemic can make education more accessible around the world?

Respondent #1: Yeah, and it will. I I think, in developing countries this is very exciting especially ones that have invested in broadband and digital technologies that education can spread its wings into those spaces where we couldn't before because of the remote nature of that space or the difficulty in getting individuals to that space. All the complexity in in some cases be visas will be travel restrictions, and you can still okay. It's not face to face it's not a replacement for it but it's it does enable institutions to reach spaces that they couldn't reach before. […] This is a really good question. The human broads divided up into 3 categories. Students can either go on a work placement so no university they can do a British language. Sorry British Council Language Teaching Assistantship. That's through the British Council that's no university. or they can go to a university in terms of the breakdown. This is a guess here. So don't don't quote me on. This is probably about 15% go to a a work placement. 25/30%, perhaps to British Council might be more. Actually. Yeah. yeah. So i'll say, between the 2. You're looking at about 40%, and then 60% go to university some approximate numbers there. So that leads us to the question of what to those universities do? What did they do when it came to the year report? Some simply told their students we're closed bad luck. So it was. They wash their hands of the international students, I mean, they had enough to things to worry about other thanto shoot and centering the the country as as guests and, to be honest, there was a reluctance for people to travel anyway. Very few actually made the adventure if they did decide to go. So some universities did that. Other universities said, okay, we can't allow you to

come, but you can access our online provisions. So that did happen. And other universities set up moocs. And these moocs all part of our virtual year abroad program, and that it was not just the language cafe where they got this native speaker content. It was not just the research-based language, tutorials. but it was a whole package of moocs that were made available to university students. particularly. my colleague, B. said, needs a noteworthy praise on this front, particularly in France and Spain where we have the largest cohort of our students going. What students were doing were engaging with those moocs from the comfort of their own home? Of course, under Covid restrictions with those institutions delivering their content. So they made up and the the intention was with the virtue we abroad, that we would offer some of those provisions, the host universal. Some of the host universes not all offered others. But there was another element to this as well, Simona, in that the University council of Modern languages during that time between April and, let's say, August this is sector-wide collaboration between universities per language listed resources that students should be accessing on a regular basis to find out what's going on in the country to find out what's happening in the country, to find out all sorts of things about the country. and to set up their own timetable, so that they had engagement with the language from the perspective of these small group cafes that we were doing the research-based language tutorials that we're doing that was informed by departmental research expertise and research strands that experts would then deliver as a presentation form, but it would lead to critical debate and discussion, but also these Moocs, and also the resources the University of the University council of modern languages actually put together. So, in other words, we had this package for them by September that was being populated on which basis they could actually do the assessment. So certain universities got their act together overseas other universities less so, and we managed very well with with those provisions at Birmingham to ensure that the students got some form of provision. Yeah, so we won the awards for digital engagement at the University. We're very proud of this, so it's not. It's not just me. I mean. I'm taking credit for all of this, and my colleague, R.W. as the chair of the abroad. I coordinated with her very closely. My colleague, B.S. He he was the real thrust behind the virt that behind the research-based language, tutorials and the moocs and establishing links with those universities, and being quite persistent and trying to get things off the ground. And the University Council of Modern Languages was something that colleagues here at Birmingham also Institute. I think that that documents somewhere, I might be able to find it for you, and and send it to you. What they what they actually did. i'm sure it's. Oh, Yes, it will be on the site. There will be listed language by language. Yeah, I can send that to you. That's that's still there. and they'll give you a sense of the kinds of things that students were being told or instructed what to do.

Simona Scanni: Thank you very much for all your answers.

Staff interviews: Respondent #2

Simona Scanni: so my first question [is] name of the institution and the position.

Respondent: So yeah, University of Birmingham, and I am an associate professor in Modern languages.

Simona Scanni: Did your institution promptly intervene to manage the emergency? And how would you evaluate the COVID-19 crisis management?

Respondent: yes, I would say that they did intervene quite speedily. The institution stopped in person teaching before Government imposed lockdowns as far as I remember. that move swiftly to online learning, then move swiftly to mitigating the effects of missed exams and things for students. and on the whole I thought that they manage the crisis well.

Simona Scanni: And was the institution ready to shift to remote education?

Respondent: we wouldn't. We weren't ready on the the you know the sort of as soon as the pandemic broke out. and it it was, I guess, relatively fortunate in as much as it. It was March 2020 when it broke out, and that was a week 10 in the second semester. So what followed after that was the exam period, but we just cancelled most of the exams and then that gave us 5 or 6 months really to prepare for the new academic year, by which time we did shift to online learning.

Simona Scanni**:** so, have certain activities been completely stopped and resumed after few months? You just said yes, because it was actually the end of the semester.

Respondent: yeah, so we stopped some teaching and then we resumed in the online mode from the following year, and then that year the 2000 2021 academic year was entirely delivered online. and then the 2022 was pretty much as far as possible. in person

Simona Scanni: Did your university provide professional development courses in technology or remote education?

Respondent: yeah, they were. there was some helpful little videos. It was set up by our tech team.

Simona Scanni: Okay, so the third part is about teaching practices and methodologies. What have you been doing since the COVID-19 outbreak to assist students in the move online, either on or off campus?

Respondent: So in that question, when you say you do, you mean me personally, or the institution?

Simona Scanni: Yes, you personally.

Respondent**:** So we held weekly group tutorials with all our personal duties that were online. So we saw them much more frequently and then they became sessions where people were able to talk through their problems, but also because people who relatively isolated it. It was also just a way of relaxing. So we did some silly things as well as some, you know, kind of academic related things. in terms of the managing the technology itself. A lot of our students are digital natives, anyway. So they were much more at ease with moving to the technology than probably the staff were. So instead, what they're the concerns were about, I guess, for more than sort of the psychological difficulties which, you know, Staff weren't necessarily in any better place, either, you know, since stuff were kind of locked down and experiencing this for the first time in in our lives, I actually found that, probably, we got through it together rather than me, you know, being always the one that helped them.

Simona Scanni: And did you already have experience with remote teaching prior to COVID-19?

Respondent: At our university we do have some distance learning programs, but I've never been personally involved with them and I'd never really been interested in it, either, because I enjoy prior to the Covid outbreak. I don't, you know, I always enjoyed the face to face teaching experience.

Simona Scanni: What do you see as the biggest challenges involved in online teaching?

Respondent: in terms of an experience, it's just less enjoyable than interacting in a room with people in in real life. I mean, I can see it's advantages as a model, for you know, out over and above the Covid thing, while we're connecting today in a different country…you're in Italy, aren't you? So, you know, I can see that, and I can see the advantages of distance learning but I guess once sorted out

that technical challenges which we know, I think most people had reasonably with Zoom and stuff like that. It was quite a steep learning curve. Then the challenges, I guess, are around making the sessions enjoyable, keeping people motivated…and just losing the interaction with, you know, within as a human being. I don't think for some in terms of pedagogy, I don't actually think it's necessarily a worse medium. So there are some things you can do, for instance, so let's say, like breakout rooms where you might put a seminar group of 12 into 4 breakout rooms, 3 in each room, and they'll chat away, and then you can visit each room and that's really easy online. When you try and do that in a classroom you can do it. But sometimes you're clambering over desks and chairs, and you're moving things around. So sometimes the physical properties of the classroom make certain forms of collaboration in small groups less easy to to kind of manage…Yeah. So okay for that one.

