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Comparing Teacher and Learner Perceptions of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)

A Qualitative Study of Interviews

Abstract

As a result of the shift to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), changes occurring both inside and outside virtual classrooms have led to discussions of the possibly detrimental effects of digital pedagogies on learning (Hodges et al. 2020). The challenges faced by the educational community during this time have been addressed on multiple occasions (Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo 2020, Ferritti 2020, Maldonado and De Witte 2021), yet debate also exists around the "transformative" potential of ERT (Reimers et al. 2020). The move to this format has, in fact, created new teaching and learning spaces, and the many lessons to be learned from this situation will reveal themselves in time to come, as the result of careful investigation. To this end, our paper reports the findings of a small-scale study carried out at the University of Verona in 2020. A qualitative approach was adopted in the analysis of interview data, conducted with those directly involved in ERT. The objective was to explore the perceptions of both language students and teachers concerning their experiences with learning and teaching technologies. The paper examines which emerging themes may be worth integrating into university language teaching approaches going forward.

Keywords: *Emergency Remote Teaching, language teaching, Higher Education language learners and teachers, Framework Analysis, learning design*

1. Introduction[1]

The global health crisis which started in 2020 caused an abrupt transition from traditional instructional delivery to online delivery modes. The challenges faced by the educational community during the period of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), both in Italy and

[1] This paper is the result of the collaboration of the two authors. The single contributions may be identified as follows: Sharon Hartle wrote sections 3, 5 and the Conclusion. Giorgia Andreolli wrote the Introduction, section 2 and section 4. Section 1 was written by both authors, who reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

worldwide, have been addressed on multiple occasions (Maldonado and De Witte 2021; Batini et al. 2020; Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo 2020; Ferritti 2020). ERT differed from online teaching in that, according to Hodges et al. (2020), it was intended as a temporary solution, implemented to ensure educational continuity and characterized by unclear, if not lacking, pedagogical design. Similarly, Bond et al. (2021, 1) described ERT as an "unplanned practice" carried out with "any kind of offline and/or online resources that may be at hand." As a consequence of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, teachers and learners were forced to build and learn how to navigate new spaces—projecting private bedrooms and all-in-one countertop workstations into virtual conferencing rooms and Learning Management Systems (LMSs). From this perspective, the move to ERT primarily concerned the distance between participants and, as a consequence, their relationships across separate places and times (Moore 1993). Furthermore, the long-term unpredictability of the pandemic hindered the implementation of sustainable faculty transition to ERT (Stewart, Baek and Lowenthal 2022; Hodges et al. 2020). As a result, changes occurring both inside and outside classrooms, coupled with the high demands of the new format, raised concerns about its possible detrimental effects. Debate also exists, however, around the "transformative" potential of ERT (Reimers et al. 2020) and the positive aspects we may continue to implement. To explore this line of inquiry within our teaching and learning context, we carried out a small-scale qualitative study including both student and teacher perspectives. While the study is limited in scope, it attempts to document experiences of sustained ERT over two consecutive semesters (Stewart, Baek and Lowenthal 2022). The findings presented in this paper are a section of a larger mixed-methods analysis of questionnaires and interviews aimed at identifying which aspects of ERT to integrate in future blended practice at the University of Verona. The two main research questions asked in the study were:

1. What were the most positive aspects of the ERT experience?
2. Which aspects of ERT were beneficial and worth integrating into a future learning design in higher education (HE) language teaching contexts?

After an overview of the literature on ERT, with a focus on the Italian context, we present the methods of data collection and analysis, including the coding process. The experiences and perceptions of those directly involved in ERT were examined applying Framework Analysis, as described in the following paragraphs. Meaningful themes are first discussed separately and then merged into key suggestions to support local teachers, students and stakeholders in

reflecting upon and improving their practice.

2. Literature review

The implementation of ERT in Italy from March 2020 onwards was characterized by the lack of generalized guidelines at a national level. Structural inequalities emerged strongly, driven by the uneven distribution of technology and other socio-economic barriers believed to compromise the right to equitable and inclusive, quality education (Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo 2020). Conti (2021) examined the impact of ERT on foreign language education both at secondary and post-secondary level. Major challenges were, among others, teachers' resistance to pedagogical change and the development of oracy skills. Interaction was reported as the most compromised area, with particularly negative effects on the participation to group discussions and students' autonomy. Overall, as underlined also by Ferritti (2020), the extraordinary nature of ERT might have contributed to transferring the prevailing teacher-led model to virtual spaces. Learners' digital literacy was more than often overestimated while teachers, Ferritti argues, were not offered sufficient opportunities for familiarization with the tools being implemented. In higher education, increased workload and stress were also reported among teachers. However, reconciling the frequently conflicting experiences of teachers and learners still appears to be necessary, as "the essence of ERT design is the ability of universities and educational institutions to understand internal conditions (teachers' ability to manage Internet-based learning) and external conditions (students and society)" (Cahyadi et al. 2021, 2). Besides, the benefits of technology ought not be overshadowed: cost-effectiveness, potential for inclusion, time- and space-related advantages as well as attractiveness and learner motivation have long been promoted in the literature. In a digital age there is a temptation to see technology as a panacea and to opt for extreme approaches to learner autonomy such as Mitra's (2013) "Build a School in the Cloud" endeavor, where learners were guided by specific questions at the outset into directing their own learning in complete autonomy. Discussion of the effectiveness of both distance and blended learning, over the years, have often made reference to the twin aspects of learner autonomy and agency—which have emerged also from ERT studies (Whittle et al. 2020; Green, Burrow and Carvalho 2020). Definitions of autonomy range from Holec's notion of complete responsibility for learning being in the learner's own hands (1979) to more nuanced interpretations (Benson 2007; Little 1991). Agency is linked to autonomy, implying, as it does, the learner's investment in their own learning (Norton 2013). A widely cited definition of agency, in fact, is Ahearn's view of agency as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (2001, 112), which is linked to agency in discursive spaces between individuals and the conditions of the

moment. In the language learning process, this can be interpreted as conditions which provide opportunities for student involvement, where the decision-making process of what, how and when to study is mediated by both teacher and learner (Hartle 2020a; Larsen-Freeman 2019; Duff 2012; van Lier 2008). Working asynchronously provides learners with choice over both the materials selected and the amount of time dedicated to their study (Kiddle 2013). Illés (2012), in her discussion of learner autonomy revisited, in fact, stressed the need for materials that "engage learners on their own terms" (2012, 505). In contexts of technology and language teaching, Stickler (2022) underlines the need for learners to be exposed to a range of tools to ensure that they can exercise their agency in making principled choices about the resources they use. The role of the teacher may shift to facilitator, she argues, with less teacher intervention in the learning process, which, in turn, enables a greater degree of learner choice and autonomy. Online environments certainly provide learners with the option of choosing when, how and what they study, so they can be considered fertile ground for the development of autonomy whilst promoting learner agency as well.

3. Methods

The study was framed within a qualitative approach serving as a preliminary investigation for further research. The aim was to investigate students and teachers' perceptions of ERT and identify emerging intersections or differences which could inform decision-making and implementation of technology at the local level. The participants, who all expressed their informed consent, were volunteers from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and the Language Centre at the University of Verona. Students and language teachers participated in online semi-structured interviews (Richards 2003) separately, at two different stages. First, a group of eight students were interviewed on their study strategies both in and outside class and the changes occurred due to ERT. These interviews lasted approximately 15 minutes and were carried out in the second semester of 2020. After collecting student perspectives, we turned to teacher experiences. The interviews took place at the beginning of the following academic year, when ERT was still being implemented but with a partial reopening of universities and social spaces. Eight participants were recruited among in-service language teachers and interviews lasted 30 minutes on average. For both groups of interviewees, three leading questions were formulated based on previously collected data: a questionnaire in the case of students, and a classroom observation for teachers. Due to space restrictions, we will not describe the entire interview protocol. However, the questions build on key issues for our research aims and are reported in Table 1 below.

