DISTANCE LEARNING AS THE NEW REALITY IN TERTIARY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract. The year 2020 was a horrible shock for both educators and students worldwide because of the COVID-19 disease. The whole educational process had to undergo cardinal changes in that it was forced to transition from face-to-face to online mode. Distance learning (DL) became the new reality in no time. This unusual situation prompted us to conduct research on what challenges it meant for tutors to cope with the new requirements. The main goal of our case study was to get insights into the altered daily routines of tutors and understand how the system functioned. Another objective of our survey was to provide a brief synthesis of distance learning, based on the academic literature. We have applied the qualitative research design, using a semi-structured interview as a research instrument for collecting data from the respondents. The research sample consisted of thirty-four college tutors teaching language and literature (English, German, Ukrainian, and Hungarian). The

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participants were requested to reply to eleven questions either online or face-to-face. The results proved how unexpected and difficult it was to move from the classroom to distance education. They emphasized how crucial digital literacy is for both instructors and students. One of the essential implications is that teachers must develop their digital skills in every possible way. The next stage of our research will be to investigate what impact DL has on teachers' and students' physical and psychological well-being.

Keywords: *distance learning; challenges of distance learning; emergency remote teaching (ERT); tertiary education; language and literature teachers; synchronous and asynchronous classes.*

1. INTRODUCTION

'We cannot teach in the old way any longer,' said Ken Beatty in 2021 in a webinar organized by Pearson, and we entirely agree with him. It is doubtless that the daily routine of any teacher, tutor or educator, in whichever conspicuous or inconspicuous nook of the world they would live, will never be the same as before the outbreak and spread of COVID-19. The new reality is felt around us and evidently, it brings its own norms to our lives and professional activities. An enormous number of research articles have appeared in publication since the start of this new reality reporting on various aspects of distance teaching as the main factor, providing evidence on issues like motivating students online, assessing student performance effectively online, the influence of online teaching on student interaction, or university students' attitudes toward online language learning, just to mention a few. In the present paper, it is intended to review the academic literature that has appeared mainly after the outbreak of COVID-19, and has reported primarily on the appearance of the new reality in education worldwide, relating to the transition to DL[4] and emergency remote teaching (ERT) in particular.

Literature review

Hargis (2020) claims that the notion of online or distance learning is not new, and it has an enormous bulk of academic literature (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Machynska & Dzikovska, 2020; Simonson et al., 2000). Indeed, twenty years ago, Keegan (2002) defined distance education (DE) as 'teaching and learning in which learning normally occurs in a different place from teaching' (p. 20). In our study detailed below, we take the position of Keegan when interpreting DE and accept the descriptors of Paulsen et al. (2002) who characterise this mode of content delivery as teachers and learners being physically separated from each other, involving an educational establishment providing grounds for the educational process, as well as applying the internet for teaching and student-teacher interaction. However,

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[4] In this paper, the abbreviations/terms DE and DL are used interchangeably to refer to online teaching and learning

Juárez-Díaz and Perales (2021) believe that there is a need to use other terms to give a more precise definition of the situation that was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

This new term used by Hodges et al. (2020) is 'emergency remote teaching' (ERT). In their view, it is an alternative teaching method that needs to be switched to when a crisis situation arises. ERT aims to provide temporary access to education that can be reliably delivered in an emergency or crisis situation. Once the emergency situation has subsided or ceased to exist, education will revert to its original form. Kamal et al. (2021) concluded that face-to-face learning and DE are effective in different ways. In addition, Aranyi, Tóth and Veisz (2022) came to the conclusion that the knowledge gained on DE in ERT would be of great value and use in future contingencies like natural disasters or times of conflict. However, Camilleri (2021) urges education leaders and policy makers to embrace online education models and virtual systems as they are here to stay in the post-COVID-19 era.

The rapid transition also meant rapid skill development for instructors, who invested considerable time and effort in learning about online course design, as well as developing and teaching their courses. Tanasijević and Janković (2021) admit that the transition from traditional to remote teaching was difficult not only for the teachers, but for the learners and their parents, too. Padayachee and Dison (2021) argue that, in addition to teachers, students were also significantly more actively engaged in the teaching process than in face-to-face teaching and learning environments, as they had to meet the challenge of managing their own learning processes in a less formal, virtual environment. Sumardi and Nugrahani (2021) also found that, although ERT was a successful teaching mode to substitute face-to-face instruction, less able students faced difficulty in disciplining themselves to be more attentive during online classes, over which situation the teachers could have little control.