Simona Scanni: so it's face to face interaction... Especially, I think, in modern languages it's an important part…the interaction between people What pieces of technology or programs do you think would be most beneficial dealing with this situation?

Respondent: I guess just the things like zoom and teams with the standard ones, and they come in features which enable particular types of learning. You can run little polls and surveys and things which you know I thought were really useful to check understanding. In a way, that's hard in a physical classroom. So there was some things that were useful.

Simona Scanni: What do you say about the problem of students who don't have the same access to the technology and equipment necessary for online education? How did/does your institution and how did/do you, as a teacher, support those students?

Respondent: Well, as an individual during the pandemic? If someone didn't have access to the Internet, there was absolutely nothing that I, as an individual, could do. I don't think the institution was able to think to make rooms on campus available once the strictest lock down. I then did with access to the university's wi-fi for people. We did have a few problems with that during some of the uses you do, like catch-up sessions. that kind of things if someone can't access it. There was one student who actually was a visiting student and he was clearly doing it from his house. But there was a lot going on. It was like a flat, and then his mum was in and out, and all this kind of stuff, and that was quite difficult for him, I think, to follow it. And I don't know whether the institution needed to, or was able to provide things like laptops to people that didn't have them.

Simona Scanni: Did you recognise the importance of equity and inclusion in your teaching practices online?

Respondent: I try and be mindful of that at all times. Online no different to in person, I think. I guess the equity, if you are in an economically challenging situation, as your sort of previous question hinted, then that kind of education it's harder. But I mean, even since we've come back into classroom teaching. We've virtually gone paperless now, so there is almost an expectation that all students will bring a laptop to classes. So, I guess that's never been made explicit. But it's all it is. It feels implicit now. But you need to have a laptop.

Simona Scanni: Have the curricula and course content been changed due to the COVID-19 crisis management?

Respondent: a little bit in my languages we didn't put we pre-recorded our lectures during the pandemic for the core modules and for all the modules. When we came back, we left the lectures as an online recording. I mean, those modules still have 6 h per week contact on that particular module. So it just went down to 5. But with an online recording, in my own personal modules, I have kept the online recordings i've sometimes re-recorded and updated them and flipped all the lectures so that

they watch stuff in advance. QandA session to check understanding, to try and develop a few things, and seminars are still the same. They're more based on discussion and an exchange of ideas. But, as far as possible. I I think I've abandoned the practice of justturning up in a room and talking to people for 50 min. I mean, I knew even before the pandemic. I knew all about interactive lectures, and everyone said, All you need to try my collector interactive. But with, you know, once you've got more than about 30 students in a room, I still think it comes quite hard, and it's still suboptimal. So, if the purpose of the lecture was originally all about how the transmit information, so that the students have got enough to go on to then take part in a discussion, I think there are better mechanisms than the lecture. So yeah, the in person lecture is evolved a bit.

Simona Scanni: Have assessment measures changed?

Respondent: Yeah, they have. We used to have exams in a gym at the end of the year. You know all the ranks of I haven't gone back to those yet. So if you take home papers using online submission 24 h, that kind of thing just posed some challenges on languages because some of the things that we wanted to test previously would be students ability to you know, perform in the target language without access to any technology, and and so on, and obviously with anything like a paper that has 24 h to complete it.Then they can clearly use all the sort of technologies available. So, that's an ongoing discussion for us. We shifted some live all rules to student pre records as well. And we're back now with live ones. But we've kept an element, as the pre records as well.

Simona Scanni: and you prefer the previous, I mean, the face to face assessment?

Respondent: So all exams. I prefer a face to face, where possible, although you know, if I do group all exams in my module, and when I did do them online and recorded it, it was actually easier to assess the contributions of each individual because it's got when they were done in person. I just recorded them on a digital recorder, but audio only, whereas online you've got the face as well, so you can. You know it's easier to match it all up. As for written exams, there's a lot of pushing a department to go back to them. You know the sort of the traditional exam, precisely to get away from all the technology up. If it was just me, I wouldn't go back. I just change the assessment and ask them to do different things.

Simona Scanni: Okay. Sorry it's not a question but you said that you stopped all the exams right? […] And how could you assess students during that time?

Respondent: So, if students had essays to submit a coursework essays, they could still submit those, but they didn't have to, there was a kind of a bridging piece of assessment that was at the institution that was very minimal. For first and second years they were just automatically progressed and final years degrees were calculated on the basis of what they'd already done, or anything else that they chose to submit after that point.

Simona Scanni: Was the communication between teachers and students effective during the pandemic?

Respondent: I think so. As I mentioned earlier, the weekly group, personal tutorials were very, sorry, the group tutorial sessions are very useful because it it was also a means of exchanging information and staff probably spoke to students more during the pandemic then actually we do now where things like office hours where you are available. They really were used by the students.

Simona Scanni: Did you attend professional development courses in technology and online teaching on your own initiative?

Respondent: So there were these: obviously there weren't courses to attend in person, because we weren't thinking about it much before the pandemic, or I said it wasn't. So, the ones that I accessed during the pandemic were basically the things that I needed to get me up and running. And you know, work out how to to use the new technology, how to upload the recordings of things from home, how to use the various features of zoom, some of it with courses I attended. Some of it was just bits of knowledge that staff shared amongst themselves.

Simona Scanni - How would you evaluate online teaching in terms of workload and well-being?

Respondent: worked right, I think. For anything that you pre record it probably takes longer than anything that you deliver in person. Just I think because there's that natural kind of thing. All this is going to be an enduring recording. Therefore I need to make it as polished as possible, whereas when us is turning up and delivering in person. I'm not saying, I just turned up, an wind it, but that's got a different feel about it. So it's probably a little bit more intensive to produce an online session. That's a sort of a pre-record than an in-person lecture in terms of the seminars preparing for and delivering them. It was the same marking. But I did find that easier, and still sometimes print out really long things rather than reading them on the screen. Online teaching and all the to spend on the screen has knocked my eyes. So well being well, I guess, for everyone it was a bit harder because you didn't have the support of a the community. During the pandemic my partner was working in a Covid Lab, so she was actually out all day. So I spent a lot of time kind of at home on my own working, and I found that quite miserable. But that was the same for a lot of people. I don't think it's necessarily I think that's a there's a difference there between using online teaching in the context of a mixture of in-person teaching and using it as a teaching tool at certain times, and being a part of a community and and using online teaching as a last resort during lockdown, where effectively you you see anybody. So the other well being that I think, is I, I don't, I think, has to be evaluated in it's wider context.

Simona Scanni: I think about what you were saying before about communication with students, the fact that you can answer by email. So you are always available. So can you include this situation? The fact that you answer your emails all the time as workload?

