

Language Teaching in Times of COVID-19: The Emotional Rollercoaster of Lockdown



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Highlights

Teacher emotions and well-being need to be taken into account in teacher development programmes both in the short and the long term.

Continuous professional development fosters increased levels of confidence so that teachers can adapt more effectively to new teaching contexts.

Detailed course protocols are essential aids for teachers to deal with unforeseen circumstances/crises.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic declared in the first months of 2020 has given rise to far-reaching changes around the globe and this has been no different in the world of education. By the end of March 2020, many countries had implemented or were in the process of implementing radical measures to control the spread of this highly-infectious and fast-spreading disease and one of these was to move education online. This shift to emergency remote education has meant that a good proportion of students have been able to continue learning, albeit within a landscape of social injustice, inequity and the digital divide (Bozkurt et al., 2020, p. 1). In addition to this, teachers were under pressure to adapt curricula to remote learning environments, often with minimal if any previous experience. What is more, regardless of the level of preparedness of teachers and students, “the impact from the stress and grief people have experienced in a short period of time will impact us long after this pandemic has ended” (Salas, 2020). As Schleicher (2020, p. 7) posits, “The ongoing

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Covid-19 crisis has been, and will continue to be, both a massive challenge and a learning experience for the global education community.”

The aim of this report is to understand how the pandemic and the lockdown that it brought about affected teachers of English as a foreign language working at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC). The UOC was one of the world’s first fully online universities and was set up in 1995 to provide distance higher education in Catalan. From its origin, the UOC established agreements with other universities and public educational institutions in Catalonia to hire members of their staff part-time. This set-up meant that online teaching skills and competences could be cascaded back into those other institutions. With time, the UOC has attracted part-time teachers from other parts of Spain and the rest of the world. Since part-time language teachers at the UOC teach both online at the UOC and also on regular courses at other educational institutions, this had to be taken into account at the onset of the March-June 2020 lockdown when making decisions about the measures to support our teaching staff. Not only were our team of teachers facing the consequences of confinement in their homes, working in close proximity with partners and children, having family members directly affected by illness or job loss, some teachers contracted COVID-19. What is more, along with the rest of society, teachers around the world were fearful and anxious about contracting the virus. In Spain and Catalonia in particular, they were suffering from a lack of physical exercise and coping with the harsh lockdown measures imposed there; for example, children were not allowed out of their homes, adults could only leave home once a day for grocery shopping, and dog walking was limited to no farther than 100 metres from home. These measures were especially hard on those with no outdoor spaces at home and the effect on physical and psychological well-being was felt by all. Teachers in particular were also facing a challenging situation in their main jobs by either having to transition to online teaching, from one day to the next, or in some cases, losing their jobs.

The work here was motivated by our wish to understand better the struggles our teachers were facing, within the framework of their work for our institution and outside of it, under the extreme circumstances imposed on the society in Spain that was confined to their homes from March 14th to May 2nd 2020, when lockdown restrictions were gradually eased in a process that lasted till the end of June.

2 Online Learning Before the COVID-19 Crisis

Prior to the COVID-19 health crisis, remote teaching was taking place in the context of distance education, and online education had been a growing area of interest for research. Three lines of inquiry are pertinent in the context of the COVID-19 situation: firstly, the changing roles of teachers, secondly, emotions in online learning, and thirdly, training teachers in digital competences.

In the field of language learning and teaching, the situation before the COVID-19 emergency situation was one which had incorporated the communicative approach

into foreign language classrooms first and then the task-based approach transformed teaching practices and the roles of teachers and learners alike. From the 1980s, thanks to the premises proposed by the communicative approach, teachers began to assume their current role of facilitator or mediator of learning, with students acting as negotiators and interactors who give as well as take (Nunan, 1989). This changing terminology is an indication of how teaching roles have changed too in online learning contexts. Warschauer and Healey (1998) and Bax (2003) noted the shift in the role of the online language teacher from “provider of knowledge” (Bax uses the term “monitor”) to one of “facilitator of learning”. Harms et al. (2006), established a correlation between the facilitator role and the teacher’s need to promote co-presence to help students feel less distant from the learning environment. To them, constructing a learning community is considered beneficial as it fosters good group rapport and encourages participation. Alberth (2011) also emphasised the fact that teachers’ facilitation skills are a crucial part of online language learning. As part of their in-service formative training of faculty members in instructional conversation, Meskill and Sadykova (2011) found one of the challenges their participants (teachers who are moving into online teaching environments) faced was the change of pedagogical approach. Specifically, they had to transition from more teacher-centred to more learner-centred teaching, with a consequential change in the role of the teacher to “guide”, “helper” and “mentor”. In a similar vein, in Moore and Kearsley’s (1996) view of distance learning, teachers and other stakeholders are part of the same system and cannot function without the others. That is, the teacher “humanises the learning environment, facilitates and encourages interaction, organises and presents information, and provides feedback” (Compton, 2009, p. 87). As Williams et al. (2015, p. 34) noted:

Sometimes we need to be in the role of the controller or director and at other times we need to become a facilitator or participant. However, a role we never relinquish is that of group leader, and one of our principal responsibilities remains to manage and develop the group of learners we work with (Harmer, 2011). As teachers, we will typically be the central focus in our classrooms and one most likely to affect the classroom atmosphere and group dynamics.