The rapid transfer to ERT also meant that researchers worldwide began investigating this new reality. A plethora of research papers has appeared that have intended to gain insight into the various aspects of ERT. Most of these papers deal with the urgent question of transitioning from face-to-face to emergency online learning (Aranyi et al., 2022; Vargas Barquero et al., 2022; Marshall et al., 2020; Yeigh & Lynch, 2020), the relationship between COVID-19 and remote teaching (Alvarez, 2020; Arefi, 2021; Bacsa-Bán, 2022; Donham et al., 2022; Herrmann, 2020; Schrenk et al., 2021; Toquero, 2020), instructor and student perspectives on remote course delivery (Castañeda-Trujillo & Jaime-Osorio, 2021; Chen et al., 2022), as well as student and teacher perceptions, experiences and attitudes to the unconventional for them mode of education (Baruth et al., 2021; Butic Reyes, 2021; Civelek et al., 2021; Gürler et al., 2020; Hussein et al., 2020; Ironsi, 2022; Juárez-Díaz & Perales, 2021; Martin et al. 2021; Melnychenko & Zheliaskova, 2021; Ozfidan et al., 2021; Pylypenko & Kozub, 2021; Valizadeh & Soltanpour, 2021).

Other issues frequently addressed in the literature on ERT and the pandemic include the impacts of ERT on students and teachers (Day et al., 2021; El-Sakran et al., 2022; Jelinska & Paradowski, 2021; Kamal et al., 2021; Purushotham & Swathi, 2020), factors affecting the quality of e-learning in the COVID pandemic (Elumalai et al., 2020; Kawasaki et al., 2021), the relationship between ERT and academic performance (Nazempour et al., 2022;

Oraif & Elyas, 2021), online formative assessment (Said Pace, 2020; Zou et al., 2021), interaction in online teaching (Yang & Lin, 2020), ERT and the role of teachers' online community of practice (Ulla & Perales, 2021), ERT and parents' involvement (Safriyani et al., 2022), and teaching practicum of pre-service teachers in DE (Koşar, 2021).

One of the most notable differences between face-to-face and distance learning is the dilemma of teachers as to whether or not students have done their homework on their own. While this issue is negligible in face-to-face teaching, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront educators' concerns about the quality of online assessment and the potential for a higher incidence of online cheating and plagiarism (Nguyen & Keusemann Humston, 2020). Beatty (2021) argues that automated systems such as Turnitin (US internet-based similarity search software), or the Unicheck plagiarism checker, widely used in Ukraine, exist to counteract concerns about plagiarism and cheating. Beatty (2021) offers suggestions on how teachers can cope with similar difficulties. In his view, teachers should encourage students to produce original work and to check themselves. This is where the shift of responsibility comes in, i.e. students taking responsibility from teachers for their own learning and work. It can also be useful for students to write a code of ethics, setting out precisely the rules they should follow.

However, we are convinced that we have found little empirical evidence on the way instructors experienced the transition from face-to-face to remote teaching, how they could cope with the challenges they had to face, whether they managed to complete their responsibilities. Moreover, hardly any proof of this was found in the Ukrainian context. Therefore, we conducted our qualitative research on distance learning using the case study approach. It was first hypothesized that the transition from face-to-face to online learning was stressful for every participant of the educational process. Second, it was presumed that organizing student interaction during synchronous online classes caused difficulties for instructors. Third, we assumed that students were more motivated to learn when participating in synchronous online classes than when the material was provided for them in the Google Classroom and they learned asynchronously. Finally, our fourth hypothesis concerned student assessment: we hypothesized that instructors assessed student performance in a written form. We collected data with the help of an interview with the intention to fill the gap and add to the general knowledge of the issue under consideration, as well as contribute to the growing body of academic literature on it.

Thus, the present study aimed to reveal the answers to the following research questions:

1. What was the transition from face-to-face to online learning like for the participants of the educational process?

2. Did organizing student interaction during synchronous online classes cause difficulties for instructors?

3. When were students more motivated to learn: during synchronous online classes or when learning asynchronously?

4. How did you assess your students in the two quarantine periods in 2020?

2. METHODS

In this paper, we report on the second phase of a longitudinal study on DL as realized in a higher educational establishment in Ukraine (See analyses of results and implications of the first research phase in Huszti et al., 2021; Lechner et al., 2022.)