Students		Teachers	
Changing strategies	What do you believe changed in the way you studied in the second term?	***Technology***	What do you think about technology in teaching?
Learner Evaluation	Which changes do you consider to be positive and which negative?	***Interaction***	How do you interact with students online?
Aspects perceived to be effective	What aspects of online learning would you recommend integrating into course development in the future?	***Reported practice***	Can you walk me through an activity you did online?

Tab. 1: Leading interview questions and related area of investigation

The interviews were transcribed using Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS)[2] and analyzed using Framework Analysis (Richie and Spencer 1994), as described below.

3.1 Coding and analysis

Framework Analysis is a method of coding narrative data that combines "deductively-derived themes (i.e., a framework)" and "a cross-sectional analysis using a combination of data description and abstraction" (Goldsmith 2021, 2061). This facilitates the integration between *a priori* issues with emergent themes, adding depth and insight to our small datasets while retaining granularity. Adherence to the coding process allows to retrieve the originally coded segments at any given time. Initially developed in the field of applied policy research, Framework Analysis has been used in a variety of fields and particularly for mixed-methods case studies (Mason, Mirza and Webb 2018). Five stages[3] are recursively applied in the processes of coding, analyzing, and interpreting the data to map key issues and themes. After transcription and familiarization with the data, the analytic process led to development of a

[2] Both NVivo by QSR International (https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home) and QDA Miner Lite by Provalis Research (https://provalisresearch.com/products/qualitative-data-analysis-software/freeware/) were employed due to licensing restrictions. All links last visited on 22/11/2022.

[3] The five stages of Framework Analysis are: familiarization with the data, development of a thematic framework, indexing, charting and mapping. See Ritchie and Spencer (1994).

thematic framework devised to be responsive to emergent themes. Four superordinate themes crossing the two datasets were identified, namely:

a) *Essentials*: the basic, fundamental aspects of language learning and teaching as a whole, relating to core beliefs and values
b) *Positive aspects of ERT*: the generally accepted and recognized advantages of using technology
c) *Controversies*: topics upon which an agreement among interviewees was not reached and opposing points of view were discussed
d) *Emerging aspects of ERT*: unexpected effects, outcomes and realizations discovered during ERT that generally felt positive and forward-looking.

Subsequent stages, referred to as indexing, charting and mapping, aimed at reorganizing the initially descriptive labels into more meaningful categories. The full index can be found in the Appendix. Data were lifted from their original context and summarized into charts used to map the codes, leading to the recognition of cross-category patterns and intersections, and ultimately to a series of guidelines that may be taken into consideration when planning our future university language courses. To aid the analysis, the frequency of coded segments was calculated and is presented in the following sections, where findings are discussed separately for each group before examining their intersections and differences.

4. Focus on students

We begin by describing the most commonly occurring themes, starting from the most to least coded. The initial analysis is then followed by in-depth discussion of the most meaningful mappings.

4.1 Initial analysis

Of these themes, the one that included the most student references was Essentials (N=121). The percentage breakdown over the various themes can be seen in Figure 1. The majority of the references (N=70) referred to independent study management, which is a key area of concern for students. Other issues, although less frequent, were still of interest to students and are therefore worthy of note. The issue of teacher availability during the Covid-19 period, for instance, constitutes 12% of the total references but this still means that it was mentioned fourteen times during the interviews.

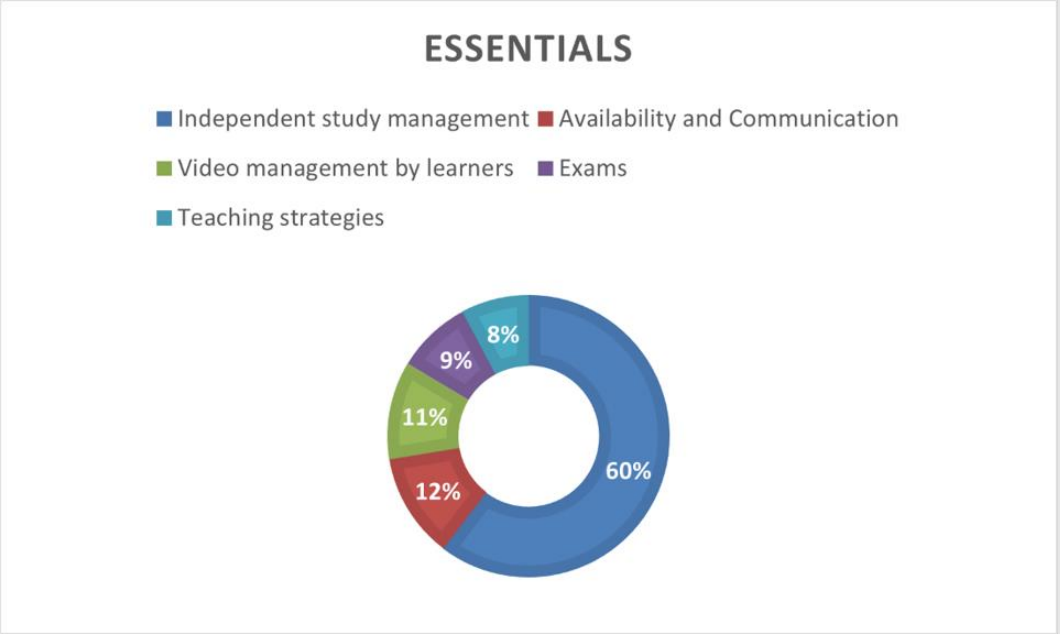

Fig. 1: *Essential* aspects of ERT from the student perspective

The second category in order of reference frequency for students was *Controversies* (N=94). As can be seen in Figure 2, these are more evenly grouped, primarily (N=21) being made to tradition, which was closely followed by time and place adaptation (N=17).

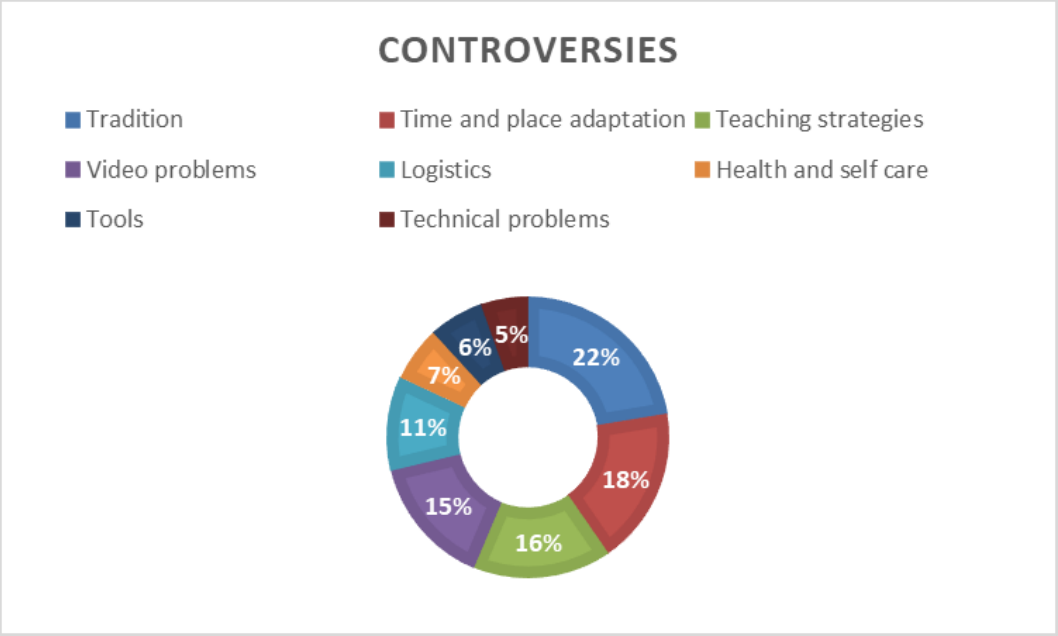

Fig. 2: *Controversies* in student interviews

The *Positive aspects of ERT* was the third category (N=77). Despite having fewer student comments than the first two categories, it reflects, in any case, many positive elements of the online contexts, which will be discussed further below. Figure 3 shows that most references (N=27) were made to the synchronous context of lessons streamed via Zoom.[4] This, however, was closely followed by the asynchronous context (N=25), in this case, the use made of Moodle for different courses. It must be underlined, once again, however, that these references reflect student perceptions of issues such as effective teaching, which is, of necessity, subjective. Time saving was also a key issue for many during the lockdown period when travel was not a factor in university study.