Teachers’ attitudes towards technology and developing new identities provide important justifications for professional development for online language teachers. In this sense, Comas-Quinn (2011) claimed that teachers in the past may have moved to online teaching contexts through an inherent interest in technology; however, more recently, teachers are being required to teach online and as a result may not have such positive attitudes and this is even more true with the COVID-19 situation. Comas-Quinn considers professional development programmes to be essential, both in practical issues but also in the affordances which technology can offer and insists that teachers and institutions need to invest “time, effort and commitment” (Comas-Quinn, 2011, p. 221). However, due to the almost overnight change of circumstances caused by the COVID-19 crisis, there was simply no time for anybody in education to prepare and many teachers had to learn new skills just hours before they were faced with new tools and teaching methods. In a study on how teaching practice was remodelled during the COVID-19 crisis, Littlejohn

(2020, p. 61) noted the need for training and suggested that “Rather than providing courses and training, educators’ professional development is likely to be more effective integrated within their everyday practice.” We find this is certainly the case in the Centre for Modern Languages at the UOC. The extensive experience gained as a fully online centre has, over the years, led us to the conclusion that ongoing and experiential professional development is vital: technology is constantly changing and teachers need to update their skills in the context(s) they are working in to be as effective as possible.

3 Teacher Emotions

The COVID-19 crisis has forced many teachers into emergency remote teaching, often without any prior training. At the same time, they have had to deal with the impact the health crisis has had on their personal lives. It is therefore of paramount concern to understand the impact of COVID-19 on teachers’ emotions. Along this line, research in the area of education increasingly considers teaching to be “an emotional-laden process” (Gkonou et al., 2020, p. 1). However, research focusing on teachers’ emotions is limited. Sutton and Wheatley (2003) pointed out that more research in teacher emotions is required and also the need for this research to go beyond beliefs and identity. Fifteen years later, Mercer (2018) expresses the concern that teachers are still being left out of the area of research of the psychology of learning which has mainly focused on the learners, and urges for this imbalance to be re-addressed. She also argues that teachers’ needs and their professional well-being need to be brought (back) to the research agenda.

A number of studies have explicitly examined the interconnections between teacher and learner emotions, engagement, motivation and autonomy; see for example Skinner and Belmont (1993), Little (1995), Hargreaves (2000), Frenzel et al. (2009), Mifsud (2011), and Becker et al. (2014). It therefore follows that if teacher and student emotions are interconnected, we must not overlook teachers when it comes to considering the emotional impact of specific learning situations. What is more, teachers’ psychologies and professional well-being have been shown to be connected to the quality of their teaching as well as student performance (Caprara et al., 2006; Day & Gu, 2010; Klusmann et al., 2008). Long before the COVID-19 situation arose, researchers were already acknowledging that teachers are increasingly under enormous stress: there are record rates of burnout and teachers are leaving the profession (e.g., Hong, 2010; Macdonald, 1999). One of the causes of stress in teachers can be dealing with changes beyond their control. Tran et al. (2017) identified four types of response to a change in research policy which relate to participants’ emotional experiences and emergent identities: there are enthusiastic accommodators, who welcome change and embrace new possibilities, pressured supporters, who accept change, albeit somewhat reluctantly, losing heart

followers, who gradually lose faith in the system, but go along with change anyway and discontented performers, who are openly against change. The findings of this study showed that career stage, qualification and area of specialisation do not have a clear impact on the emotional reactions of the lecturers, but rather these stem from the interplay between the individual beliefs and goals of the academic staff and the changes taking place.

4 The Impact of Lockdown on Teacher Emotions

It is important to note the distinction between research which examines teacher emotions and wellness in general, and work which explores emotions in response to emergency situations. Several studies have already reported on the impact that COVID-19 has had on education. For example, Bozkurt et al. (2020) suggest that the current practices are best defined as emergency remote education. As the authors argue, emergency remote education differs from previously existing distance education approaches such as online learning, principally due to the fact that it is not optional, but rather an obligation imposed by circumstances, and that all those involved are undergoing “trauma, psychological pressure and anxiety” (2020, p. 3). The writers report on cases from 31 countries, revealing many similarities such as the fact that while technology is already incorporated into existing educational policies, several studies highlight the lack of digital competences in a significant number of teachers (e.g. in Spain: Rodríguez et al., 2018; Rodríguez García et al. 2019; Fernández Batanero & Rodríguez Martín, 2017). Bozkurt et al. (2020) go on to link this lack of digital competences among teaching staff, as well as their students and families, with increasing levels of anxiety and stress during the COVID-19 crisis. They claim that there is a need for training and support across teachers’ professional communities and urge school leaders and academic management to provide this support to teachers. Finally, linking to the central role of emotions in a period of crisis, they advocate for a pedagogy of “care, affection and empathy” (Bozkurt et al., 2020, p.4).