Respondent: Yeah, although that's the case for some colleagues, even during normal circumstances. Isn't it that they struggle to set boundaries around their work because students don't work or operate to those kind of hours. You know, most of them. You occasionally get email, sent it to after the pub or whatever. But I I've never felt any pressure to respond outside of standard hours. Sometimes I do but that's a choice rather than something that I feel as a requirement. So that sense of having to be always on and all available, I don't think that's a particular function of remote learning as much as the modern world that we live in with. You know, email accessible at all times.

Simona Scanni: Okay, that's great point to me. In the aftermath of the emergency remote learning experience, what are the effective/positive teaching strategies and approaches which have been introduced during the pandemic and you would consider keeping in your future teaching practices?

Respondent: So it's the same thing that I was saying earlier that I've just moved away from formal lectures to flip lecture process and try my every classroom situation a bit more interactive and keeping online recordings, keeping them shorter as Well, I realized that the to the a lot, the sessions that we have the length of them was pretty much determined by. Well, that's how the timetable works. They're 50 min, and then you always felt in the past that oh, it it needs to last for that long, because that's how long there's been allocated to it. But sometimes you know less is more and so it's just, I don't think I've changed anything in terms of how I want to interact with people in the classroom situation, and how to kind of initiate a discussion how to involve everybody, how to kind of move arguments and discussions on those kind of things. I think wI've been doing it for nearly 28

years now. So I think I kind of got some techniques for that. Anyway, it's just yeah around the the sessions that we're mainly to lead information, giving that I think I've changed a bit.

Simona Scanni: the conclusion is that is unexpected transition to online learning during the lockdown was meant to be temporary. So the term we use is actually emergency remote learning and teaching, which is not online learning per se. In light of the above differentiation between distance learning and Emergency remote learning, do you think the COVID-19 emergency has had a negative impact on the perception of online learning? And to what extent?

Respondent: Not necessarily, I don't think, from the point of view of staff because actually we're increasing our distance, learning and online learning provision at Birmingham. And we, I think, we recognize that there's opportunities to teach people in, you know, distant markets, and and so on. And that. in part is a response, I think, to You know sort of changing landscape of higher education and higher education, delivery, remote campuses, and all those kind of things. So staff have necessarily. you know, suddenly so change the perception. In fact, if it's. probably opened people's eyes to the possibilities of it a bit more where they what I didn't. you know kind of even think about it. as far as students are concerned. They are Very grateful, I think, for the opportunity to return to in person teaching, but that's mainly the students. So i'm talking to for whom the in person learning is the possibility, because they are at the university, and they're coming to classes. But I wouldn't say it's kind of impacted negatively. I think people would always have said before and after that in person is is better than online. Where in person is possible. […] You know the fee situation, it's certainly an element of that. because we have like open university in this country which offers largely distance, learning, and correspondence degrees. It costs a fraction of a university degree and so the University experience has to offer something different to that, I guess, to sort of to justify it. It's it's fee so that's a that's really understandable. But I guess I'm, anticipating a little bit your next question Do I think it is a good way to make education more accessible around the world? Yes, you know I mean, we're doing. We're doing more of that. I think. we're still not as developed in terms of thinking about how to interact with people, the numerous time zones and things around, submitting work and marking and giving feedback, and all those kind of things in the way that we might be with in cost. But yeah, I think it. You know it is a good way to make education more accessible around the world. But if someone's given the choice I'd still find in person teaching the more enjoyable experience.

Simona Scanni: Okay. So I have other questions about staff and leadership roles. So the highlighted questions are the ones which are similar to the ones I already asked you, but I'm going to ask you just a few questions about how your National Government managed the situation. So the first question is, did, or does your National Government have an education policy on crisis management?

Respondent: They evolved one during the crisis. But if I had to answer that, I'm saying no. some of my views on a national government might be colored by my particular antipathy towards our current government, who, I think, are a a disgrace, really. So I don't know whether that it validates my answers, but just putting that out there.

Simona Scanni: and you also said that the University closed before the Government gave instructions. Right?

Respondent: Yeah, just before I think the national lockdown was just like the twenty-th of March on a Tuesday. And I think we stopped on the twentieth. So it was just it was just before Our institutional leadership was much better than the National.

Simona Scanni: Did the education authority make teachers and school administration staff complete professional development courses on remote education and technology?

Respondent: So it was all about. I I mean the university was actually in charge, and the staff was in charge of anything related to the emergency and remote learning in the COVID-19 crisis management. But, there was very little direction on higher education. and how it should be managed. Many students in this country were complaining about the fact that they'd gone to University to live in residence, and then those halls of that has been put in lockdown and that they weren't allowed out. And so they were saying, we're paying £9,000 for essentially a prison sentence. and then you were allowed to go back home and the government, I feel largely that the universities take the blame for that when a lot of it was government policy.

Simona Scanni: Did your institution introduce alternative delivery modes? Which one(s)? (examples: hybrid, online, in-person, mixed).

Respondent: Yeah. So during the pandemic we had online. In the post pandemic, well, with the kind of post 21/22 we sort of experimented a little bit with hybrid. But unless you've got the technology properly set up, it's quite unsatisfactory with like 2 people. you know, kind of, on a screen in the front of the room, and then 10 people in the room and stuff. So we've actually moved away from hybrid this year.

Simona Scanni: What are the preventive and safety measures carried out by your institution to reopen on-campus operations and activities, or to avoid education disruption?

Respondent: So when we were in that period where it wasn't for lockdown, but not fully open either so essentially academic year 21/22 all rooms were vented, we encourage strongly a mask wearing in seminars even though that was quite difficult. We also tried to put in place social distancing in the classrooms as far as that was possible in congestion builders that were previously congested. We had. where possible, one-way systems as well to kind of manage flow. there were 3 that flow tests available for staff and students, and they are encouraged to do one of those couple of times a week. We put in place online catch up for anyone that contracted Covid or or was a. And so that people weren't tempted to come in, even though they weren't very well. And the university's got quite good mental health and well-being services, anyway. I mean they were quite heavily used by students during the time, but you know the the full panoply of the services were available.

Simona Scanni: What are the priorities and concerns of your institution during and after the pandemic?

Respondent; I guess, well, i'm not party to the discussions that took place at the higher level of the institution, but in as far as they were mediated to us it looked like student well-being, staff well being, and keep the show on the road. Essentially.

Simona Scanni: has your institution recommended strategies aimed at improving equity?

Respondent: we've got a long-standing commitment to equality diversity and inclusion at both the staff and student level. So we regularly monitor statistics such as things like the ethnicity, attainment gap, or any gender imbalances. Where as we, as we mentioned earlier, the Covid pandemic might have highlighted the inequalities might be more around access to technology and and so on.I don't know if the university's done anything about that.

Staff interviews: Respondents #3 and #4

Simona Scanni: First question. Name of the institution and position as a respondent.

Respondent #3 Okay, I am an assistant professor in modern languages and director of undergraduate studies.

