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## EFL educators in the COVID-19 era: Examining the case of Greece

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In early 2020, the abrupt global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) in all fields of education. This abrupt transition to online teaching and learning shocked most language educators. Practitioners and researchers around the globe raised questions and concerns as a result of the rapid planning and implementation. In this study, which forms part of an international survey on educators' attitudes and online teaching activities during the pandemic, we look into EFL instructors' behaviours within the Greek educational system. More specifically, the article presents EFL educators' attitudes towards online learning and their reported feelings of confidence and satisfaction when facing the challenges of converting their face-to-face (F2F) courses into online ones during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of our study, we were able to look into the psychological and instructional difficulties the Greek ELT community experienced when reimagining synchronous and asynchronous teaching in a digital environment. Finally, the article discusses the impact and some of the lessons learned from this national experience.

**Key words:** Language Education; Emergency Remote Teaching; Teaching Online; Digital Literacies; Teacher Education; COVID-19

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### 1. Introduction

In the week ending December 31, 2019, Wuhan health authority reported 27 pneumonia cases of an unknown aetiology (Committee W.C.H., 2019). As a result of medical investigations, this pneumonia has been identified as Coronavirus pandemic (2019-nCoV) or COVID-19. In response to the abrupt global outbreak of the pandemic in late 2019-early 2020, Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) was implemented in all fields of education. Globally, educational authorities closed schools almost instantly to prevent the spread of the disease, a situation that prompted UNESCO to call on countries to ensure that learning takes place in both formal and informal settings. As a result of the abrupt switch from in-person instruction to online instruction, a rapid introduction to online tools alongside the adaptation of teaching methods was required by most language educators (Giannikas *et al.*, 2022).

This was also the case in Greece. After 89 confirmed cases and no deaths, the government, in collaboration with the Greek National Health Organisation, suspended face-to-face instruction nationwide on March 10th, 2020 (<https://eody.gov.gr/en/>). As stated by the Ministry of Education and

Religious Affairs, this was an opportunity to present and apply pending reforms related to digital knowledge and skills (<http://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com>). However, this was far from a simple task, mainly due to a longstanding legacy of a financial crisis. In accordance with the OECD (data based on the 2018 PISA), the country's poor finances have delayed necessary investments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and have deepened poverty. More specifically, OECD has published that in Greek schools there are one in five students without access to computers and one in ten without internet access. The lack of technological resources did not stop there. According to the OECD data, more than 1 in 3 students worked with educators who were unable to incorporate digital devices into their classrooms due to an insufficient amount of equipment or a lack of pedagogical skills. A result of these circumstances there was recognition by head teachers that an effective online learning support platform was not possible. Given the little time the Greek Ministry had at their disposal in March 2020, they issued instructions for the use of both asynchronous and synchronous teaching.

Following the UNESCO guidelines (<https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com>), asynchronous teaching (non-real-time one) became compulsory, with every teacher (of all disciplines) required to upload lessons and assignments. Asynchronous learning was applied with:

- interactive textbooks (<http://ebooks.edu.gr/new/>) and other learning materials (<http://photodentro.edu.gr/aggregator/>) as well as digital lesson plans (<http://aesop.iep.edu.gr/>); and
- two digital education platforms, ([https://auth.e-me.edu.gr/en\\_US](https://auth.e-me.edu.gr/en_US)) and (<https://eclass.sch.gr/>), for students and teachers.

Synchronous (real-time teaching) became mandatory only for students in the final year of high school and was supported through:

- Webex services (<https://youtu.be/qQlx91b3WMk>),
- the national School Network platform (<http://lessons.sch.gr/>) that uses the Big Blue Button open software.

The rapid planning and implementation of emergency remote teaching has raised issues and questions among practitioners and researchers worldwide. In the context of a larger international study, this article brings under the spotlight the field of primary and secondary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Greece and examines issues pertinent in teacher education through adaptive systems viewed from the perspective of complexity and unpredictability. In particular, this article focuses on Greek EFL educators' attitudes towards online learning and their perceived feelings of confidence and satisfaction when facing the challenges of converting their face-to-face (F2F) courses into online ones during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our findings reveal the difficulties encountered by the Greek English Language Teaching (ELT) community in reimagining synchronous and asynchronous teaching in the digital era, as well as the lessons learned from this national emergency remote teaching experience.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Emergency Remote Teaching vs. Online Education