A number of papers are appearing now investigating how teachers experienced the first stages of the COVID-19 emergency situation. For example, MacIntyre et al. (2020) examined teacher stress and their coping responses during the confinement period in the spring of 2020 and point out that results of studies such as these should inform future responses in education to cope with educational reform, or work-intensive periods and that skills to cope should be part of pre- and in-service teacher development programmes. Similarly, Schleicher (2020) argued that the disruption caused by the COVID-19 emergency situation and the transformations that it brought about will long outlive the crisis.

5 Objectives of the Study

We set out to explore the impact that the March-June 2020 lockdown which was implemented as a result of the COVID-19 situation had on a group of language teachers working at the UOC, a fully online university based in Spain. We were guided by the following questions.

1. *How did the teachers experience the March-June 2020 lockdown?*
 - (a) *How were teachers' emotional states affected?*
 - (b) *How were teachers affected in their regular online work at the UOC?*
 - (c) *How was their face-to-face teaching affected?*
 - (d) *To what extent did teachers feel their needs for support were met?*
2. *How were the teachers' online students affected?*
3. *What actions did these teachers' coordinators undertake?*

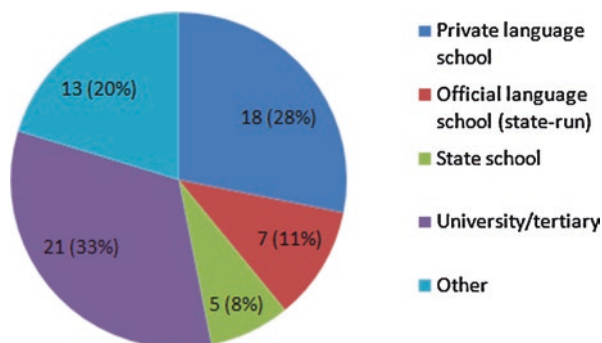
While the focus of this report is the teachers, we also collected information about these teachers' online students and the teachers' coordinators in order to obtain a broader picture of their context. The information elicited from students and coordinators is related to these teachers.

6 Context and Participants

Our report centres on teachers working at the Centre for Modern Languages within the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), which is a fully online institution. In March 2020, the COVID-19 health crisis led to a full lockdown in Spain from 14th March which was gradually relaxed from the middle of May onwards until the end of June 2020, when freedom of movement was restored. However, educational institutions remained closed and teachers were required to set up emergency remote teaching until the end of June. The UOC is a fully-online institution and therefore, our courses continued throughout this period without any changes, but the impact of the health crisis was still felt by students and teachers. This report focuses on the effects the crisis had on a group of 66 language teachers, 64 of whom work part-time as English as a foreign language teachers. The other two participants are researchers, who coordinate English courses at the UOC. In addition, we also report on the impact of the crisis on the teachers' students.

The language teachers at the UOC come from a wide variety of backgrounds, both geographically and academically. Of the total number of teachers, 62.5% of those surveyed are based in Catalonia, 10.9% are based in other parts of Spain, and the remaining 26.6% are based in other countries around the world. The teachers at our fully-online institution work part-time but they also work in other face-to-face teaching institutions. Figure 1 shows the type of institutions the teachers work in for their other jobs.

Fig. 1 Types of institutions UOC language teachers also work for



Of the 64 teachers who took part in the survey, 85% had been teaching languages for a period of 10 years or more, 14% had been working between 5 and 10 years and 1.5% of the teachers had been teaching languages for under five years. Additionally, 20% of the teachers surveyed have been working with the UOC for 10 years or more, 25% have been working for 5-10 years and the remaining 54% have been working at the UOC for under five years. 62% of the teachers were female, 36% were male and 1.5% of the teachers preferred not to indicate their gender. Of the 64 teachers, 61 were working on the B2 English programme and the remaining three were working on other levels.

The two coordinators, who are also the authors of this paper, are full-time lecturers at the UOC, in charge of the instructional design, training programme for new teachers and overall coordination. They were both female foreigners that had been working in Catalonia for 15 and over 25 years in the field of language education.

Students in the UOC are typically adult students aged 24-55, who combine work with study and family duties. There were 307 students in the B2 English programme who responded to the survey.

7 Procedures

We present the results of a voluntary questionnaire sent to a group of online language teachers in June 2020. The questionnaire was designed to understand the personal and professional effects of the lockdown implemented during the second semester of 2020–2021 as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. The questionnaire combines closed and open questions and in addition to a short section about the teachers' background, it consisted of two main sections:

- The impact of COVID-19 on teaching at the UOC, and
- The impact of COVID-19 on other teaching commitments.