2.1. Participants

Thirty-four language instructors from a rural teacher training college gave their consent to participate in our research as respondents. They taught English (n=13), Hungarian (n=11), Ukrainian (n=8), and German (n=2), among them 23 women and 11 men. Their average age was 40 years and their average teaching experience in tertiary education was 13 years. Only two educators had done some online teaching before the pandemic broke out in 2020.

2.2. Instrument and Procedure

As a research tool, an interview was designed containing 11 questions that covered topics such as the transition from face-to-face to online teaching, activating students during online lessons, student interaction during the live online classes, student interest and motivation, the methods of assessing students' knowledge and performance, etc. The interview was conducted retrospectively. (See the English version in the Appendix.) The second phase of our research took place in the summer of 2021. The interviews were conducted online and offline, in every case according to the preference of the interviewees. Thus, twenty-four participants were interviewed online either through Google Meet, or via Messenger. To avoid misunderstandings, the interviews were carried out in the mother tongue of the respondents, i.e. Hungarian and Ukrainian. They lasted for 25 to 35 minutes on average. Every interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for the data to be retrievable for later analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

In this study, the qualitative research design was applied in the form of a case study where the case (Seliger & Shohamy, 1990) itself was the teaching staff of a department at a higher educational establishment in Ukraine. Content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was employed to analyse the research data obtained through the interviews. We identified themes which recurred across all the interviews and thus four themes were singled out (transition between online and offline teaching, students' involvement in online lessons, students' interest and motivation, assessment and effectiveness) comprising the main categories along which the data were analysed in the course of research. The data were coded manually and to preserve the respondents' anonymity, they were given codes T1 to T34. Excerpts from the interviews are presented here in the authors' translation.

3. RESULTS

This paper is an attempt to investigate various aspects of DE in a Ukrainian tertiary educational context through the lens of instructors who voiced mixed opinions in the

interviews. Four themes were singled out during data analysis along which the obtained results are introduced and discussed below.

3.1. Transition between online and offline teaching

During the qualitative analysis of the data collected from 34 interviewees, it was revealed that college educators were affected differently by the transition from face-to-face to distance education. More than half of the teachers interviewed (53%) experienced this transition negatively. Many were frightened that they would not meet the expectations, or feared coping with a task they did for the first time online, because in the first place they had little online teaching experience. There was a teacher who was troubled by not seeing the students' facial expressions, not seeing how they reacted to the teacher's explanation, or how much they understood the new material, and this teacher found this situation particularly frustrating. Others complained that they constantly felt they were performing the same task twice, offline and online (during the second quarantine period in autumn, 2020).

> *It was harder that way because I felt like I was working in two forms at the same time. So I did double work because I first selected and prepared the links in writing, and then I gave the presentation, which was very difficult because I had to condense what would have been 90 minutes into 60 minutes*[5] (T1).

One young teacher, who was himself a student a few years earlier, expressed regret over the students:

> *I regret that students are unable to live a student life that may have existed before the pandemic. During the final week of the module or during the exam week, the students often study together, so they also share their knowledge about the subject, which was less common during the quarantine period* (T12).

One of our respondents acknowledged that '*it also had to be realized that virtual eye contact did not really reflect understanding, or interest*' (T31). In this regard, several teachers commented on how disturbing the students' off-camera was to them: '*It was very bad that I didn't see the students' reactions to what I was saying, and I couldn't decide how much they understood the material*' (T4). At this point, our results are exactly identical to those of the Swiss research conducted by Kovacs, Pulfrey and Monnier (2021), who also reported similar cases.

The transition to online education caused mixed emotions in nine (26%) teachers. There was a teacher who was happy at first, saying a lack of physical contact would hopefully slow the spread of the epidemic. However, within two to three weeks, the shortcomings were revealed, and problems related to distance learning emerged unexpectedly and suddenly, for which the vast majority of teachers were not prepared. On the other hand, the negative emotions had a positive effect on a Ukrainian teacher: '*I was worried about the situation, but it also inspired me to improve my digital skills*' (T36). This is in line with what Tankó (2021) found in her research, namely, that teachers' digital skills were developed noticeably during ERT.