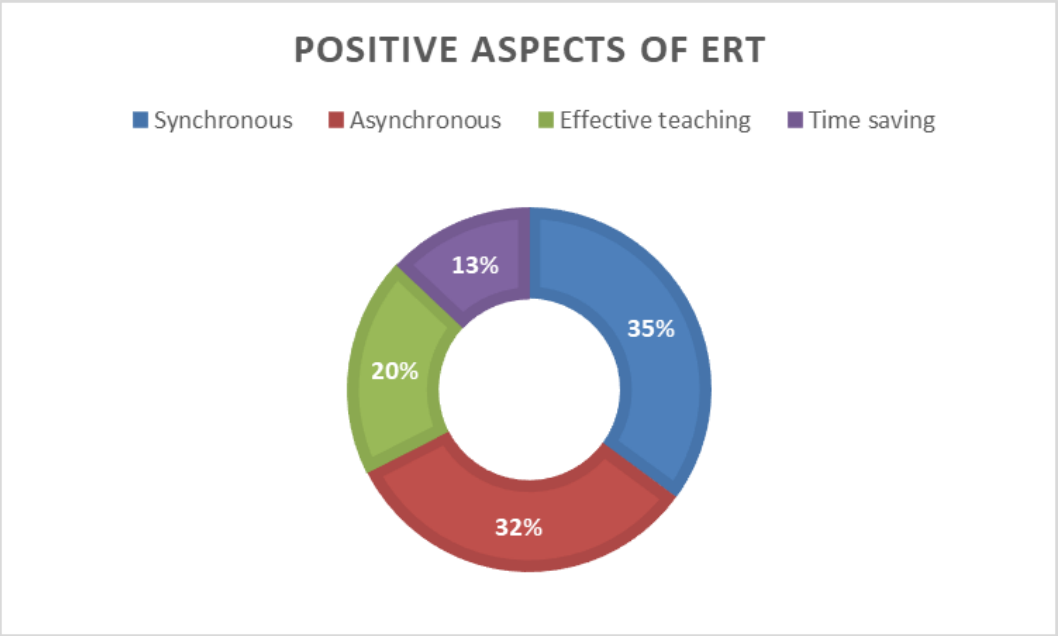

Fig. 3: *Positive Aspects of ERT* from the student perspective

The fourth category, with slightly fewer total references (N=68), was related to aspects that emerged from the thematic coding but that had not been anticipated by the researchers. As Figure 4 shows, a key area of interest for the interviewees was online interaction (N=25), which, when added to the thirteen references to onsite interaction, reveals interaction in general to be a key interest for students. Perhaps surprisingly, identity (N=24) was also seen to be key and although flexibility has a smaller percentage of the whole there were six references made to it, which suggests that this is another area of interest.

[4] Zoom: https://zoom.us/

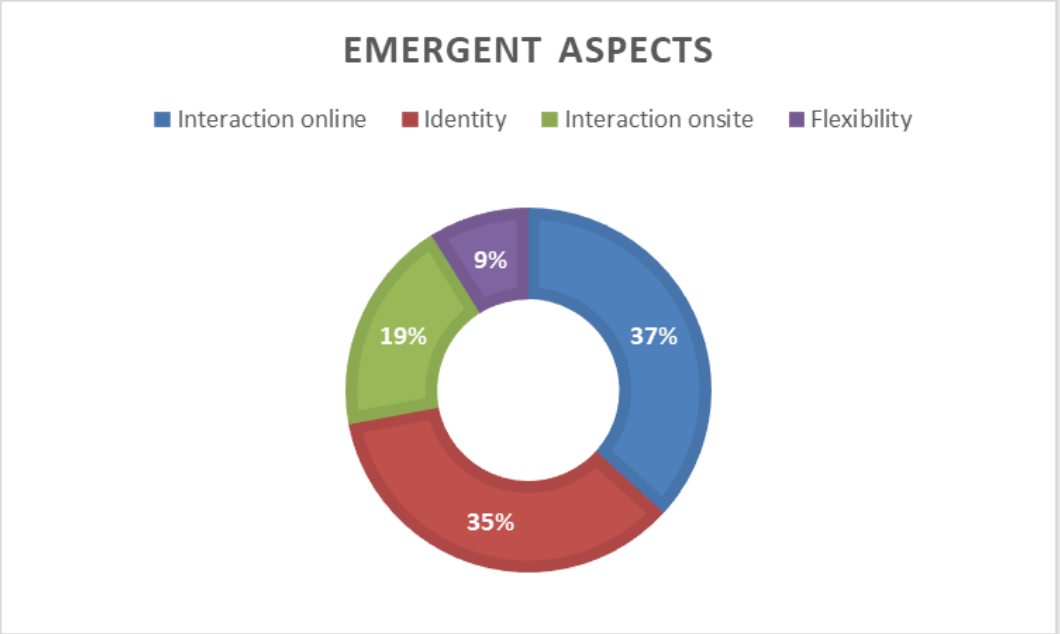

Fig. 4: *Emergent aspects* from student interviews

4.2 Mapping and interpretation

Six main thematic categories were identified as being of greatest relevance to students. These have been listed according to frequency of reference:

1. Video recordings and asynchronous platform use
2. Teacher accessibility and communication
3. Interaction and the synchronous context
4. Independent study
5. Observed teaching strategies
6. Time management

4.2.1 Video and asynchronous platform use

Of the six categories, the ones that led to most discussion were firstly video recordings and asynchronous platform use and independent study. Videos were interpreted in three ways by the students:

1. recordings of lessons uploaded onto the class Moodle
2. videos provided on Moodle by teachers as study resources
3. videos found autonomously by the learners themselves.

The perception of type 1 recordings was overwhelmingly problematic, and learners reported the detached nature of watching recordings when compared to onsite or even streamed Zoom lessons (N=2).[5] The perception of teachers 'struggling' with technology was also noted by participant L2, which underlines the reactive nature of ERT (Bozkurt and Sharma 2020; Golden 2020) adopted as an *ad hoc* solution to the Covid-19 crisis. This type of recording, however, was not always the first choice of content delivery in language learning courses at the university, where asynchronous, streamed lessons were more common. A lack of familiarity with distance learning was also noted, including issues of duration: students reported recorded lessons that were over an hour long despite the university recommendation of limiting the duration to 30 minutes. This, in fact, is also overlong, as the recommended length for instructional videos used in distance learning is six minutes (Brame 2015; Guo, Kim and Rubi 2014). The participants in this study, in fact, reported frustration, procrastination and a lack of willpower when attempting to watch the recorded lessons and one individual recommended the integration of shorter videos into the Moodle platform. The only positive points were related to flexibility of when and where to watch the videos and the fact that having the recorded lessons was useful when attendance was not possible. Brame (2015) refers to three key elements that should be considered if the use of video is to be a productive part of the learning experience, which are an awareness of cognitive load, non-cognitive elements that impact engagement and the promotion of features fostering active learning. This, in fact, reflects the student perceptions of the second and third type of video, which were more encouraging. Despite one respondent's mistrust for publicly available videos, the videos provided for language work on the course Moodles were considered to enable learners' exam preparation (N=X3) and in-depth study, providing a variety of focus when studying. Videos chosen independently to develop language skills were also reported positively as providing an introduction to a topic or a review, and one respondent underlined the link between memorable video content and recall.