The questionnaire consisted of 33 questions which were organised into three sections. The first section of the questionnaire focused on collecting background data about the participants. Section two of the questionnaire asked about the impact

COVID-19 on the participants' part-time online teaching at our institution. Section three included questions about the impact COVID-19 had on teachers at the other institutions where they also work. We opted for a combination of closed and open questions, together with questions which included Likert-scale options to choose from. We carried out descriptive statistical analysis and prepared charts to report on the results from the closed questions in the questionnaire and for the open response questions, we adopted an inductive thematic analysis approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006): the responses were coded by two researchers initially in terms of whether they were positive or negative.

Each researcher coded the responses to one question each and any differences were discussed and resolved. The main differences were in how to code a neutral effect reported by teachers in their comments with negative language, as in the case of "I had to...". The researchers agreed to code these instances as negative because from the teachers' perspective, these changes were imposed on them.

In addition, a short survey was sent to these teachers' online students which consisted of two questions. The first asked students to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 the degree to which the COVID-19 situation had affected their level of dedication to the subject and the second was an open question inviting the participants to add any particular comments they felt were pertinent.

The course coordinators and authors of this paper were faced with a number of decisions at the beginning of the lockdown period in March 2020 and implemented certain actions in response to the situation, such as increasing the degree of flexibility for submission deadlines. More details are provided in the final section of the Findings below, where we will also reflect on the rationale behind each of these actions.

8 Findings

8.1 *How Were Teachers' Emotional States Affected?*

We asked teachers whether their emotional state had been affected during the semester on a scale of 1-5, where 1 indicated "not at all" and 5 "extremely". The results are presented in Fig. 2.

As we can observe in Fig. 2, very few teachers indicated that their emotional state had not been affected at all (2% of teachers in Spain and 6% of teachers in the rest of the world). In fact, we find that the vast majority of teachers were affected, either somewhat, quite a lot, or extremely. The trends we can observe for teachers in Spain and in the rest of the world are similar, although our results do seem to indicate a higher intensity of impact on teachers' emotions in Spain.

In addition to asking teachers about the extent to which COVID-19 had affected them emotionally, we also invited them to share anything else about the impact the situation had had on them and their work. This question generated a range of

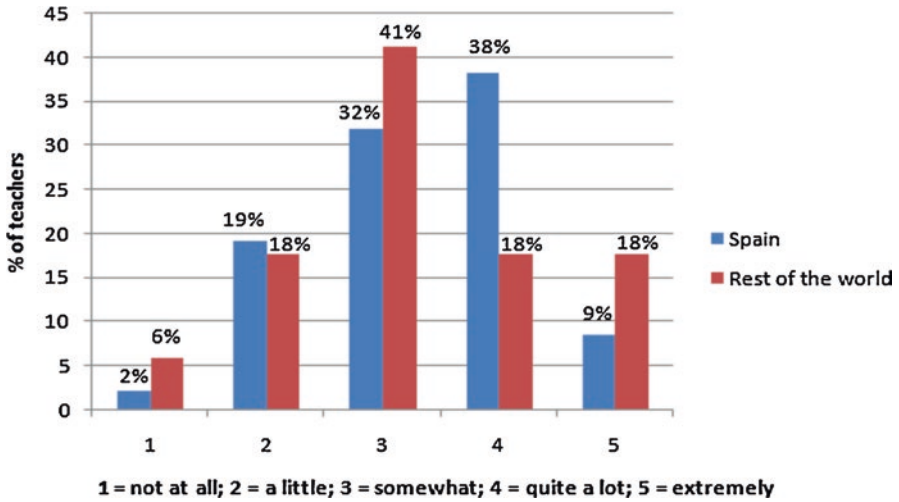


Fig. 2 Impact of COVID-19 crisis on teachers’ emotional states in Spain and Rest of the world

responses in terms of the positive and negative effects of the situation, but most of the answers seemed to focus on the negative ones. Teachers made reference to their feelings of anxiety for themselves and their learners. For example, one teacher wrote “My daughter is a nurse and was working in Barcelona hospital - on the front line - so, I was extremely worried about her which, at times, took my focus away from work”, while another teacher explained “Psychologically, it's been hard for me and my students. We've all had some kind of anxiety and/or depression”. Several other teachers commented on their feelings of sadness and loneliness. One teacher wrote “it's all still very sad and scary” and another explained “On my solitude, on my work - I felt overwhelmed with everything I had to do”, to the sheer physical and mental exhaustion they had experienced. One teacher elaborated “being able to cope mentally with the situation was a constant struggle” and another wrote “I get overtired of working in front of a screen all day!”. These perceptions were particularly exacerbated because they were working from home, sharing their workspace with their families. In this sense, one teacher said that “Concentration was another issue because teaching other people and making sure they receive the appropriate information was difficult, especially if all the other members of your family share the same space.” The issue of staying focused was referred to by another teacher who said “it was difficult to maintain a “work head” on”.