Respondent #4: and I am a former teaching fellow and a Phd students at the University of Birmingham.

Simona Scanni - So my first question is, did your institution promptly intervene to manage the emergency? And how would you evaluate the COVID-19 crisis management?

Respondent #3: I would say yes, the institution did intervene promptly. and in a way that I think should be praised. I mean a lot of stuff really the best to adapt quickly to the new online environment to get it with the instructions that came from our leadership team in the university, and despite the lack of information coming from the Government, so I think the University couldn't have acted more promptly to my experience.

Respondent #4: Yes, I totally agree with Respondent #3, and also, especially from a teaching point of view. I think that is the staff managed the COVID-19 crisis over basically in a very good way, but with new teaching approaches and new teaching materials. And I also think that the students were quite happy with the adjustments to the programs.

Simona Scanni: So the other Respondents said that because the period goes to March, so I I think it was the end of the semester, the institution had enough time to prepare. So that's what they said. But after that period they were ready to intervene to move online. So was your institution ready to shift remote education? You said Yes.

Respondent #3: I I think it was partially ready in that. Obviously we have online technology embedded in our Canvas tools and other tools. So we were already partially using online technology. But of course there were issues, various issues concerning assessment communication with students. We were expecting a different kind of approach. Of course, in March we had to really change all our plans concerning assessment, so I will say that Yes, we were partially ready to. But of course there were lots of unpredictable challenges that we had not conceived before in terms of inclusivity. In terms of really the use of technology. Everything could go wrong, and then in the class could just be disrupted from one moment to the next. plus yes, I mean the students themselves, some of them were not equipped properly to the shift, and therefore they experience all sorts of problems with the everyday. Some of them we're living in accommodations, and then to share facilities, and that way people around that they weren't comfortable, or does that more relaxed environment and experience no issues. But in general I think we were partially ready, as one can be with something that happens so suddenly and in such an unpredictable way.

Respondent #4: Yes, I agree with Respondent #3. I at the very beginning back in March, 2020. I think that we yes, we were partially ready, like the staff generally could count on previous experiences. For example, the University of Birmingham, in particular, the more the Languages department is one of the pioneers in in the online learning programs. but at the same time, of course, there's very sharp shift from on campus to online needed some adjustments. And so at the very beginning it was difficult also for such an innovative institution to deal with this unprecedented times. But I think that the University and the staff managed to be like well, 100% ready for the new challenges in a very short period of time, if compared, maybe to other learning situations or in institutions.

Simona Scanni: *Have certain activities been completely stopped and resumed after few months (or not resumed at all*)?

Respondent #3: Well, of course they made a difference from what previous provision was for that we could not obviously have in in person session. So everything up and online I would say that nothing really stopped. That was changed. So obviously we had to use different ways of running our communications, classes and user language classes. Everything had to be adapted to the new environment. So I will say that in this sense that we try to keep things running, we don't necessarily making huge changes, so stopping anything. But of course we had to adjust to so obviously the kind of assessments that we designed were different because we had to. We could see that the students had access to all online tools and dictionaries, and so we had to prepare assessments which were more robust than before. So we have taken into account the grade inflation. So the fact that we didn't want to. Obviously it would have been contracted to have an entire class that you, in first grades which were not representative of the real level. But I would say that, apart from the obvious necessity to stop live provision of face to face the rest, the more or less remained active and running.

Respondent #4: Yes, I remember that just the very week after the announcement of the first lockdown, basically the universe, like lectures, actually stopped, but it was just for a week, and whoever doing that week we were encouraged by the University to publish some extra materials that students could complete. During these 2 weeks that we're remaining from the second semester before the assessment. So that was the only time. But it lasted like 2 weeks, where actually lectures, the seminars, and like language classes, where in a some way so. But it lasted 2 weeks, and then we were ready like in a month, we were already ready for the assessment. So I think that we had like a very quick interval of time to to answer to the new learning needs, and also to the new assessment needs.

Simona Scanni: Okay. So the assessments in 2020 remained in the summer, right? Or when you talk about assessment. You mean later in the following academic year?

Respondent #3: No, we shifted to online. So everything was done online and we had to…well, I really need to explore previous communication, but certain kind of assessments could not be done like exams and they were adapted into. For instance, exams were changed into take home papers. So, instead of sitting obviously in a hall with all the students, and being invigilated, the students would do this at home. So that was the main difference that they, for that we had to change all the assessments to adapt it.

Simona Scanni: And did your University provide professional development courses in technology or remote education?

Respondent #3: Yes, I would say that especially HeFi, the Department dealing with the digital learning, they were very, very proactive in providing the instructions and the videos demonstrations to show how to use the tools, and I think a new roles where appointed as well, that, like there was someone who was appointed as a leader of this kind of training and provision. So this this person was specifically dealing with the development of materials and guidance for for staff. So I think, again. I think I can’t really complain at all with the kind of interventions at the University did, because this was very, very useful, of course, some somehow, sometimes it was a little bit overwhelming, because for every single change you had to learn how to do it, you had to. You had to do it in a certain way the kind of tools that you were supposed to use. They were decided that it's at some point by the university, so you couldn't use, You know, Skype, for you had to use Zoom or the Web system procedures. So it was kind of very time consuming to learn how to do things and keep update, up to date with the new communication coming all the time. I mean. It was very, very intense, that period very, stressful for lots of people.

Respondent #4: And also, I remember, like, especially during the summer 2020, that they have organized like this summer festivals, where, like during a week, they organized several meetings

regarding different aspects of teaching online also like relaxation sessions which I found very, very interesting, especially because, like learning in teaching online, it's very different from teaching on campus. And so there were some techniques that I actually put into practice during the COVID-19 experience as a teacher, and especially how to use, for example, my voice during online teaching sessions, and how to manage time during the online sessions, for example, which is a little bit different then, if compared to on campus, seminars and language classes. And so I've found, like the the suggestions, very, very useful. And yes, I I cannot complain about like the professional support, and in terms of both how to use technology and how to change and to adapt my education style to the new online tools. And so I was very happy with the support given by the University.

Simona Scanni: So about the the next part, it is about your personal methodologies and teaching practices. So what have you been doing since the COVID-19 outbreak to assist students in the move online, either on or off campus?