4.2.2 The asynchronous platform

During the pandemic, Moodle was widely used not only to provide administrative information but also to share course materials, supplementary resources, exam practice exercises, quizzes or discussion spaces. The participants, when discussing asynchronous access to technology, distinguished between this platform with the resources provided there and other external tools that were used in class or recommended for independent use. The most widespread use that was

[5] These figures report the number of participants who referred to a specific theme.

made of Moodle, apart from institutional administration such as messages regarding exam dates or timetable issues, was to download slides and documents to repeat exercises that had been done in class. Video, here again, was a commonly occurring theme (N=6) and was used, as mentioned above, to practice language skills or to prepare for exams. The positive factor of being able to access resources meant flexibility of access regarding time and place (N=4), which is a factor that may increase learner agency. This was already evident from the choices the learners reported making when studying independently, such as using tools such as Quizlet to review work done in class but also to create personalized content. Agency, as discussed in the literature review above, is widely considered to be linked to student involvement in the learning process, where the decision-making process of what, how and when to study is mediated by both teacher and learner (Hartle 2020a; Larsen-Freeman 2019; Duff 2012; van Lier 2008). The asynchronous platform provides learners with choice and a range of options for the extension of their study, as do other online resources, available independently, but the overall perception from the interviews was that optimal learning combines not only the asynchronous but also the synchronous context which affords greater human-to-human interaction.

4.2.3 Teacher accessibility and communication

The aspect of teacher accessibility was related to both asynchronous and synchronous contexts, but the primary element was a lack of access to teachers during ERT if their content delivery was limited to uploaded recordings. The lack of access was underlined as being problematic when learners sought clarification on a range of academic questions, such as exam dates, as well as the lesson content. Email was not seen as being an efficient channel because of its asynchronous nature and learners suggested the provision of further online channels for communication both with teachers and their peers. On a more positive note, the ease of access to online lessons was underlined as was the opportunity for interaction and communication in the synchronous contexts, which will be described below. One aspect to emerge here was the value of 'discussion' with teachers (N=2) that was possible during streamed lessons.

4.2.4 Synchronous interaction in streamed lessons

Synchronous lessons were streamed via Zoom in our context and despite overall positive judgments (N=16), there were also some negative perceptions (N=7). These referred to technical limitations, such as lack of Wi-Fi access, participants not switching their videos on so that participants were presented with black screens, or issues related to the context which enables greater distraction than an onsite lesson might, and possibly leads to "Zoom Fatigue" (Peper

and Yang 2021). The expertise of some of the teachers when using this context was also criticized. In particular, judgmental, overt correction of chat contributions was felt to be potentially demotivating as was teacher-centered approaches, where learners waited for long stretches to contribute to the lesson. L4, in particular, stressed the need for everyone to learn how to use technology effectively and discussed the invasion of spaces that are usually inaccessible, saying "the borderline between the private sphere and the public one is very thin." One interesting attitude which emerged covertly was the notion of ERT as not being 'real lessons.' The streamed sessions, however, were considered to be as close to 'real lessons' as possible. L2, for instance, said "[Zoom] was much more interactive and much more similar to a real lesson." This type was generally judged positively, providing as it did, a context for human interaction, communication, both for academic purposes, such as asking teachers and peers for clarification or doing didactic activities in breakout rooms, and socialization (N=16). Students missed the social context of the university, in fact, and felt that Zoom provided them with a space where they could communicate. The provision of a variety of tasks in synchronous lessons, such as the use of the Zoom chat or external tools such as Mentimeter[6] were seen to foster engagement (Bond et al. 2021). Despite this, one participant preferred to study alone but compared herself to others underlining the fact that her choice was different, thus demonstrating her own agency. Breakout Room activities were also judged positively particularly when they were well structured. The affective nature of the synchronous context was enhanced by the appearance of names on video screens, which enabled teachers to address learners by name, something not always possible in large classes. L8 underlined this aspect saying that she felt like "a person and not a number" when the teachers used her name.

An interesting emerging element was easier interaction online for shy students (N=2) both from the didactic and the social viewpoint (Hussain Al-Qahtani 2019), and inter-student relationships were created online then developed beyond the context of the streamed lessons.

4.2.5 Synchronous interaction onsite

There was considerable discussion of onsite contexts as well (N=6). The "theatrical nature" (L4) of lessons as performances, or the human contact were described (N=2) as lacking online and this 'human' factor was perceived as being essential for effective learning. Onsite routines such as physically meeting friends, going to lessons or the library were mentioned (N=3) as providing a reassuring structure and routine to the day. The role of structured routines is a key element

[6] Mentimeter: https://www.mentimeter.com/

in blended learning (Beagle and Davies 2013) and could be provided to enhance learner engagement. The social aspect was mentioned here again and another emerging aspect, related to the ease of interaction online (mentioned at the end of section 3.2.4), was the fact that some students felt uncomfortable (e.g., observed or judged by others) during onsite physical lessons – suggesting that investment in the learning process is affected by aspects of learner identity (Norton 2013). Other participants, however, stressed socialization as key, which once again points to the need to provide multiple choices for learners in order to foster agency. Agency, in fact, is a recurring theme and is closely linked to the notion of learner autonomy, demonstrated by students in their interest in independent study.

4.2.6 Independent study strategies

Study is perceived by the students as having three main stages: in-class elaboration of ideas, an initial post-lesson study phase and a later more in-depth stage, often related to exam preparation or to developing communicative competence (Canale and Swain 1980; Hymes 1972). Learner autonomy in Italian HE contexts is a key characteristic (Hartle 2009), and this was clear from the student perceptions. The preferred activities and tools referred to were reading and using pen and paper (N=5) to take notes, reflecting the traditional aspect of studying. Varied approaches were adopted, however, once again reflecting the agency of single students. The use of Quizlet[7] and Kahoot was mentioned for memory work and a range of study strategies (Oxford 1990) were alluded to, including the development of mind maps (N=3), personalized content on Quizlet (N=1), or drawings to link to items in vocabulary learning (N=1). Two participants also stressed the use of colors to highlight key information when studying. The fact that discussion centered mainly on non-traditional strategies, rather than the traditional, however, may have been influenced by the questionnaire items. It is worth noting that the majority of the participants considered reading and taking notes to be the most effective methods. They generally take notes *verbatim* from the source in the first stage or highlight information on slides and it is at the later stage that they vary in their strategies. Even at this stage pen and paper (N=4) is preferred for notetaking followed by content elaboration, which is done in various ways. Partially understood concepts are explored by searching for further information (N=2). It is at this second stage, however, that the non-traditional strategies such as creative notetaking or elaboration of content provided asynchronously are mainly used. These include the use of videos for various purposes, as outlined above, together with the repetition of

[7] Quizlet: https://quizlet.com/; Kahoot: https://create.kahoot.it/

exercises provided online.