On the other hand, several teachers pointed out the opportunities that had emerged; one teacher admitted “I’m shattered! However, it has been a great learning experience”, while another suggested that the COVID-19 context “should be seen as an opportunity to improve and change those things which weren’t working at school”.

8.2 *How Were Teachers Affected in Their Regular Online Work at The UOC?*

We asked teachers whether the COVID-19 situation had affected their online teaching work at the UOC. 48% of the teachers said it had not, 25% said it had in a negative way, while 27% reported that the effect had been positive. Teachers were also invited to reply to an optional open question describing their experience. These comments were coded as positive/neutral/negative. Of the 62 comments, 27 (43%) were negative, 10 (16%) were neutral and 25 (40%) were positive.

The negative comments tended to focus on the logistical implications brought about by confinement. One teacher reported that the impact had been negative for her students and wrote “They had people ill at home, more work, children at home... as a result they delivered their work late”. Another teacher referred to the issue of multi-tasking and how that affected her work. She reported that:

juggling with all the personal and family duties (looking after a baby, cooking, learning, etc.) at the same time I had to work at home was extremely complicated, mainly because I did not have enough time to finish everything I was supposed to do.

Several teachers reported in more neutral terms the impact on their online work. One teacher explained that the experience had led to “just different things to take into account” while another explained “The topic of COVID has replaced other work-related topics in our content”. Several teachers referred to how the way they communicated with students changed. One noted that “The new situation affected the way I communicated with my students at the UOC. I needed to be more patient and understanding with the personal situations students were involved in”, and another found “a tighter relationship with the students which was an interesting dynamic.”

On the other hand, some teachers were more positive when describing the effect on their online work. The main themes that emerged from the teachers’ positive responses related to the flexibility offered for organising their own and their students’ work. One teacher explained that “The COVID-19 situation affected my work at the UOC in a positive way because I’ve had more time to organise myself. I’ve had less time pressure and more flexibility. Consequently, I think I have worked in a more relaxed way.” Another teacher noted “I had more time to give personalised feedback and the contributions of the students were more accurate.” Another teacher found that “The flexibilisation of rules and deadlines have had a positive effect. A caring, affectionate classroom environment was the result.”

8.3 *How Was Teachers’ Face-to-Face Teaching Affected?*

We asked teachers how much the COVID-19 situation had affected their main job outside the UOC on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 was “not at all” and 5 was “a lot”. A total of 77% of the teachers answered 4 or 5. When we asked teachers if their

workload had been affected, 70% reported they had worked more hours, 16% reported they had worked fewer hours and 14% reported no change.

When asked what specifically they had to change in their main jobs, the main theme that emerged from the data was the inclusion of synchronous sessions (55 comments), of which 15 were about methodology, and 40 were about tools (22 mentioned Zoom, 12 Meet, and 6 Skype.) Table 1 in the appendix summarises the tools teachers mentioned using during the lockdown period. The rest of the topics that came up were about their increased workload (11), one-to-one synchronous meetings with students (10), redefining course plans (7), and producing video-recordings (4). All these comments were also rated as positive, neutral or negative. Only 2% of the comments were positive, 50% were expressed in a neutral manner and 48% were negative. For example, one teacher described the changes as: "More zoom meetings. Radically more organization, which continues, substantially more support for students, complete restructuring of the program for the coming year, etc etc etc. It's been a lot and continues to be." This comment seems to sum up the overall impression from the teachers surveyed.

We were also interested in finding out teachers' views on how much their online teaching experience at the UOC had helped them deal with changes in their other work. The majority of the teachers (73%) answered yes to this question, with only 13% of teachers answering no, and the remaining 14% answered that it was not applicable (mainly due to the interruption of teaching in their main job places). A comment by another teacher illustrates the ways in which their online experience had helped them: "Over the years, I have understood that online communication needs to be clear, concise and consistently supportive. This helps with dealing with students who are not used to learning online. I have developed patience over the years!"

The feeling of confidence in the use of technology and, online teaching in general surfaced positively as can be perceived in this teacher's comment: "I felt comfortable and confident using the computer to teach my regular face-to-face lessons. I had more resources to face technical difficulties. I was able to give more detailed feedback on their writing assignments." This confidence was also expressed in relation to the use of technology, "Being used to using all kinds of online tools, even though they're not necessarily the ones you use in other contexts." This confidence transpires in the responses to the question of whether they thought the changes they had introduced in their main jobs worked, with 28 positive answers, 10 neutral and 9 negatives. The negative answers included responses from primary school teachers who thought that teaching children online is more difficult. There were also frustrations over the cancellation of end-of-course assessments of their students, and concern that "Students often did not have adequate technology or internet access. High attrition rate locally."

The following positive answer illustrates the spirit of most of the positive answers from teachers:

I wouldn't be overly confident saying that with the primary kids, but with the teens - yes. They have actually been brilliant and the 2-to-1 speaking sessions have worked really well. They have spoken more online than they usually do in class. It is something that we are considering continuing with even if we can go back into the classroom.