Respondent #3: all sorts of things. Well, we have announced materials online, of course, for each course now has a a welcome video, and in some other guidance, or on which were recorded so like to that, lectures had to to produce lots of materials online which remained on on canvas for the students to consult, and we had to create a extra material for students who couldn't attend. So some kind of catch up materials, making sure that the students would know what they've missed. So all these extra materials, which were meant to assist the students who could not really attend the session. If there were any technical problems they could do their activities independently. But also with the lectures. For instance, they were all done, at least for the core modules. They were all done online, and we had to use a different approach. So, instead of giving a lecture lasting, I don't know 45 min, or 50 min as we were doing before in the classroom the instructions whether we had to break the lecture into little pieces and the short video, so that the students could engage with one part of the lecture of 5 min, and then a little break, and then engage again. And so this is a new kind of approach, which is in line also with the way students are learning today, because obviously the deep learning approach it's a fading. Students are more used to it, kind of a more a horizontal approach to learn, and in that they are more exposed to a deconstruction online. And they are more used to switch from one task to the next in a very rapid way, in a very quick way given to the fact that they are now exposed to online digital technologies that have changed the way we learn. And therefore we are adapting our teaching a little bit to this new approach. So the fact that we are breaking, we have broken the classes into bits and pieces, in a way it reflects this new way of learning and of dealing consuming information. So I think this was the main approach that we we we talk in our teaching obviously offering lots of support. So we're often on Skype talking to the students, trying to just show them trying to provide help all all sorts of things. So I think this is a at least from a pedagogical point of view, but also the well being team has been very, very active to help the students. I think the amount of work that the well-being team had to really produce and the support that they provided to was the huge during the pandemic. So this is what the University, I think. announced this department to assist the students.

Respondent #4: Yes, also, the department organized personal meetings. And so each academic year had like a personal tutor, and there were organized like weekly meetings online. Of course, to talk about different aspects of the learning career. Basically. So we talked about some important to institutional appointments. For example, I was the personal tutor of second year students. So we talked a lot during these meetings about the year abroad. and so I give to them like specific information about learning. In Italy, For example, we look together at the different website of the different universities, that where they would have spent their year abroad, and I talked about my personal experience. For example. also, I've tried to be more present for them, so I try to reply as as quickly as I could to emails, for example, or I've tried to give to them like extra support through like one to one meetings, for example, of line, of course and from a more teaching practice related point of view I've tried to use as many online tools as possible in order to give each students a

chance to have, like a preferable online tool to use during the online sessions or during the autonomous learning that they were required to do by themselves. so that they could find like more personal way to to study, for example. So, for example, with first year students, I used online tools which are very useful if you want to improve your vocabulary. And so the words, like these flashcards that they could create themselves, or I prepared and give to them where, just by topping the flash cards. They could see, like the translation in from Italian into English, for example, or I use like a lot like, for example, Kahoot!, which was a good way to learn something about the Italian culture and Italian language as well, but in a funnier way than the classical line meeting. For example, I also use the same to my Phd research.an online recording voice tool, and which was quite helpful, not only for me to collect data for my Phd Research, but also for them, in order to keep track of their progress in terms of linguistic competence. So they could, for example, record themselves and listen to their performances and spot the different mistakes, like from up grammar or vocabulary, but also from a pronunciation, intonation, point of view; and I think that's greatly affected their the self percept perception of their progress while learning Italian, even though I'm. I was not like physically with them. Through this kind of self assessed tools they could check their progress. And then, of course, doing the online meeting, we could talk about this progress together and find different strategies to improve.

Simona Scanni**:** So I'm skipping 6 and 7 questions, because I want to remain on this this thing you were talking about, Respondent #4. So number 8, what pieces of technology or programs, do you think would be most beneficial dealing with this situation? You actually answer the question. But if you have something more to add…

Respondent #4: Yeah, for example, also like from, which is quite different from my actual actual teaching experience. For example, I think that zoom is a very good online tool for online classes. It's very easy to learn how to use the different tools offered by zoom. And if compared, for example, to Microsoft teams or other platforms, for example. So yes, apart from the other online tools that I've already mentioned.

Simona Scanni: Yes. Do you think all the tools you mentioned could be used for informal learning, so like the students, can use them by themselves to improve the language outside the classroom context, or the formal educational context?

Respondent #4: Absolutely. Yes, I think that one of the most beneficial aspects of these tools is that online tools are quite similar, for example, to very common to very well known online apps that students normally use to start learning like a foreign language. And so it's very easy for them to familiarise with this new tools, and also, for example, in self assessed learning programs, I think that these tools could be implemented. and they could be a useful support for autonomous learning out like, for example, in language courses which are like self regulated and where, like the there's no actual feature, but there may be, for example, a tutos or weekly meetings. But basically like the learning process is self-regulated, and I think these tools that could be very helpful to support the learning process from a linguistic point of view, but also from a motivational one, as they actually have a lot of tables which can be analysed by the students, and where they can, for example, check their progress. And also sometimes these tools mark specific vocabulary contents, for example, which still costs like some issues, for example, and so students know, without the need of being guided by a tutor. the the elements, the aspects of the foreign language that they are learning that they need to improve more.

Simona Scanni: And Respondent #3, how would you answer question number 8?

Respondent #3: Yeah. I I agree with you. I think zoom is is an invaluable tool. I didn't know it before the pandemic, and I think it without zoom we would be. We would have been in trouble. Really, I

particularly like the the breakout room function because it allows you to monitor the student's work by the same time leaving them work, leaving them to work independently, and also allows for a in a way to to differentiate to tasks us. So we a group can work on something that while you know the group is doing something else. and therefore it it's quite beneficial for for for for team work, and and, as I said, the for for different levels of students. So you can really assign different tasks. So, according to the level, according to the interest as well, if possible. So that is something that I didn't know before, and that I started to use, and with the and I I would continue to use I mean, if possible. Obviously I think we also had to learn as teachers out to, for instance, how to deal with breakout rooms, so we had to find a good balance without, instead of leaving the students there, for I don't know half an hour, and we would just do something else. In the meantime we'd like to find a good way to manage this, perhaps by checking how the work was progressing. But be that without being there too much, creating a little bit of pressure to the students, so we sometimes that will be the breakout room for a couple of minutes without saying anything, just making sure that the students were working, and then leave and let them continue. So this is something. I think that is very, very good, and I've never really experienced any issue with the use of zoom from a logical point of view. I think I could do anything that I wanted to do. Obviously there were problems because the students missed being in class and obviously was alienating for everybody. But if we considered the purely pedagogical aspect. I think I could meet all my targets, and the students works well, so I've never really experienced any any problems with that.

Simona Scanni: So back to question number 6. Did you already have experience with remote teaching prior COVID-19?

Respondent #4: No, Personally, I did only like face to face teaching, basically. So it was my first experience with online provision.

Respondent #3: same here.

Simona Scanni: And what do you see as the biggest challenges involved in online teaching?

Respondent #3: Well, I think the challenge is first of all, obviously, technology evolves quickly and online. What do you really mean by online teaching? I mean, is it just by, you know, staying in front of a computer and having a telecommunicator at the other side of the screen; or is it developing tools ourselves, developing real activities that we have to embed in a specific software or platforms? So that's a different kind of thing. We need to really, first of all, define not what we need, what we mean by online teaching. So if you see this, or only just to use any aspects, I will say the relation, the interaction with students, for example.

Simona Scanni: yes, or the lesson planning or any type of challenges you find relevant.