In emergency remote teaching (ERT), instructional delivery is abruptly switched to online mode after an immense catastrophe or crisis occurs, a situation that is very different from the delivery of courses, which are initially designed and intended to be delivered from a distance (Mohammed, 2022). The literature associates ERT with poor online teaching infrastructure and teacher inexperience (Zhang *et al.*, 2020), as well as a lack of teacher competency in utilising digital instructional formats (Huber & Helm, 2020). However, the vast majority of language educators have been tempted to associate online education with ERT. Online education is known to carry a stigma of being of lower quality than face-

to face (F2F) learning, despite research studies showing otherwise. Using a variety of educational tasks, it offers students the opportunity to customise their learning according to their own way of learning, rather than following a tactical pre-organized learning programme, allowing them to learn at their own pace (Thoms & Eryilmaz, 2014).

The rushed transfer to online learning by so many educational institutions could validate the perception of online education as being the weak option, when in truth it is impossible to make a smooth transition in the middle of a pandemic (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hodges *et al.*, 2020). A longer period of time was needed for educators and institutions to prepare for ERT. The academic community and educators have, however, struggled to develop online learning platforms due to the lack of advanced technology, experience, and training (Mohammed, 2022). Additionally, a suitable environment is necessary for efficient delivery of remote teaching. At this point, it would be unfair to place online distance education and ERT in the same equation as the approach, circumstances and preparation process differ immensely. In ERT, digital tools are utilised to deliver curriculum that would normally be delivered in a blended learning environment or through face-to-face interaction. Mohammed (2022) conclude that once the crisis subsides, instructional delivery will return to its original format.

## **2.2. The Teachers' Perspective and Preparedness**

Previous studies have shown that studies on teaching approaches to assist with social distancing in schools have concentrated on extended school closures; however, according to Uscher-Pines *et al.* (2018) little attention was ever paid to the procedure and feasibility of these interventions. Since teachers played a crucial role in sustaining the educational ecosystem during the initial global lockdown, it has become imperative to understand the situation from their perspective. Nonetheless, it has been observed that it was teachers' fear of using digital tools that inhibited them (Carrier & Nye, 2017 cited in Giannikas *et al.*, 2022).

As noted by the OECD (2020), COVID-19 struck at a time when participating education systems were not ready for the world of digital learning, as revealed by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) implemented by the OECD in 2018. More specifically, data indicated that shortages or inadequacy of digital technology hindered learning (OECD, 2019). Digital skills have proved to be vital given the instant global shift towards online teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown. Before the crisis, teachers reported a need for training in the use of ICT for teaching. In particular, 18% on average cited this as a high training need, coming in second only to teaching students with learning differences (OECD, 2019). Despite its benefits, the mere presence of technology cannot lead to students' progress (Li & Ma, 2010) since teacher education plays a defining role (Giannikas *et al.*, 2022).

Moore-Adams *et al.* (2016) argue that high quality online teachers are necessary in order to meet the needs of online language learners. Although this is the case, teachers are frequently asked to assume online teaching roles without any formal training, and are expected to learn as they teach through brief training sessions or workshops (Rice & Dawley, 2009). Due to these learning experiences, language teachers have been unable to develop effective online teaching techniques (Archambault, 2011). Additionally, the introduction of online instruction training has been slow in pre-service teacher education programs. According to Carrillo and Flores (2020), well-established teacher education in online learning is in immediate need and must go beyond emergency online practices, where the particularities of digital pedagogy and its implications should be emphasised. Carrillo and Flores also argue that there is a need to go beyond the instrumental approach when it comes to online teaching and learning.

Back in 2007, Watson claimed that most educators and policymakers still lacked a basic understanding of how online education programs worked, what an online course should look like, and most importantly, how students can learn online. Unfortunately, this has not changed in the COVID-19 era. The necessity of integrating preparedness content into basic teacher education has been emphasised. Preparedness has become an important goal of education for young learners in many countries (Cabilao-Valencia *et al.*, 2018). However, due to the unclear nature of preparedness in this context, it is unclear if, in situations such as disasters, diseases, and emergencies, preparedness is the same. As we move into the new normal post-COVID-19, goals such as this will need to be contextualised within the possibility of pandemics that will lead to preparedness for the new digital age.