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[5] During online teaching, classes lasted 60 minutes instead of the traditional 90 minutes.

Only seven respondents (21%) stated that the changeover was definitely positive for them. This was best summarized by one of the Hungarian teachers:

I have designed the platforms that are best suited to convey my subjects. Looking back, I can clearly say that I prospered in this compulsive situation with positive experiences and obviously serious professional development (T11).

One teacher also claimed that '*Google Classroom is better in some respects than offline education*' (T3), explaining and substantiating this statement with a number of beneficial, useful features of that app. These teachers did not have any difficulties in the transition, they were satisfied with their own and their students' performance, while considering the emergency situation that had arisen as a professional challenge.

It is interesting to note that while more than half (53%) of the teachers experienced their own transition to digital work as negative, only five teachers perceived their students' transition as such. Sixteen instructors (47%) rated the students' adaptation positively, saying that '*students were fully aware of their responsibilities and tried to cooperate, coping well with the challenges of the new situation*' (T11). '*My students adapted quickly, it was an advantage for them not to have to spend time and money on travel*' (T36). One colleague highlighted the difference between teacher and student: '*It has been easier for students to adapt because of their age, as most students love technical novelty. Sometimes the student supervised me from a technical point of view*' (T26). Moreover, '*during the second wave, adaptation was no longer necessary, they had some prior experience; no negative feedback was received from them*' (T13).

Contrary to the above, five educators voiced negative opinions. For example, '*It was very difficult for the students to switch to online learning because many could not technically handle the digital interfaces*' (T16).

At first, the majority of students were hit hard by the new situation, they stressed a lot, but there were also those who looked at the quarantine period as a holiday. Few were responsible for online learning, with the majority trying to get out of work and trying to circumvent the vulnerabilities of digital education (T27).

However, the above two examples are not common, but rather suggest that teachers have found themselves facing individual cases and that this has led to a negative opinion.

3.2. Students' involvement in online lessons

Involving students in the lesson procedures is an important part of online education. Thirty of the 34 teachers we interviewed believed that students had been successfully involved. The examples below all support Cundell and Sheepy's (2018) claim that teacher-student interaction is highly recommended in online education.

I called the students by their first names because I know everyone (T3)*; I asked the question first, then I gave everyone some time to think about the answer and finally I called on a student* (T5)*; I tried to ask everyone with the same frequency, everyone was called on during the class* (T12)*.*

The type of lesson plays an important role in how well we can involve students in the procedures of the lesson. Practical classes provide the best opportunity to engage all students:

> *During the practical classes, the students listened carefully to the person answering my question because I expected them not to repeat the same material a few times, but to add something new and this way to contribute to the ongoing discussion* (T6)*.*

In Ulla and Perales' study (2022, p. 1), the teachers 'pointed out the lack of students' interaction, lack of time to do assessment and feedback, and the lack of students' concentration in online teaching'. Similarly, one of the teachers surveyed by us noted that it was difficult to interact with students who were usually reluctant to turn on their cameras, arguing that they did not function (T23). Another teacher missed the face-to-face contact in the lectures: '*I had to give a lecture without seeing anyone*' (T18).

Four of the respondents felt that it was not always possible to involve all students in the lesson procedures, partly arguing that they were unknown on the online interface, i.e. they used nicknames unknown to their teachers:

> *I felt like I couldn't involve everyone, there was a student who couldn't be addressed, and I couldn't send the message of my discipline to him* (T7)*; It works the same as in the offline period, there are more active students and there are those who are relegated to the background* (T16)*.*

3.3. Students' interest and motivation

One of the basic conditions for successful language learning is the motivation of the student. Therefore, we considered it important to ask teachers whether they experienced a difference in student motivation during the first and second quarantine periods in 2020. Additionally, teachers were asked about how they managed to maintain students' interest and motivation.