Respondent #3: Well, I think mostly it's the fact that it could be much more time consuming in terms of preparing extra for posting, just because, you know, you never know whether the students have really engaged with what they were supposed to do before perhaps attending a meeting or during the meeting, especially if the class is big. It depends on obviously, the context. With 30 students online, it's impossible to check that everybody is doing what they are supposed to do, or that they have a assimilated what they have to assimilate. So, in a way, there is lots of extra to be prepared to support the session, so that it from a purely workload point of view that's quite challenging. Again,it could be difficult to monitor the progress if the class is big and, but in general, I think, apart from the actual experience which is a problem for the students, I don't find huge challenges involved with that. To be honest, according to my experience, at least so far I have never. Well, the only challenges were really technology related. So the Web, the West situations where I was supposed to have hybrid sessions at the university. So what's the time where we were transitioning back to in

class provision? But some students could not attend for a short period of time. I mean this was for a master's course I was doing, because not at the level, but in Master's level. So at one point the room was not equipped, and therefore I had to move around with my laptop in class. That was really this roughly for me as a teacher and for the students. So. But if the technology is embedded properly, I don't thinkI mean, apart from really this practical, I I don't think there are huge challenges involved in, you know, in online teaching.

Respondent #4: Yes, I agree with Respondent #3, especially, like, I add, like an hybrid language class with like 4 students, and that was quite challenges because some students were exempted from like attending my class on campus for personal reasons and so I had to…half the class was on campus, and the other one was a line, and it was quite challenging, especially because during language classes, the most important goal is interaction, of course, into target language, and was quite difficult to manage the time, and also to keep involved both on campus and online students. And so that was quite challenging it. Hmm. Another challenge that I experience. But it's not from like the teaching point of view is more from like I don't know, motivational point of view for me was quite a challenging to keep everyone motivated, especially those students who had, like a a lower level of language proficiency, or who we're not like so personally involved in the learning process in general. So while during on campus sessions, they were like, in a way, in a friendly environment. They were on campus, and so, even though they were not very interested in the contents of my classes, for example, and this always happens, of course with some students they have, like some I don't know aspect of their on campus life. That's in a way keep them motivated on the country when we move to online only provisions. All these positive aspects of being on campus like just disappeared. And so there's uninterested students. We're just simply demotivated. And so maybe they were attending the class, and since I had like small groups of students during my language classes I managed to involve, like everyone, basically by asking like direct questions, for example, or by asking their personal opinions. And some of them were just not simply replying to my questions, or they decided to keep their cameras off for microphones off and so I think that the most challenging aspect of online provision is to keep everyone motivated which could could not be seen as a real challenge. If when you have like language courses for all those who decide themselves to enroll in in language courses because they want to improve their language skills, or they just want to learn like a new foreign language. But when you have to deal with undergraduate students, who for many different personal reasons, are just going through like a tough period, for example,.They're not motivated well online, online provision was very was very challenging, for me at least

Simona Scanni:…also because they expected to be on campus.

Respondent #4: Yes, they wanted to…a lot of them told me that they wanted. They were tired of not experiencing university, as they were supposed to do, and so they felt like being at like being university students without the chance to really experience university life. It was just pointless and I couldn't really reply to them, because I was only like responsible for their acquisition for the learning of the Italian language. But of course this is emotional stages that they experience greatly affected also the very little part of their university experience for which I was responsible, and I really did not have answers for them, so I tried my best to involve them with the different online tools or games, or just, I don't know, to to keep them motivated, but in some cases, with just I mean not enough.

Respondent #3: Just one more thing I wanted to add. I think challenge for everybody involved was the information overload basically everything that came through emails. And so for the student was also very hard, because communication develop very quickly and well got new guidance almost every day, and the students needed to really keep track of that. So that was a problem for the students and for staff as well. If I did, the thousands of emails circulated, and it was sometimes very difficult to read the demo and from a teaching point of view I think Another major difference to the

previous time was that lots of videos were introduced to. Before, perhaps even in the preparation of a canvas module page, we would just write a text on canvas. Now we were asked to produce videos, and this is something that it probably will stay in the future. For some it's not a problem for some members of staff. They do it naturally. They like it; for others. Well, it's not always a a nice experience to have to be in front of a camera and record yourself, and know that lots of students will watch that. So for some people. It's less comfortable than for others. But this is another element. I think, that perhaps will be retained for the future. So it just to came to my mind, I wanted to mention this.

Simona Scanni: So what do you say about the problem of students who don't have the same access to technology and equipment necessary for online education. How did your institution, and how did you. or do you, as a teacher, support the students?

Respondent #3: Well, at the very beginning of the pandemic. Yes, I mean, this was a problem. There were lots of students who didn't have a laptop. They would use their phone to the zoom class or to do anything I needed to do so. For some of them this was a problem. But the institution has a developed strategies at the moment and the library provides laptops. They can rent a laptop, I mean, they don't have to pay. Obviously they are free. The students can book a laptop, and the library provides that for them. This is something that we'll land as a result of the pandemic. So I think again, the university is working hard to to be as inclusive as possible, and this is one of the strategies that were introduced again by the library to help students personally. Well, as a teacher, I did what I mentioned before. I tried to provide extra materials. The connection with the work of the students couldn't attend. For technical reason. I would provide extra materials, but of course they need to access that stage with technology. Otherwise I couldn't so that there isn't much that the teacher could do really to help them, if not again using technology, but they needed to access that. So the problem wasreally structural: if they didn't have a laptop. Then there would be in trouble.

Respondent #4:.that was the same for me. And also while I tried to make all the materials used in class available as soon as possible, so that students who couldn't attend my classes could access the materials whenever they want to do. And also I've tried to use online tools that work fine on different technological devices, so on smartphones on laptops, on ipads, for example. So i'll try to be as much inclusive as possible, of course, but without I mean any kind of access to the Internet it would have been very difficult for me. I wouldn't have like the necessary tools to help them. So the the University started immediately to find the strategy is to have students who didn't have like access to technology, basically and also like during the transition from the move from online, provision back to in person Provision University managed to use rooms or other spaces of on campus, and to provide technological tools that students could use. So, for example, students who didn't didn't have like for example, laptops, or a good Wi-fi connection good book like a desk in a different buildings across the campus and could attend their classes from that, computer, for example, so that that was a good strategy that allowed a lot of students to to attend classes. So yes, but also like doing the transition from online to on campus. I think that's the University of Birmingham actually managed very well this transition, which was quite difficult regarding some aspects. And so that was a good strategy that actually worked because, like a lot of my students. So because that i'd like, as you know, 8 flat mates, and they couldn't actually focus if they studied at home could do in order to to attend the class in the best way possible, or just to study.

Simona Scanni: Okay. So did you recognise the importance of equity and inclusion in your teaching practices online? You already answered.

Respondent #3: Yeah, I mean, yes, absolutely. The inclusion was one of the priorities, I mean, from our perspective as teacher from the institutional perspective as well. So this is something that was discussed regularly in meetings and communication coming from people in specific roles. So, yes,

absolutely. This is something that university values a lot as well. In general. It's it's one of the mission of the University. We have to be as inclusive as possible.

Respondent #4: Yes, there are also, like compulsory courses that every teacher must attend in order to be able to teach. Actually, it's a requirement in order to work at the University of Birmingham, to compete equity and inclusion courses so, yes, absolutely.