4.2.7 Teaching strategies

The perception of teaching strategies from the student viewpoint focuses mainly on the organization of classroom management (Harmer 2015; Great Schools Partnership 2014), the provision of didactic activities and the feedback provided. Perceptions were generally balanced with reference to both online and onsite contexts (N=11 positive, N=9 negative). As previously mentioned in Section 3.2.5, the importance of interaction in and access outside class were emphasized, together with the human element, and providing space for discussion and practice within lessons was considered essential (N=4). Using online discussion spaces, it was felt, fosters interaction but also enables learners to contribute to their own learning process. A series of techniques were discussed which participants considered to be useful, such as adopting an inductive approach to presenting new language (Harmer 2015; Kaye 2011), creating rapport by using learner names, drawing on teaching experience and personal expertise as well as flipping appropriate content and providing a range of activities in class to enable learners to contribute and to vary the pace of the lessons. The negative comments also referred to both online and onsite contexts and included a dislike of teachers who are unavailable to answer questions, who simply reread their slides during lessons or are unable to gauge the difficulty of content for their learners. The teacher-centered approach where students are asked to read out sentences one by one around the class, or where the coursebooks are followed slavishly, was also criticized. Another criticism was occasional lack of learner support or the use of judgmental correction techniques which are perceived as extremely demotivating for learners (Hattie and Timperley 2007). Many of the comments, however, were related to technology and the lack of familiarity with online teaching that was characteristic of the ERT period. Teachers were seen to be "struggling" with technology and unable to use the technology to create effective videos.

4.2.8 Time management

The final emergent aspect was time management, which was considered firstly from the viewpoint of adaptation to differing times and study contexts and secondly from the aspect of time management when studying. A very important aspect of time management (N=3) was saving time because of not having to travel, together with the fact that the lesson cycles were completed earlier during the lockdown period, providing more time for independent exam preparation. As far as location is concerned, positive perceptions include access to lessons from multiple locations and time saving. The shift to online delivery led to saving time in two ways.

It was better, firstly, for those who find studying whilst travelling difficult and it was also advantageous because not having to travel physically meant not having to waste time moving from one onsite space to another for different classes. A major concern was time management and L3, for instance, equated effective time management with "good studying," seeing the ability to organize time as an essential part of the process. On the negative side most of the participants reported difficulty in adapting to the online contexts with lack of motivation and procrastination appearing (N=5), as mentioned above (Section 3.2.1). This was partly due to the nature of the recorded classes but also to the lack of structure which is provided by onsite study routines. It was felt that despite increased flexibility in study management (N=2), more effort was involved in organizing independent study and planning timetables (N=2). Another negative aspect related to the plenary, synchronous context when learners who are not involved directly may waste time, be distracted or focus on other tasks that are unrelated to the lesson itself. The participants reported different ways of managing study periods as well, ranging from single blocks of two to three hours with no breaks to short periods with breaks (N=2). One student reported studying in blocks of several hours with short breaks in between, all of which highlight once again the question of agency and differing learner self-regulation strategies (Al Fadda 2019; Zimmerman and Kitsantas 2014). Other peripheral aspects seen as positive were having more time for non-study related activities such as spending time with families and the ease of access to early morning classes because of the lack of travel, as mentioned above.

5. Focus on teachers

Figure 5 below illustrates the relative frequency of coded segments for each overarching category. The most frequently coded theme relates to the emerging, unexpected aspects of ERT, which amount to 34% of the total coded segments (N=126). The category grouping the *Essentials* of teaching consisted of 29% of codes (N=111), followed by *Controversial* issues (24%, N=90). The least coded, on the other hand, was the *Positive Aspects of ERT* category. The analytical process then shifted the focus of the discussion onto the teachers' appraisals of technology in connection with the core values and instructional methods underlying their practice.

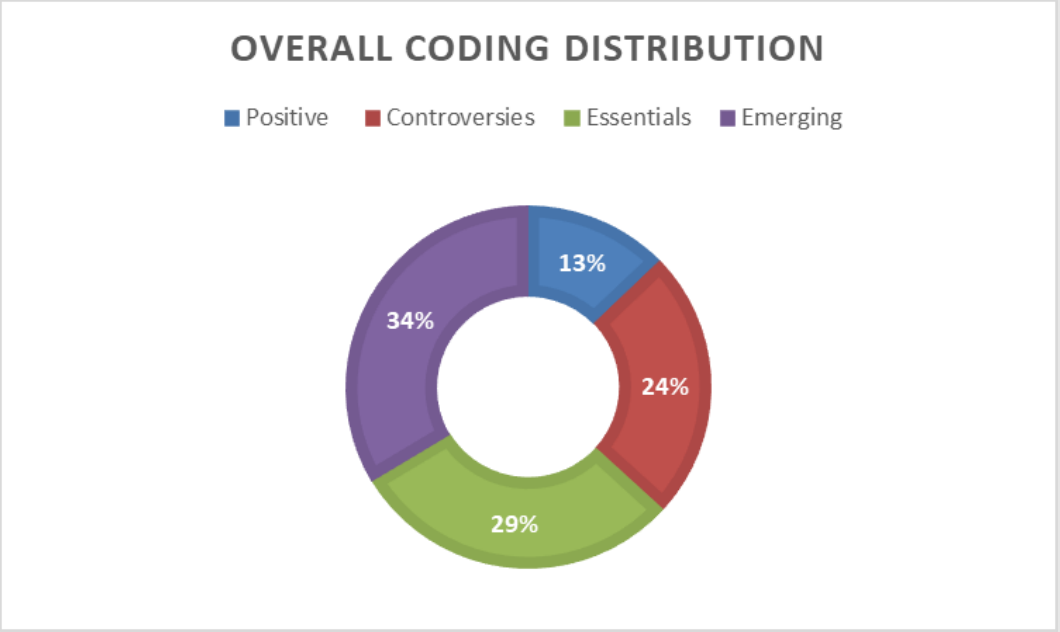

Fig. 5: Overall coding distribution in teacher interviews

5.1 Initial analysis

As illustrated in Figure 6, teachers emphasized topics related to the human dimension (41%, N=52), consisting of those aspects of the teacher-student relationship which gained relevance during ERT such as non-verbal communication, authenticity and spontaneity. Flexibility is the only common aspect with students and constitutes the 34% of the codes in this category (N=43). In the case of teachers, flexibility included material re-organization and changes in teaching habits. ERT afforded new possibilities of inclusion (13%, N=16), while a smaller number of coded stripes (6%) brought up democracy (N=8) and the support received from the teaching community (N=7). The themes coded in the *Essentials* of teaching (N=111) partially overlap with those raised by students (communication with teachers and teaching strategies). As shown in Figure 7, the majority of the segments in this category mentioned the role of relationships (55%, N=61), including negotiation of social norms, respect for the role of the teacher, emphasis on co-construction of meanings and collaboration (especially in the space afforded by Zoom's breakout rooms). However, this emphasis comes from some of the interviewees who seemed particularly concerned with the relational aspect. Conversely, a more common theme was the Communicative Approach (23% of the coded segments, N=26), followed by the commitment to continuous learning and professional development (12%, N=13) and the ability to plan lessons strategically (10%, N=11).