Nine informants tried to raise the motivation of the students by preparing diverse and varied tasks to be considered when planning the class, trying to provide the students with information that arouses their interest:

> *I always tried to create creative tasks, for example, when analysing poetry, they had to look for different motifs in the poem. Interesting assignments stimulated their imaginations and allowed them to express their own opinions* (T4)*; I also tried to include multimedia materials, such as short videos or audio materials, in the classes that could be eye-catching* (T11)*; I try to share interesting details, biographical data and creative methods about the authors. In the case of contemporary Hungarian literature, I also tell personal experiences if I have met the author or have a good relationship with them* (T12)*.*

Four respondents believed that the evaluation and feedback of the teacher increased the motivation of the students:

I thought it was important for the students to get feedback; I evaluated or assessed their work. This is crucial because a student loses interest very easily if we do not value their work and they can find it useless (T17)*; in my experience, it is a well-established method where students can earn more grades per hour, which will count when gaining the exam mark or the pass-and-fail exam mark* (T9)*; it is very important to evaluate student performance. Both justified negative and positive criticism have an incentive effect* (T31)*; evaluation was the main motivation* (T36)*.

In higher education, students motivate themselves, there is no need for external motivation - we also encountered three such opinions among the respondents:

Maintaining student motivation in higher education is the responsibility of the student. They came to higher education because they wanted to study (T1)*; motivation does not depend on the form of education, but rather on individuality. He who is motivated will learn under any circumstances* (T13)*; in the case of adults, I think they are reasonably expected to be motivated to some degree, since the goal of getting a degree is not necessarily to entertain them in class* (T30)*.

Our research participants highlighted the disadvantages of online education that had an impact on student motivation. The main reasons were:

- feeling confined:

Most of us were 'worn out' by the confinement, so I tried to be more understanding. Students often complained that they were very busy as they were given much more assignment than during offline education. I tried to reduce the pace and the amount of homework while setting realistic requirements (T27)*.

- mental strain:

Mental strain made it more difficult to maintain motivation (T19)*.

- physiological features:

There were times when I had a hard time motivating students, such as at the beginning of the working day (when they were sleepy, etc.) (T35)*.

- lack of live communication:

They lacked the possibility to communicate with their groupmates and teachers just like in the standard classroom (T19)*.

- technical problems:

Sometimes the internet disappeared because a power outage occurred (T26)*.

One respondent found no difference between face-to-face and online education:

Maintaining interest in offline classes is just as challenging as in online synchronous classes (T30)*.

Twenty-five respondents (73%) believed that in the second quarantine period in 2020, when synchronous online classes were held, students' motivation improved significantly. One teacher justifies this by highlighting that the students also saw each other live online through the camera (T10). Six respondents (18%) were unable to form an opinion on this or, in their view, '*being motivated could not be measured so much. The fact that they could learn online was already motivating for the students*' (T18). Only three teachers (9%) stated they did not

see a difference in the students, or they were just as motivated or equally demotivated, but this was not clear from the responses.

The improvement in student motivation was explained by several factors. Five respondents believed that the positive change was due to students' lack of personal interactions. They were happy to be able to connect with both the teacher and the groupmates. '*They were much more motivated. They were eager to have social interactions, even online,*' said one teacher (T27). According to another respondent, the difference in students' motivation was evident even without having to externally motivate them.

> *I didn't feel the need to motivate my students. I felt like they were demanding it more than I expected. They requested my presence* (T21)*.*

Four other instructors felt that students' motivation had improved because they met with the teacher on a regular basis online, and were more experienced during the second quarantine period, '*they had less difficulty, and this already significantly reduced demotivation, it did not discourage them from learning. On the contrary, regularity also encouraged them to learn*' (T23). Through regular online classes, teachers were able to connect directly with students, even in the digital space. In this way, the topic was explained, students could be asked back immediately, and the questioning could take place more often and 'face-to-face'. '*They knew that if there was a synchronous class, I could call on them at any time to ask for the material. I think this motivated them to some degree. I believe that direct assessment increased their motivation*' (T10).

Two respondents believed there were correlations between students' age and motivational level. '*The motivation of BA students was not comparable to that of MA students. Moreover, the motivation of a first year BA student was not at all comparable to that of a third or fourth year BA student. So the higher year was directly proportional to the motivation, I noticed*' (T1). The opinion quoted below also confirms the previous idea.

> *I think they were much more motivated, because even if we didn't sit in the classroom, but a serious relationship developed during the class, it was easy to motivate them, all the more so because we have these youngsters who enter higher education at the age of 17-18, they are in great need of the presence and explanation of the teacher. We're not talking about an adult in his twenties sitting in the library on his own and studying. Therefore, I think they were much more motivated and more effective* (T9)*.*

3.4. Assessment and effectiveness

Respondents were somewhat divided on whether they found student performance to be more effective during the period when they were online than during the first quarantine period. Those who did not teach in both periods could not judge this, nor did two instructors who gave online lessons in both periods make a definite statement.