Simona Scanni: And the curriculum, and of course, content being changed due to the COVID-19 crisis?

Respondent #3: Yes, I mean, as I mentioned before, we couldn't really keep the assessments as they were, and as a consequence, the content also needs to be adapted to in order to for the students to be prepared for that particular kind of assessment. So certain tasks, when changed into more reflective tasks. So, instead of asking the students to do grammar exercises like filling the gap, or something like that, a students could have found the answer online. We asked them to…we prepared the tasks which were more problem solving and self-reflective so they, instead of using instead of writing, they had sometimes to explain what kind of tense was needed. Why? So they were open questions which made the task a slightly more robust, but also, I think, more effective in a way, because encourage the students really to know what they were doing and to reflect on possible options. So this was the main change; so making the tasks more open and more self-reflective this was one of the the changes that applied to all sorts of assessments in language, but also in task cultural link to the cultural classes as well. So this is something that we we really paying up to a certain extent, I think. And so far, for instance, we still have some assessments that derive from the pandemic for recently final year in semester one they submitted the take on paper instead of doing the exam, as they would have done in the past. Some assessments would be a permanently capture. As the Take home papers, for instance, in translation, and in practice, so does it an assessment that will be forever, as as it was during the pandemic, because it works better. So in a way, yes, all these changes were applied during the pandemic. Some of them will be retained, or the will not be retained. For instance, most of the colleagues prefer to return to exams as far as the the core modules are concerned, so use of language training. We left to most of the cases. We've come back as an exam. But in some cases we have kept the changes.

Respondent #4: Yeah, yes, I mean, I totally agree. I mean, I've nothing to add. She covered everything.

Simona Scanni: And yeah, we talked about the assessment…Is there anything you want to add to answer the the question about the assessment?

Respondent #3: […] We asked the students to submit a recorded presentation. Again, for inclusivity reasons because the student might not have connection at the time of that particular assessment, and obviously would have been very complicated to reschedule. So to avoid that various cases we introduced presentations which the students needed to upload. But most cases we are reversing back to live, or else because the conditions are because it's easier to really assess the level it it's a slightly more authentic as well, any way that obviously the students need to reflect on the spot on the kind of answers that they have to provide.

Respondent #4: Yeah, I have nothing to you to had.

Simona Scanni: was the communication between teachers and students effective during the pandemic?

Respondent #3: Yes, I think so with the reason I mentioned before, to become a little bit overwhelming, because we had to send lots of emails, lots of communication from instruction. So, but it was as effective as it could be. Yes, I think so in terms of really the communication. Everything was carefully studied in advance, prepared in advance. So the team, which was involved in providing guidance as the pandemic developed, they were really very careful to provide the communication, which was well as again inclusive, and taking care of all sorts of difficulties for the students that are experiencing. So I think I think the answer is Absolutely. Yes.

Respondent #4: yes, absolutely. I totally agree.

Simona Scanni: We answered number 4 about courses in technology on your own initiative. You basically said Yes, before. I could see, you were both enthusiastic about the online experience, and also number of things about workload and well being that. So, last question: in the aftermath of the emergency remote learning experience, what are the effective/positive teaching strategies and approaches which have been introduced during the pandemic and you would consider keeping in your future teaching practices?

Respondent #3: Well, I mentioned before the breakout rooms, and this is something that I would keep. I mean, if I had the chance to teach online again. This is something that obviously the University wants us to be in person now. So we don't have the kind of freedom really to adopt everything that we would like to adopt. Because, again, I need to be there in the classroom. So I cannot use a zoom in that particular context. I think what I mentioned before they changing the approach in terms of understanding that the students sometimes learn more with one less is more basically in the sense that instead of expecting the students to engage with content for 45 min, we can break it and make it more effective. So this is something I learned in recent years. So I think that's something that I would like to retain, if possible.Yeah, I don't know. I think also the assessment I mentioned before designing assessments which are more reflective and and even more engaging for the students. So this is something that I I had to do during the pandemic, and I think I will keep.

Respondent #4: yes, also for me, like time management which is really useful nowadays, and also, for example, the technological expertise that I've reached during the COVID-19 pandemic. So the use of different online tools which can be adopted also, like in on campus classes, of course, because teachers have access to computers in classes. So I usually keep all the online tools that I've used to during the pandemic also, for on campus teaching even now, and i'm better communication with students. So, being more direct or just clear in my communicative exchanges with students, for example. And yes, I think these are the main things that I've learned during the pandemic, and then, and that I've decided to keep in my teaching practice nowadays because I think they work fine.

Simona Scanni: Thank you. So about the last part of my interview. It basically says that there is a difference between online learning and what we experienced during the COVID-19, which is called emergency remote learning. They are not the same, but sometimes they will use it, as synonyms. So in light of this differentiation between distance learning and emergency remote learning, do you think that the covid19 emergency has had a negative impact on the perception of online learning by students and by teachers? And if so, to what extent?

Respondent #4: Personally, I don't think I mean, I think, that the positive perception of online learning I mean they were more positive effects than negative effects regarding online learning, because I think that it was not like at the very beginning it was in as something that was not good enough, but I think that was due to the fact that all the possible available tools were not known either by teachers and or learners. and so I think that this experience of, though it was quite challenging, helped us out both the teachers and learners to familiarize themselves with new tools

that actually are very effective.and that can be used as I mean, they could be implemented and used only in more traditional way of teaching. I'm thinking about, especially modern languages, teaching. And since the I mean, technology is was used. And so I think that is experience actually, at least in my personal experience. It gave me the chance to know a lot of different online tools that greatly help my teaching practice. And yeah, I mean, I feel like I need to keep up to date with this new technological devices now, because they actually create me and reach the teaching and learning experience.

Respondent #3: yeah, I I agree with you. I think the perception of online learning. If it was bad. It was bad because of all the experience of being stuck at home, and people had enough of it, and therefore it was fair failed, and they return to in person. Teaching would be much better for the students and for stuff. So in that sense, yes, I think the perception was negative, but because the entire experience was negative. But yes, we we obviously prefer at the moment the face to face teaching, because for the students situation, obviously, they pay high fees, and they want to be on campus. They want to see the facilities they want to use the facilities. So it's not. The problem is not with learning but with a general experience. So if we say no to online learning, we do that, not because online learning is not a static, but because it doesn't allow for the experience. So that's the only reason, I think, of course, there are some challenges that we mentioned before the assessment challenges or all the challenges I like. If you want to have an or not a session, it works better in person, probably because obviously it's more authentic. But in general I think the perception of online learning is not negative as a result of the pandemic, I think we've understood that it's potential some limitations as well. But I think, as we, as we have said, it's much more deposited than the negative, and I think we have developed skills that we didn't have before, and which can be used in different situations now.

Simona Scanni: And would you consider online learning as a way to make education more accessible around the world?