Overall, teachers in this study seem to have found their previous experience in the UOC extremely useful for dealing with the change to emergency remote teaching in their other face-to-face work. This does not deter from the fact that teachers still struggled, particularly in terms of how to solve assessment issues which arose from the COVID-19 situation.

8.4 To What Extent Did Teachers Feel Their Needs for Support Were Met?

When asked whether teachers felt they had received enough support for their UOC teaching, 89% of them said yes, nobody said no, and 11% said this was not applicable. When we analysed the teachers' comments about support, again, the majority of comments were positive (24), although there were 4 negative comments and 6 neutral responses. The positive comments varied in terms of content: some highlighted the fact that they felt well-supported by their course coordinators. For example, one teacher wrote "I've always had a quick response from the coordinators" and another noted "There was always a friendly response to any questions teachers asked, maybe even more friendly than usual which was nice". However, there were several comments which were more negative. One teacher felt that "Support and flexibility was mainly student-focussed" and another wrote "I would like to see more consistent messaging about flexibility in grading deadlines during a pandemic". The neutral comments consisted of teachers expressing that they had not felt the need for extra support.

On the other hand, we also asked teachers if they had needed any other type of support in their other jobs. 62% of the teachers reported that they had not needed any other support, whereas 38% of teachers indicated that they would have liked more support. When we asked teachers to specify the type of extra support they felt they had needed, just under half of the comments (44% of these) indicated that teachers felt they needed more training in the use of specific tools. For example, one teacher wrote that they would have liked "Training in tools and assessment", while another wrote "access to materials, more teacher training". Other areas where teachers identified as requiring additional support were more stable work conditions, technical equipment, faster reaction times from their superiors and flexibility. In this sense, one teacher wrote "more flexibility to meet the deadlines and more empathy with the situation, as we were all struggling at various levels to juggle everything at the same time."

In general, our findings seem to show that while teachers felt they had enough support for their online work at the UOC during the health crisis, they identified several areas where more support would have been welcome for their work in the

other institutions where the shift from face-to-face teaching to ERT had taken place. Specifically, the area where they indicated that additional support was needed most was in training in the use of specific tools.

8.5 How Were the Teachers' Online Students Affected?

We also sent a short survey to the B2 programme students and asked them how much COVID-19 had affected their participation in the subject where 1 = not at all and 5 = a lot. Figure 3 shows the results.

As can be observed in Fig. 3, 10% of the students reported that the health crisis had affected their participation in the course a lot while 17% of students reported no change at all. The majority of students reported it had had some or quite a lot of impact on their participation. We also invited students to comment on how the COVID-19 crisis had affected their work during the course. We analysed the 40 comments from students and found 20 were positive in terms of the effect on their work, while 20 were negative. For example, five comments from students noted the issues they struggled with in terms of balancing their work, study and family commitments. One student wrote “I was especially affected because I’m a mother of two children and run a small family business and the situation meant I struggled to cope with everything”. Six students mentioned that being health workers meant

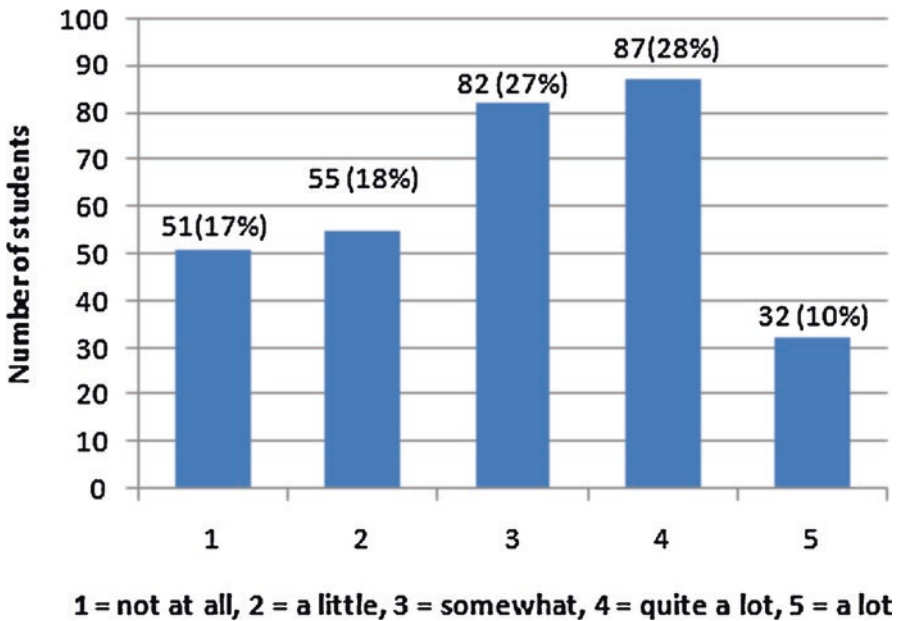


Fig. 3 How much did COVID-19 affect your participation in this subject?