> *I held online classes in both periods, so I can't judge that, but a synchronous online lesson is certainly more effective than just uploading the teaching materials to the Classroom, so the student is sure to get information through multiple channels* (T30)*.*

The vast majority (85%) considered the second period to be more productive than the first one. The reasons were seen differently, however, the dominant opinion was that there was a realistic opportunity to have a dialogue, to ask questions, to discuss problematic issues (T9, T14), to analyse the poems, to express opinions, to discuss; in addition, there was feedback (T13). Students understood that they had to answer questions asked by the teacher spontaneously, without preparation (T2). '*The need for regular preparation also played a significant role, as well as the fact that we were able to plan and prepare for this period during face-to-face education*' (T32).

Others argued that student effectiveness was subject-dependent and group-dependent and also was highly influenced by the attitude and ability of the individual. According to one young teacher (T36), teacher-student collaboration changed, new opportunities opened up for self-improvement, which required a high level of motivation and self-discipline, so it is no wonder some students performed worse while others gained in-depth knowledge.

This is subject-specific because personality is very important in literature and this personality, no matter how hard I tried, could not be passed on so much in the online class. There is a special radiance of the classroom as a space that cannot be reproduced in the virtual space. We don't feel the volume, it also depends on how it's set, we don't sense who wants to say something when the internet is stuttered. I couldn't create the personality, I constantly felt that the students were strangers in this space. There is a concept that is a paradoxical notion of 'hospitality hatred' (Jacques Derrida)' (T32).

An instructor highlighted the lack of objectivity, saying that '*This effectiveness is difficult to measure online. For example, in a test paper, I cannot control whether I receive completely objective data*' (T16).

Two instructors saw no quality difference between the two periods (T1, T26), whereas one teacher was absolutely negative:

I do not consider the quarantine period to be effective at all. I feel sorry for this generation of quarantine. I think the performance of students in online conditions was weaker than when we taught face-to-face, but I don't see a quality difference between the spring and autumn semesters of 2020. This may be because I only give lectures and get the assignments through Classroom anyway. I see weaker student performance and also think that it is not entirely online education that can be blamed for this, but also the lack of motivation of students (T1).

Another teacher (T20), on the other hand, expressed relief that she was very pleased to be able to hold synchronous online lessons during the second quarantine in the autumn of 2020, as the time spent on evaluating students' written submissions was significantly reduced, as it proved easier and much faster to explain the reason for any error to her students orally, even via a screen, so she could use the free time to prepare further teaching materials.

During the interview, we also discussed whether the method of assessment of students' performance differed during the first and second quarantine periods. The vast majority of respondents (82%) reported some difference. The most common discrepancy was

that while in the first period they were only asked to do written tasks on different platforms (Redmenta, Google Forms, Google Documents), in the second period, when synchronous online classes were held, there was usually an oral answer and a discussion. Among the benefits of online lessons, this combination method was mentioned by respondents, among others.

> *Since we were now able to discuss via video, I was able to insert the oral part, and this way the choice of assessment methods was expanded. The rest of the writing, the test assignments, and the final module papers worked the same on different platforms as for the first time (Redmenta, Google Classroom). It worked successfully* (T19).

According to one respondent, the ratio varied between oral and written questioning. In the first period, written assignments were in the majority, while in the second period oral measurement of acquired knowledge was more common.

> *During the first period, there were several written assignments, I asked for them in the Classroom, but I asked for the reports orally on Meet. In the second period I asked students to write fewer papers online, there were more oral answers, they wrote fewer module papers, and the pass-and-fail exam was oral* (T24).

Another respondent said '*the mode of assessment was unaltered, only the platforms changed*' (T27) and one teacher demonstrated a specific change. In his opinion, the way he assessed his students did not change, but his attitude towards being assessed did.

> *The way of assessing didn't change, but the way I approached it did. In the first case, I was very strict about deadlines, a lot of things, and in the second case, I already knew that students could be late. I didn't lower a mark, there were no minus 10 points if the assignments were submitted late* (T32).

Five respondents (15%) stated that the way in which they assessed had not changed, as '*they had already applied assessment in the form of digital content even before the quarantine*' (T30). The assessment for these teachers had already been in hybrid form.