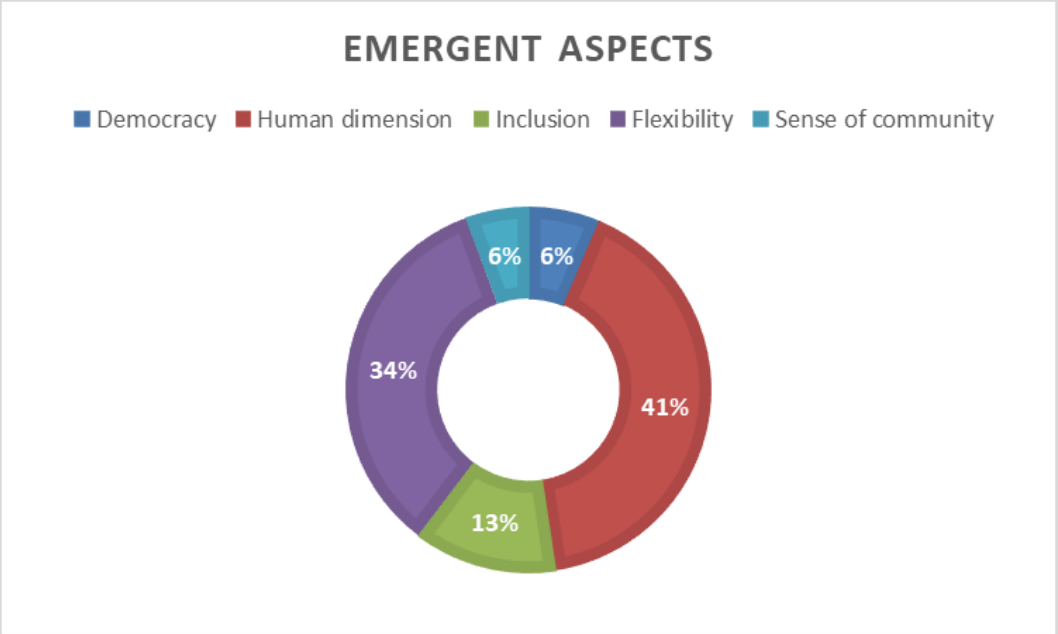

Fig. 6: *Emergent aspects* from the teacher viewpoint

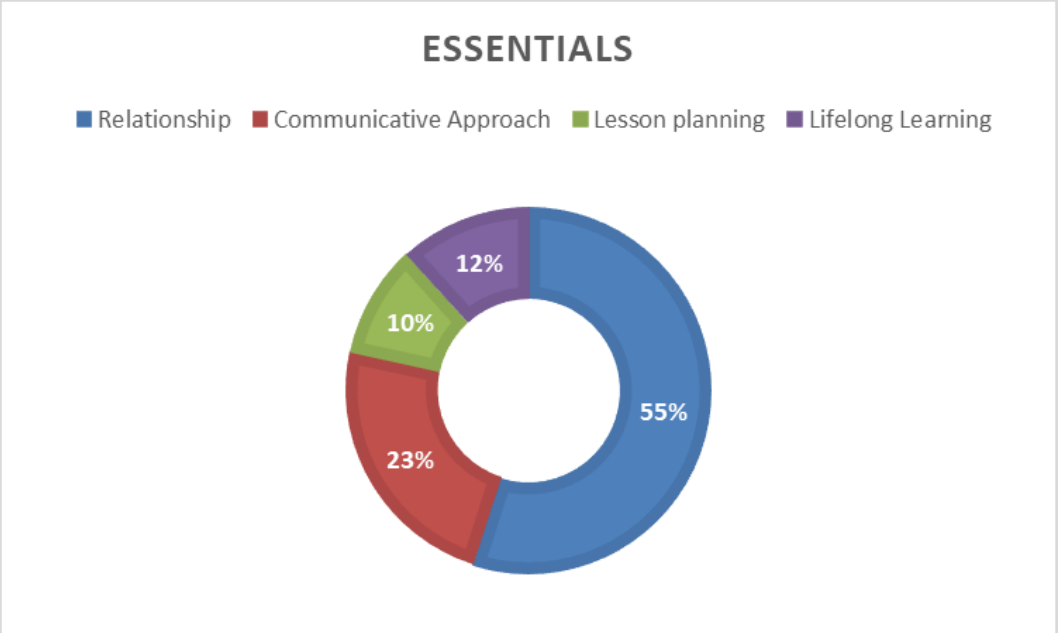

Fig. 7: The *Essentials* from the teacher viewpoint

A breakdown of the controversial aspects is reported in Figure 8. Most coded stripes (33%, N=30) underscore the preference for traditional modalities, depicted in opposition to ERT, and reveal a negative appraisal of the use of technology—which, however, coexists with the acknowledgment of its benefits, as discussed below. Other themes open to discussion were the negative impact of technology on students' attention and focus (20%), followed by increased

difficulties in giving feedback (17%) and maintaining quality teaching standards (16%). Lastly, time-related issues were debated, with technologies being on a continuum between saving and spending more time.

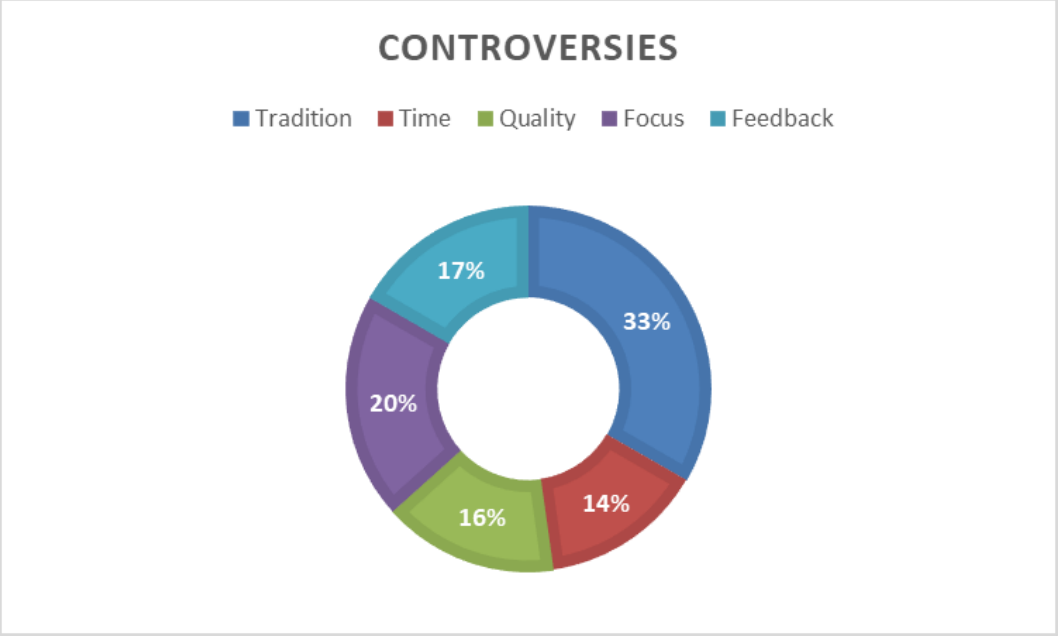

Fig. 8: *Controversial* aspects from the teacher viewpoint

Figure 9 represents the three positive aspects that teachers associated with ERT, concerning the general, factual benefits derived from the implementation of technologies. Overall, this is the least coded category (N=48) and the least problematized by the teachers interviewed, who considered technology innovative (44%, N=23) both from the perspective of new tools and instruments and for their own professional identity. They recognized that, overall, technology "works" and can be considered effective (39%, N=17). Lastly, 17% of the coded segments in this category referred to convenience (N=8), that is, the practical advantages in terms of costs, time and resources.