Respondent #3: Yes, of course, and I think the University of Birmingham is currently investing on that. There is a new project with languages for all which is called the digital. First we have. We are changing completely the way the courses are structured, so the students will have the chance to engage with independence activities online. That would be a postal dedicated to this, so that will be involved in no source of activities online, and they will meet their tutors every 4 nights. So 2 weeks, but most of the activities will be done independently. The meeting with the 2 would be to make sure that they are progressing well, but we are changing approach totally in languages. For all this, this doesn't apply to to the model languages curriculum, but only to learn to languages for all. But it shows that we are opening potential new investments and and the new way of learning. Again, we want to involve as many students as possible that are also distance learning new programs which have been created at Masters level, especially in translation studies. So this is something that the University is doing to make education more accessible without necessarily compromising the the the traditional in person. Provision.

Respondent #4: yes, also like from my current teaching experience, i'm teaching Italian languages, Italian. So for a language at the University of Bologna, and the University has created these online language courses for international students who have decided to enroll to like undergraduate and master degrees at the University of Bologna. and in order to increase the number which is already quite high. And this is great because Italy needs to appeal more international students to their universities. According to the new European language policy, international students learn studying in European countries need to learn by the the end of their university program the language of the country where they are studying. And this is a great way also to I mean a large. The number of speakers of Italian as a for a language. and in order to do so like in a more accessible way, the Italian language courses are provided online and also like in the time slots which are suitable for

students like, especially for master students who are otherwise overwhelmed by other classes during the like, from 9 9 am. To 7 Pm: so online courses are very useful or support forum student time management skills and of course, in order to include as many students as possible. Online modules are fundamental. So also in Italy we are I mean, going towards this direction. Okay.

Simona Scanni: Okay. So thank you. We have finished the interview. This was the last question. Respondent #3. I don't know. If you want to answer the others.

Respondent #3: Yeah, why not?

Simona Scanni: This is the first part. So these are some questions about the governance, and how a government manage the crisis, and then we already answered these, and then we have reactions and actions of the of the institution. […] Okay. So first question is.did your National Government have an indication policy on crisis management?

Respondent #3: I think the Government didn't really, at the time of the pandemic they didn't really act very quickly on that in terms of what education was concerned. I think we didn't receive many instructions at the institutional level. I mean the University guidance, and according to obviously the the the direction given by the Government When we had to shut down. We obviously shut down, but not so we didn't. Really, I don't think the University received a very helpful and detailed instructions on how to deliver teaching, or how to approach the problem with assessment. So we followed the main direction at the the that the Government had decided to make up which was to close university into a switch to online provision. But I don't think that there was a proper education policy on crisis management.

Simona Scanni: So number 2, if the National Government gave instruction.

Respondent #3: and yes, I mean to to proceed in general terms, we followed the main, the main idea. They was to to close the university and to to stay at home. But not more than that, to my knowledge, I mean, as far as I concern,

Simona Scanni: did the Education authority to make teachers and school administration staff complete professional development courses?

Respondent #3: No, this came again. This came from the university, because obviously and from teachers themselves, I mean, we asked for particular specific time when we were dealing with certain tools, and we weren't very skilled. We asked the University to provide demonstrations and to to to teach us how to do it. So we had specialized developers, and there's a team you have. He made of people who are expert in the digital learning technology. So they were very, very helpful. But this again happened at the institutional level, not from the didn't come from the Government.

Simona Scanni: So I think Number 4 about the support from authorities was lacking actually to to your institution.

Respondent #3: I think not from the institution. No, no, it wasn't from authorities. Some authorities in a way, yes; but at the same time I also think that this kind of approach. It should be taken independence in a way, because the needs of the of the university are different from the needs of another university. I mean, we we in a way certain level of autonomy it's important to we can't. Instead of following a directions which are applied and discriminately in the entire country, I think that you, the having a little bit of a autonomy from at the institutional level, it's it's more advantageous, because we know what we do better than probably people who are dealing politicians. No, up to a certain sense, I think so. That's so definitely from the institutional level was

great. The government from a government level. It wasn't great because they it was lack of clarity, and but in in the end it worked out well, because we have yes, so the alternative modes where to switch online. So to use the zoom, it's the main tool that the very first week of of the pandemic I remember I was using Skype. But then the University asked us to use zoom and embedded zoom into Columbus as well. So that was very useful. And so they During the pandemic. We were online totally the in the transition back to campus. We had some hybrid classes, but this was for a very limited amount of time, and people didn't like it. I didn't like it, either, because again we didn't. We were not equipped so they were only very limited amount of the rooms in the university which could be used for reproductive hybrid session. Most of the rooms were not equipped, meaning that we really had to improvise. So there was a lots of sharing good practice between colleagues, but most in most cases we wasn't a little bit of a disaster to teach a highway sessions, because, as I said I had the some students, I told him, and I was using my laptop, but the students could see me. They couldn't see the rest of the class. I had to to to move the laptop around. So it was very disruptive. basically yes, we were online for a short period. We had some hybrid sessions, but nobody like this.

Simona Scanni: Okay. I would skip the the eleventh question because it's basically like about safety measures. We already talked about it a lot. So what are the priorities, what were The priorities and concerns of your institution during and after the pandemic?

Respondent #3: Well, the priorities were to make sure that the students will achieve the expected learning outcomes, because obviously we didn't want that degree to be valued less. Obviously, we wouldn't want them to find themselves in a situation where they were applying for a job. and the employer would say, okay, your degree is less, is, is is is not as good as the previous students, because you were not. If you didn't have the chance to learn properly. And so the the priority was to make sure that the provision remained at the highest level as possible to the highest. Up to this that is standard. Another priority was to make sure that in a way they are abroad. It was in the way possible to to be delivered, so it lots of measures were implemented, for instance, the you're abroad which probably I I guess John must have mentioned that, and as he was one of the developer of these initially, so I I I will not talk to anything else, because I, John, is the one who knows the best. And so the the again the I brought it was was a problem in the sense that was one of the biggest challenges, and the the university tried various strategies to to make sure that the students still had the chance to go abroad, and maybe by defering the here so they could take it in the the after, instead of that year, when they were supposed to take it. So in general, the the main priority was to make sure that they have would reach the same standard of learning. Also. After the pandemic, the priority was to be sure that we would decide the the best possible approach, and whether to return to previous provision, or whether to keep what we had. So they didn't return to normality, as also been a very, very complex period. It wasn't automatic at all. It was very, very problematic, because really we had to monitor every single activity, make sure that the students knew how to reverse some students, and never such an exam before. This is why, for instance, finally, a students . Still had the chance to do a take on paper instead of doing a an exam, because they never practice before. So this was quite successful for them to imagine to have to sit an exam after, you know the only the last exam that that was for the a level. So this was something we really needed to to think about again. Also in consultation with the students, or something that we always do. In a way. When we make changes we need to consult the students make sure that they are happy with that. So, yes, in a way, the main priorities was to make sure that the standards remained that, and that the students didn't feel put at a disadvantage. We had to ensure that they were comfortable with the with the provision and with the assessment so training them to the new form of assessment and training them to return to all the form of assessment.