Said Pace (2020) conducted research among 400 faculty members in Malta. She found that the teachers used a combination of assessment strategies, but the number of these decreased when education was transferred to the virtual space. 'Teachers who used a blended approach used both types of feedback, oral and written; however, those who adopted an asynchronous approach relied on written feedback' (p. 243). Our interview results also revealed that teachers were clearly positive that the written assessment was supplemented by an oral response in the second period. On the one hand, it was beneficial because of the need for providing equal opportunities for students of different personalities, as one of our respondents put it: '*Those students who had a harder written part or perhaps were a little more nervous about the test, performed better in the oral response, but the reverse situation also occurred, i.e. the oral response was weaker, while the written test was more successful*' (T19). A further positive feature of the hybrid examination was that it '*provided better opportunities for objective assessment through the two types, i.e. oral and written*

assignments' (T11), for example, after the written test, students were asked to justify their answer orally. This may have changed the grade as well.

> *They knew they would get a mark after the assignment and I asked questions on it and the received mark could change – get better or worse - depending on how they were able to reply to the oral questions. If it occurred to me that this was necessary, I asked them, so they felt that it was not good to copy the assignment, because the questions had to be answered even verbally* (T20)*.*

With regard to assessment, it is crucial to emphasize that it was mentioned by the respondents as a general problem that at both stages of DL it was difficult to avoid students using different aids during both written and oral examinations. The solutions listed can be summarized as follows:

• after the written test, certain of its questions must be answered orally;

• the questions of the test are such that need to be described in order to express one's own opinion;

• compilation of individual student test papers;

• after writing the test, discussion, discourse, feedback should follow;

• it was not obligatory to include gamification in the examination, but it was possible to choose, gaining extra points by developing tasks related to the topic;

• cross-examination during oral answers.

4. DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the interviews conducted with our research participants will be discussed in accordance with the four main questions that our investigation intended to answer.

What was the transition from face-to-face to online learning like for the participants of the educational process?

There were instructors for whom the transfer to the online mode was no serious challenge. However, most instructors experienced the transition from face-to-face to remote learning negatively. Their main concern was the fear from of their inability to cope with the challenges. Teachers could not see the direct impact of their teaching on students when certain students were reluctant to switch on their cameras. This fact caused frustration to most teachers. The reason for this must have been the teachers' unpreparedness for the new reality in terms of insufficient digital skills and knowledge. In addition, there is an interesting contrast between how instructors perceived their own and their students' attitude to transitioning to DE. While most of them voiced their negative experiences, almost half of them were positive about their students' perceptions of remote teaching. We assume this might be explained by the 'digital savvy' (Lieberman, 2020) characteristic for the younger generation today. Anyway, we agree with Arefi's (2021) conclusion, saying that '… despite the nightmare COVID-19 has created, academics should hang in there, and try to find creative ways of keeping the students hopeful, active and engaged' (p. 3).

Did organizing student interaction during synchronous online classes cause difficulties for instructors?

For the majority of instructors involving students into the classes and engaging them during the synchronous classes did not cause much difficulty because judging from their responses to the interview question, they did it much in the same way as during offline teaching. This way, teacher-student interaction was realized in online classes. In contrast, student-student interaction, unlike in the traditional mode, did not take place online. We presume the reason behind this was partly the teachers' lack of technical knowledge and digital skills.

When were students more motivated to learn: during synchronous online classes or when learning asynchronously?

The evident answer to this question was that students were more motivated to learn when they had synchronous online classes. This was during the second quarantine period in autumn, 2020 when students participated in synchronous classes. Compared to the asynchronous learning during the first quarantine period in spring, 2020, students could see each other at least via the screen of their devices, but even this was more than the lack of all personal contact of this type during asynchronous learning. Moreover, for some the fact that they could learn online was motivating by itself. For others, seeing the instructor regularly on a weekly basis was motivating. Furthermore, the age of the students was a dominant factor when it came to motivation as it turned out that older students were more motivated than younger students. Presumably, this can be explained by the fact that undergraduate bachelor students or college seniors and students of master courses are self-disciplined, more determined with clearer and more defined intentions and precise plans for the future. Therefore, they are also more motivated to obtain their diplomas.

How did you assess your students in the two quarantine periods in 2020?