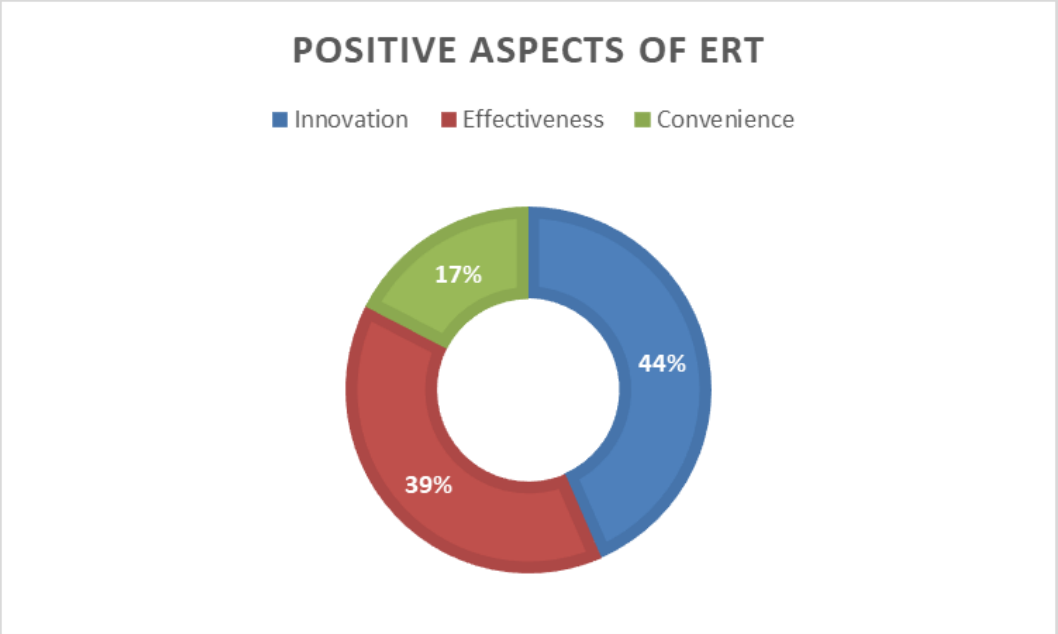

Fig. 9: *Positive aspects of ERT* from the teacher viewpoint

5.2 Mapping and interpretation

By analyzing the co-occurrences of themes, patterns were identified and mapped onto two superordinate categories, grouped according to the role played in facilitating or hindering the implementation of ERT. Respectively, these were termed *markers of continuity* and *discontinuity*.

5.2.1 Markers of continuity

Overall, a strong belief in the Communicative Approach (CA) seems to prevail and is either explicitly mentioned or left implicit by emphasizing typical features such as contextualized learning, learner-centeredness and the role of the teacher as a facilitator (Hartle 2017). T3[8] valued being "authentic" with students and claimed that authenticity was necessary not to "feel anonymous or depersonalized." At the same time, teaching role and identity were retained through non-verbal communication (e.g., using gestures, silence and intonation). Teachers committed to lifelong learning saw the acquisition of digital literacy skills as a "natural" part of their professional development (T2, T8), and strongly related to the educational goals they set for themselves and their students. The same teachers tend to depict themselves as strategic planners. In fact, lesson planning emerged as a key component to the integration of technology

[8] Identifiers T1 to T8 are used when citing teachers. Citations were translated from Italian by the researchers.

in language teaching—a skill that, in hindsight, may have facilitated the implementation of ERT, and could indicate flexibility in the adoption of new methods. A sub-group of teachers revealed a marked social-constructivist positioning (Powell and Kalina 2009), leading the conversation towards the importance of constructing relationships and negotiating meanings. The online scenario, in this perspective, multiplies the communication channels available, maximizing the possibilities of interaction. In their view, at the core of teacher-students relation lies the need to co-construct a set of rules for online classes, or a "netiquette," with teachers modelling the type of interaction desired. These beliefs appeared stronger in teachers considering relationships at the core of their practice before ERT—those who, in addition, might have been keener on supporting and noticing changes in interaction. For instance, T2 believed that asynchronous forum activities strengthened rapport among participants and laid the foundations for establishing new "enriching" (T3) connections. The forum acted as a "safe space" where students came to share personal matters with others, encountering respect and acceptance. T2 depicted relationships as a network of "many-to-many" exchanges that unexpectedly maximized participation at a deeper human level. A theme strongly related to the co-construction of relationships was the perception of an added "human dimension" despite the physical distance. Whereas teachers less committed to building rapport perceived the screen as a material barrier mediating an artificial, unnatural communication, constructivist-oriented teachers noted how Zoom features again compensate for the distance: names shown at the bottom of each "little box" (T3) allow teachers to address learners directly—unlike traditional in-presence classes, where most interaction happens with those sitting in the first rows, especially in particularly crowded courses. This "little box" (i.e., the virtual rectangle occupied by each Zoom participant with their name and picture or video) transformed the learning space into a democratic setting capable of levelling out differences among all participants, teacher included. Non-liner hierarchies were established in what was described in terms of an "ecosystem" (T2), giving voice to those who usually "sit in the back" or are "too shy" to speak up. T6, instead of imposing rules, initially allowed students to answer questions without showing themselves on camera. This choice led the teacher to perceive an increased student talking time. Students, who may have felt less observed or tested, eventually turned their cameras on without being asked to do so. According to T3, those who were less confident in oracy skills were given the opportunity to truly participate or to do so by pacing the exposure to the class gradually. As a result, we can hear "voices which would have been otherwise silenced" or "hidden" (T6). Besides, T8 recognized that the right to education was granted to all those who, before ERT, could not physically attend classes—broadening inclusion not only for those with disabilities,

but to other categories such as student workers, long-distance commuters, caregivers, etc. Overall, teachers conceptualized technology as a tool used to support the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties or disabilities as long as different "levels of difficulty" and "learning scenarios" could be foreseen by the teacher (T4). Inclusion can also be fostered thanks to the intermediation of digital tools and platforms which enable teachers to reorganize, readjust and vary their materials and plans. This was a "discovery" for T5, who admitted to having changed their attitude towards technology during and after ERT.

Among *markers of continuity,* we thus hypothesize a socio-constructivist stance focusing on the collaborative nature of learning as a result of meaningful exchanges and relationships—which seemed a prerequisite rather than a result of ERT. Teachers' efforts were channeled into forms of care for a human and democratic dimension. Coupled with the CA, that in Italy is characterized by a strong humanistic orientation, this facilitated the development of flexibility and inclusion.

5.2.2 Markers of discontinuity

"Traditional" teaching and learning emerged as the background against which the new ERT situation was compared. Teachers hoping to return to traditional in-class settings, while retaining some of the technological elements introduced during ERT, appeared aligned with the replication model discussed by Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo (2020) and Conti (2021). T1, for instance, claimed that the changes brought about by ERT were not "revolutionary," in that the nature of teaching itself cannot be influenced nor transformed by technology. Among the least enthusiastic teachers, in fact, technology is depicted as an unnecessary disturbance of previously established routines rooted in a transmissive, teacher-led model with grammar instruction still at the core. Its positive aspects (e.g., attractiveness, convenience and effectiveness) were acknowledged but with a critical attitude accompanied by feelings of "fear" (T1, T4) and "discomfort" (T8). The preference for traditional practices over a principled redesign of the learning experience may thus necessitate a reflection upon the implications of teachers' resistance to change. According to T7, embracing technological innovations would depend upon "the extent to which one is willing to put it [the innovation] into practice," with individual predispositions playing a major role in teachers' commitment. This may imply that the unique interplay of attitudes and beliefs feeding into their agency should not be underestimated. For instance, expectations related to student behavior were not matched by coherent actions, like in the case of webcam use. Turning on the webcam was seen as a form of respect owed to the teacher (T1): students who did not comply with the request were considered "rude" regardless

of the presence of clear communication or dialogue between both parts. The demand of additional efforts in "breaking the barrier" fell on the students themselves, who should actively "get closer to the teacher" by participating and asking more questions. As a consequence, according to some interviewees, classes become less spontaneous and relaxed. T3 admitted: "I know them a bit less." The mismatch between expectations and student behavior may be due to the fact that physical distance heavily modifies teaching and "undermines the very nature of their work, that is their sociality, their relationality" (T7). It appears that teachers in this sub-group adopted, rather than adapted to, ERT as a way of conforming to a "modern language teacher" imaginary—as remarked by T1, according to whom just mentioning technology "sounds good." On the practical side, such attitudes may limit its use to a certain degree of performativity. Learning apps, for example, may be used as a diversion or a short break between more structured activities (T3). One teacher (T8) who openly disliked technology, felt pressured to use clickers (such as Kahoot or Mentimeter), commonly depicted as "the solution to teaching"—so much so that only "if you use them, it means you can teach." These tools would have a negative impact on student attention span and motivational levels, distracting them with colors, music and moving objects. However, in relating their experience, T8 failed to report whether students expressed these difficulties. In turn, the same teacher ascribed the struggles to build rapport with new students to external factors such as the tight online course schedule. Time was a highly controversial theme: the flexibility and efficiency afforded by technology were counterbalanced by other time-consuming tasks and a general increase in workload (e.g., preparing materials, learning how to use new tools or answering e-mails). The following excerpt reports the words of a teacher (T2) who was nonetheless enthusiastic about virtual environments:

> To me, the blended environment is ideal, even better than the one in presence. Because presence implies the physical, the body, even unwillingness, and time restrictions—and [students] know they only have to let time go by and the lesson will go on. They don't put themselves out there in the same way. In a virtual environment, they MUST[9] produce, they must exchange messages, they must make their work tangible by leaving a trace.[10]

[9] The transcription conventions employed capital letters to signal emphasis.