they found it difficult to study due to having to work longer hours. In this respect though, one student noted “Great collaboration from my teacher for offering me flexibility, bearing in mind that I was particularly affected due to my job (I’m a doctor)”. Nineteen students expressed their appreciation of the extra support they had received from their teachers. One student wrote “Thanks to the teaching staff of this subject because I had problems during the course and they helped me throughout.” Another student noted the flexibility and said “Good flexibility to deal with the situation.” Finally, some of the students were closely affected by the situation through their work or family issues, as noted by several teachers and reported in the section above about how teachers’ online teaching was affected. One student explained:

I work in the health industry and was therefore affected, but each day I found time to for the subject. I have to say that above all, I had had a teacher who helped motivate me because they were always there when anyone asked questions.

8.6 What Actions Did These Teachers’ Coordinators Undertake?

The course coordinators implemented certain actions in response to the situation. The teachers surveyed are all members of an online staffroom, which includes several channels of communication. One of these is an asynchronous discussion forum where all teachers can post and reply to each other at any time; the coordinators created a specific area in this forum where teachers could post teaching ideas or share links to webinars about technological and pedagogical issues which could be helpful in the transition to online teaching in their other jobs. During the March-June 2020 lockdown, teachers shared links to professional development webinars and suggestions about tools and resources they were using in their other institutions in this space. In order to facilitate synchronous interaction among the teachers and coordinators, a Google Hangout chat was created where teachers could keep in contact and provide mutual support. Teachers and coordinators used this space exclusively for social interaction. Finally, the regular face-to-face end of course meeting was replaced by two online meetings. In addition to providing these extra support channels, the course was adapted in terms of flexibility, both for teachers and learners, so that if teachers or learners were struggling to keep up to date, we validated extended deadlines for both.

The main issue of concern that arose was finding the right balance between providing support to teachers while at the same time not forcing them to share details of their situation if they did not wish to do so. Monitoring teacher well-being in an online environment is challenging at the best of times, but the lockdown situation compounded this as teachers struggled to manage their work-life balance. The asynchronous nature of the communication channels employed meant that the coordinators were able to be in as much or as little contact as each teacher needed.

Synchronous meetings with teachers were discarded during the lockdown period, given the overload of synchronous teaching that the majority of teachers were subjected to in their main jobs.

Overall, the coordinators prioritised maintaining the normal running of the course insofar as this was feasible in the circumstances. It was our belief that teachers would be reassured by a calm approach from the coordinators and would pass this on to students. However, behind the scenes the coordinators were monitoring the staff room posts and classrooms for any signs of undue stress and stepping in to offer extra support whenever necessary. In this way, being more present than usual in the teachers' virtual staff room and ensuring that the tone of all of our messages to teachers were written with a sense of "care, affection and empathy" (Bozkurt et al., 2020, p. 4) were part of the strategies we adopted during the pandemic. Finally, in our role as mediators between students and teachers, an important aspect was reminding students that teachers were also being affected in different ways by the crisis.

9 Discussion

Our findings have shown that teachers in this study experienced the March-June 2020 lockdown in different ways. Teachers were affected at a personal level and experienced hardship as part of the society they belong to, but while the circumstances were adverse, we found that many teachers in their professional capacity were able to generate solutions and the resulting sense of empowerment led to positive emotions.

The vast majority of teachers (98% of teachers in Spain and 94% of teachers in the rest of the world) reported being affected by the pandemic. Of those, 47% in Spain and 36% in the rest of the world reported being affected a lot or extremely, which reflects that teachers suffered the consequences of the crisis. There seems to be a slightly higher impact on teachers in Spain than on those in the rest of the world. This may be related to the stronger measures implemented in Spain although the small scale of our study means it is not possible to draw firm conclusions. In teachers' online work, they experienced added stress, and this was evident in their comments. The sources of this stress were mainly from the lockdown situation in general, the added workload in their main jobs which interfered with their regular online teaching, and to a certain extent, dealing with anxious students.

On the whole, we have seen that teachers rolled with the changes in their main jobs (one of our teachers actually used that expression) and in this sense, a large proportion of our teachers could be classified as "enthusiastic adopters" (Tran et al., 2017); not only did they deal with the challenges that they were presented with, but many of them identified opportunities, explored new ways of working and implemented these successfully. The difficulties they experienced revolved mainly around

heavier workloads, the need to redesign courses, and an excessive use of synchronous sessions to substitute their face-to-face teaching.

The support received in the UOC was well received by teachers who appreciated in particular the additional channels of communication and the flexibility offered when necessary. As regards to the support received in their main jobs, nearly 70% of our teachers reported that they did not need any, but where they did, it tended to involve training in tools they were having to use for the first time. This can be explained by the fact that just over 70% agreed that their experience working at the UOC helped them transition to new ways of working in their main jobs.