In spring, 2020 teachers usually assigned written tasks to their students; consequently, written assessment methods were applied. Students were also provided with written feedback on their assignments. In autumn, 2020, the choice of assessing methods was expanded with the possibility of giving oral feedback. The instructors participating in our research found this second quarantine period more productive in terms of assessment of students' knowledge and performance. The reason behind this is obvious to us: besides obtaining oral feedback and explanations from the teachers in synchronous online classes, the students were provided with the opportunity to ask questions from the teachers if something was not clear or they had doubts about the evaluation of their performance.

Limitations

We are fully aware of the limitations of our study. Because of the uncertain and unusual situation in which the research was carried out, we had no opportunity to triangulate our data obtained through the retrospective interviews. Could we have collected data on the same issues in other ways, too, it might have resulted either in obtaining similar stronger

evidence or in completely different data. Also, we are cognizant that our research sample is comparatively small and the results are not generalizable, nonetheless, we believe that they can be of interest to those studying the topic.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper presents the findings of a case study applying the qualitative research design in which data were collected from 34 higher education instructors in Ukraine with the help of retrospective interviews on issues related to DE and ERT in their institutions. The purpose of the research was to get empirical evidence on how DE was realized in the first and second quarantine periods during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 in a Ukrainian higher educational establishment.

The findings have revealed the answers to our research questions. First, most instructors surveyed by us perceived the transition from face-to-face to online learning as a negative experience. In contrast, they believed their students had a positive perception of the same transition partly because they were born in the digital age and the use of technology caused fewer problems for them. Second, during synchronous online classes primarily teacher-student interaction was realized, while student-student interaction was neglected, mainly because of the lack of appropriate technical knowledge on the teachers' part. Third, the findings showed that students were more motivated when they had synchronous online classes than when they were learning asynchronously. Furthermore, younger students were more in the need of teacher motivation than older ones. Finally, concerning the ways of assessing student performance and knowledge, it was proven that the most effective way is ensuring both written and oral feedback for students. Thus, it can be concluded that our first and third hypotheses were fully supported by the research results, while the second and fourth ones were only partially confirmed.

Based on these results, the following pedagogical implications have been drawn:

1. Teacher training courses on DE are of utmost importance for instructors. These could serve as part of their professional development.

2. It is advisable and more useful to have synchronous online classes with students on a regular basis in DE.

3. Instructors should pay more attention to and put more effort into motivating freshmen and sophomores, as they are the age group who need this and expect it from the teachers.

4. Teachers should provide written feedback on student performance as well as give oral evaluation while offering an opportunity to ask teachers about problematic issues when being assessed during online learning as the written + oral variant of assessing students proved to be most effective in this respect.

As a further research trend, we recommend carrying out what we call 'online observation' of synchronous online classes in order to obtain more objective data. Another

theme that needs to be investigated is the impact of DL on teachers' and students' physical and psychological well-being.

Distance learning is a new reality today. We cannot afford to neglect or ignore the challenges, the opportunities or the positive results that this new standard means. Therefore, it is advised for everyone involved to learn, adapt and be constantly open to acquiring new knowledge and skills.

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Appendix

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

LANGUAGE TEACHING DURING QUARANTINE AT THE BEREHOVE COLLEGE
(English version)

Name
Age
Gender
Years of teaching in higher education
Taught language

1. How did you experience the transition from face-to-face to online teaching?

2. How do you think your students have adapted to the new situation?

3. How did you manage student interaction during the live online classes?

4. How did you deal with the common problem of involving/engaging all students equally during live online lessons?

5. How did you manage to keep students interested and motivated?

6. Did you use the "flipped classroom" method? (FLIPPED CLASSROOM = The flipped classroom method is where students learn the theoretical material outside the classroom at home and then later on, with the teacher, they reflect on it in the classroom. This reflection implies a much more active learner, not just memorizing but putting theory into practice.) If so, how and with what success?

7. How did the way of teaching the new material differ in the 1st and 2nd quarantine periods?

8. Do you see a better performance of your students during the period when you taught online lessons? Why?

9. Were the students more motivated when they met in an online class than during the period when you just delivered the material in Google Classroom?

10. Did the method of assessing students' knowledge and performance differ in the two phases, i.e. did you assess your students differently in the two quarantine periods?

11. How do you use the digital knowledge and digital skills you have developed during distance learning in your face-to-face teaching?