[10] The original excerpt reads: "Per me, l'ambiente blended è l'ideale, meglio rispetto alla presenza. Perché nella presenza abbiamo il fisico, il corpo, anche nella non voglia, il tempo più ristretto, e loro sanno che basta passare un po' di tempo e la lezione va avanti, non è che entrano e si mettono in gioco allo stesso modo. Invece nell'ambito virtuale DEVONO produrre, devono scambiarsi dei messaggi, devono appunto rendere il loro lavoro tangibile lasciando una traccia."

Interestingly, this teacher depicts learning as an embodied, situated and contextualized experience. Yet, removal of the physical in-class attendance seemingly becomes a way for teachers to enforce productivity, track students' activities and monitor participation (e.g., thanks to learning analytics). The payoff for increased productivity might manifest itself, as for T4, in the so-called "Zoom fatigue" (Peper and Yang 2021) and in a higher risk of burnout. On the whole, these controversial aspects testify to the discontinuities between established routines and the integration of technology. Maintenance of these routines may constitute the real disruptive element, especially in an emergency scenario where increased flexibility is required.

6. Future learning design

The perspectives emerged and described in the previous paragraphs have revealed both points of contact and divergences, which we translate into suggestions for future contextualized practice.

6.1 Needs assessment: the case of videos

The analysis suggested a mismatch in the use of materials and tools, driven by differences between learners' needs and teachers' beliefs. Preliminary needs assessment may be integrated at the program level to try and capture these opposing views. If videos, for instance, are to be an effective asset in the learning process they should be shorter, perhaps interactive, with embedded questions and discussions to promote interaction between the learner and the resource. This, in fact, was suggested by one of the students in our study. Principled implementation of videos may include a series of factors. Signaling features should be used, such as transcripts, headings, highlighted key concepts and segmented video content. By providing smaller stretches of content followed by support activities, the cognitive load may be reduced (Guo, Kim and Rubi 2014; Zhang et al. 2006; Middendorf and Kalish 1996). L8 suggested short video summaries of lessons could be very useful, rather than the long complete recorded lessons that were common during ERT. Providing such thoughtfully designed resources for asynchronous access on course platforms, when accompanied by discussion questions or exercises and quizzes, could lead to greater engagement and more effective learning. Teachers may thus reduce the variety of tools employed in the creation and adaptation of materials, focusing on those affording simplicity and flexibility (Cahyadi et al. 2021) to maximize time spent on development without increasing their workload excessively.

6.2 Supporting autonomy

In a world where learning is becoming increasingly informal or independent, with an abundance of online resources that can be accessed freely, learners could benefit from direction as to how to navigate and make the most of these tools. Learners approach independent study in a variety of ways but providing them with guidance and integrating an awareness building process may help them to explore or even share strategies between peers. Autonomous learning strategies could also be integrated formally in synchronous contexts, to increase motivation (Hadfield and Dörnyei 2013; Dörnyei 2009). This might help students to invest further in their own study process (Hartle 2009; Benson 2007; Little 1991), goal setting (Salamoura and Morgan 2021; Hartle 2020b; Carless 2007), which can be combined with learning management strategies such as developing strategies for the avoidance of procrastination (Lyons and Beilock 2012; Wright 2012). Formative assessment, particularly in HE, is a neglected area (Gikandi, Morrow and Davis 2011) and may aid discovery of personal learning paths and foster effective use of independent resources. Providing lists of external resources may not be enough. Learners could be guided and taught how to use resources such as online quizzes, videos and reference sites such as SkELL[11] (Baisa and Suchomel 2014) to be able to benefit fully from their affordances. The affective aspect is important too and gamification has been linked with greater learner motivation (Ryan and Deci 2020; Ryan and Rigby 2020); L7 suggested providing more gamified resources such as those created with Quizlet and Kahoot to enable independent study in a motivating way.

6.3 Teacher training

ERT had an immediate effect on both teachers and learners and the former struggled, almost from one day to the next, to a transition that, for the teachers, "required quickly redesigning what they had prepared in advance for the teaching semester; plans for what once would shape face-to-face classroom activity of teachers and students at certain allocated spaces and times now required transition to incorporate tools, tasks and social arrangements in an online environment" (Green, Burrow and Carvalho 2020, 908). The didactic focus over the ERT period was, as a result, on building technological competence rather than on learning itself. The time has now come, however, to provide learning-centered training for teachers, to enable them to take advantage of the affordances of both the online and onsite contexts. If teaching, and consequently learning design is to be effective, it must be developed in a principled planned

[11] SkELL (Sketch Engine for Language Learning) is a corpus-based tool providing information on language use. Available online at skell.sketchengine.eu

manner (Tomlinson 2003, as exemplified by Stein and Graham [2020] through backward design). However, challenges may stem from institutional constraints or teachers' unwillingness to put new paradigms into practice, unless reflection on own bias (e.g., on what is believed to be most effective) is also fostered.

6.4 Time and distance issues

Synchronous streamed lessons were seen as being effective by our participants and despite the drive to return to onsite lessons it may be beneficial for specific groups (where geographical location or disability impede travel for instance) to continue to provide streamed lessons. Classes scheduled early in the day may also benefit from online delivery.

7. Conclusion

When asking students and teachers to reflect on the positive aspects of the ERT experience and what they considered to be beneficial and worth integrating into teaching in the future, the participants in the study might have been expected to refer to specific digital tools or teaching materials, tasks and activities. This, however, was not the most salient aspect of the findings. Each individual interviewed, whether they were learners or teachers, after the abrupt shift into the unfamiliar environment of ERT used the experience as a benchmark to highlight aspects of the blended experience that they deemed to be effective or not. This pilot study cannot be generalized but the findings are invaluable in our local context for the development of potential language learning design. Although other contexts may differ, we highlighted how interviews may aid subsequent assessment of students' and teachers' needs— which could be further developed into context-driven quantitative instruments. If we look to the future, socialization is an area that must be stressed. Resources and tools that have been used in ERT with differing degrees of success, such as video recordings, can be reintroduced in more principled ways. Independent study is something that would benefit from support and teacher guidance so that learners have the opportunity to explore multiple approaches. Teachers, on the other hand, also require institutional support, and specific training may go a long way to aid their professional development. At the same time, agency, both in teachers and learners, cannot be ignored. Respecting the skillset and knowledge of each teacher and learner in order to build on it formatively may ultimately lead to the co-construction and development of knowledge and communicative competence.

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Appendix

Students	Teachers
1. Essentials	
– Independent study – Teacher availability and communication – Video management (teachers) – Exams – Teaching strategies – Video management (learners)	– Relationship – Communicative Approach – Lesson planning – Lifelong learning
2. Controversies	
– Tradition – Time and place – Teaching strategies – Video related problems – Logistics – Health and self-care – Tools – Technical problems	– Tradition – Time – Quality – Focus – Feedback
3. Positive aspects of ERT	
– Synchronous – Asynchronous – Effective teaching – Time saving	– Innovation – Effectiveness – Convenience
4. Emergent aspects	
– Interaction online – Identity – Interaction onsite – Flexibility	– Democracy – Human dimension – Inclusion – Flexibility – Sense of community