Students were also affected, and this had a knock-on effect on teachers who were already finding themselves under stress, experiencing anxiety but the added responsibility of dealing with students who were in precisely the same situation meant that they had to put their needs aside to address their students' needs. From the students' comments, students were very appreciative of the flexibility and empathy shown by their teachers, which resonates with what Bozkurt et al. (2020, p. 4) refer to as a "pedagogy of care, affection and empathy" needed in times of trauma and highly stressful situations. Similarly, the teachers appreciated the additional support mechanisms introduced by the coordinators and made special mention of the increased level of interpersonal communication during the course.

The nature of online courses requires thorough forward planning for a wide array of situations and every aspect of the educational experience needs to be structured, explicit and transparent so that processes and protocols are readily available and clear to everybody involved. This involves elaborating detailed teachers' guides, student and teacher activity guidelines and course plans; in times of crisis, these "rule books" provide a support framework for coordinators, teachers and students alike. These processes were instrumental for the coordinators in ensuring that the course ran in a "business-as-usual" manner.

10 Conclusions

Despite this highly stressful situation, having had the training and experience in the use of the technologies together with the methodology in the UOC meant that the teachers who took part in the survey had the necessary confidence to transfer their knowledge to different environments, situations and target learners when forced to shift to ERT in their face-to-face teaching. Our main conclusion is that pre- and in-service professional development plays a crucial role in teachers' ability to incorporate technology in their face-to-face teaching. What is also evident is that when coordinating online teachers, it is crucial to provide regular support as they carry out their work.

From the teachers' comments, it is clear that emotions were high, but while these could be negative at times, many teachers were able to put a positive spin on the situation. For future actions, we believe teacher professional development programmes in the use of technologies are paramount and teachers' well-being should form an integral part of these. More research into the emotional support systems which might be put in place in the long term would be an interesting area for future research.

Many areas of our lives have changed forever, and the field of education is no exception. Regardless of whether institutions go back to the way they were prior to the COVID-19 health crisis, because policy changes are inevitably slow, teachers and learners have now tried new ways of working and have been able to experience firsthand the affordances that technology has to offer. Subsequent conversations with teachers have revealed that they are being called upon by their colleagues in their other jobs to provide technical and pedagogical support, and thus becoming the driving force behind more long-term change. Looking into this is a promising line of future investigation.

11 Food for Thought: Beyond ERT

11.1 Implications for Course Coordinators

Course coordinators need to explore and make use of the range of different communication channels available to stay in touch with teachers. They also need to think carefully about deepening the relationships among teams of teachers and between the teachers and the coordinators. In this way, feelings of isolation can be minimised with obvious benefits to teachers and their students.

11.2 Implications for Language Teaching Design

One of the main causes for the increase of workload in those institutions where ERT took place was the long hours dedicated to synchronous communication which left them physically and emotionally drained. We feel that the excessive use of synchronous sessions was misled. More teacher-led group sessions do not compensate for the lack of closeness and simply overburden the teacher. Training in the how, what for and when synchronous sessions are the right choice is an urgent need for the future. We would recommend teachers to invest some of their time in designing learning amongst students that does not require the presence of the teacher. It is a question of striking the right balance of teacher-led and student-student small group/pair-work, which is recorded or reported on in different formats.

11.3 *Effects on Teachers (and Learners)*

We cannot underestimate the potential long-term effects of this experience on teachers and learners and we believe it will be important to monitor well-being of all those involved in the educational experience. There will be an adjustment period, and this will parallel the grieving process: for lost loved ones, for lost social experiences, for lost educational opportunities, for lost jobs, etc. On a more positive note, the experience teachers and learners have had incorporating technology into their educational contexts is opening up exciting new possibilities for the future of education and a long-awaited paradigm shift towards learner-centred approaches.

Appendix

Table 1 Tools used by teachers for emergency remote teaching

Digital tools/ platform	Links	Description
Zoom	https://zoom.us/	Videoconferencing and online chat services through a cloud-based peer-to-peer software platform.
Google Meet	https://meet.google.com	Free Videoconference tool which is part of Google Workspace. It hosts secure video meetings right from Gmail or Google calendar.
Skype	https://www.skype.com/	Free Videoconference tool owned by Microsoft. Users may transmit text, video, audio and images.
Microsoft Teams	https://www.microsoft.com/en/microsoft-teams/free	Communication platform developed by Microsoft which offers workspace chat and videoconferencing, file storage, and application integration
WhatsApp	https://www.whatsapp.com/	WhatsApp is a freeware, cross-platform messaging and Voice over IP service owned by Facebook, Inc. to send text messages and voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share images, documents, user locations, and other media.
Blackboard Collaborate	https://www.blackboard.com/en-eu/teaching-learning/collaboration-web-conferencing/blackboard-collaborate	Browser-based web conferencing with screen sharing and whiteboarding, developed by Blackboard Inc.
Webex	https://www.webex.com/	Secure app that allows to host video conferences with HD video, audio and screen sharing and connect instantly with team messaging, secure file-sharing and whiteboarding.

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