### 2.3 The Greek ELT Context

Before moving into presenting and interpreting research findings, it is necessary at this point that the reader be introduced to the ELT context in Greece, as it can be considered complex. Practitioners are required to have graduated from a Greek or foreign university with a degree in English Language and Literature. Obtaining a university degree allows for their appointment in primary and secondary state schools. According to Alexiou & Mattheoudakis (2011), English teachers in the specific context (and beyond), in addition to being proficient in the language they teach, must be familiar with various teaching methods; nonetheless, the training of language teachers is considered to be overseen at Greek universities (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2011). Greek state schools began offering EFL in the first and second grade in 2010 in line with EU recommendations regarding language learning (Karavas, 2014), which is continued throughout their primary and secondary education. According to Sifakis and Sougari (2003), the curriculum reveals that it embraces learner-centred approaches, with an emphasis on technology-related issues. More specifically, Dendrinou *et al.* (1997, p. 65) draw attention to instances where students are referred to as 'citizens of a technologically advanced Europe'. Additionally, Dendrinou *et al.* (1997) highlight the necessity for a national curriculum of Foreign Languages that would help 'the development of the skills required for the use of technological tools in order to achieve particular learning and utilisation goals' (p. 68).

As outlined by Bray (2003), many students also take private language lessons alongside their state school language classes, commonly referred to as supplementary private tuition. In response to this, there is a flourishing market in the private sector for students as young as eight years old to learn foreign languages. Such an escalation of language studies will ultimately allow students to take English language exams and obtain a certificate (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2011; Tsagari, 2009). Even so, the quality of ELT exposure students receive outside of the state school system varies widely depending on the socioeconomic situation of their parents (Mattheoudakis & Alexiou, 2009). Overall, private language schools prepare students for high-stakes exams administered by national or international examination bodies (Tsagari, 2009). Greeks are not the only ones who practise private language education. Private education is prevalent in many countries around the world (Tsagari & Giannikas, 2018, 2021). According to Bray's (2011) study, private tutoring costs European families astounding amounts of capital every year, as displayed in Table 1.

Country	Year of Research	Costs (€ - million)
Austria	2010	126
Cyprus	2008	111.2
Germany	2010	942
Greece	2008	952.6
Italy	2010	420
Romania	2010	300
Spain	2010	450

Table 1. Shadow education expenditures (Bray, 2011, p. 46)

The following sections present a selection of findings based on data gathered from primary and secondary ELT education professionals of the private and public sector all over Greece in an attempt to explore their online teaching experiences and elaborate on the different challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3. Research Methodology

The present study aims to fill an important gap and provide suggestions for teacher education programs by presenting research findings regarding EFL educators' struggles with remote emergency teaching, not only because of technical issues, which are in no case undermined, but because teacher education and policy makers have fallen short and have not equipped practitioners with a Plan B. This work is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What has been the Greek EFL teachers' reaction to the change from face-to-face to online classes?
- (2) Which are the EFL teachers' in Greece perceived training needs in online teaching and were such needs catered for by the Educational Leadership of the country during the pandemic?

In order to investigate EFL educators' attitudes and familiarity with online learning, a detailed questionnaire was created by the authors of the present paper and administered at a national and international level using electronic means from 1<sup>st</sup> April till 30<sup>th</sup> May 2020 (Appendix 1). Given the wealth of collected data, a selection of findings from Cypriot EFL teachers was presented in January 2022 in a separate paper by Giannikas, Tzagari and Liontou. An adaptation of the present questionnaire was also used by Karavas and Liontou in a study investigating university students' experiences from a blended delivery course model in Greece (Karavas & Liontou, 2022: 98). In accord with the purposes of the present study, teachers were asked to fill out the questionnaire in order to share information about their online teaching experiences prior to and during the pandemic (rated on a 5-point Likert scale) and describe their views on online versus face-to-face lessons, perceptions of students' personal involvement, perceived positive and negative aspects of online teaching practices, training needs, etc., as well as their attitudes towards online lessons (level of satisfaction, engagement, motivation, etc.). The questionnaire contained the following Sections: A) Demographic Information, B) Online Teaching, C) Resources and Feedback, D) Transition from Onsite to Online Teaching, E) Online Support, F) Student Response, and G) Teacher Training Needs. By email, the questionnaire reached a wide audience, with an expected completion time of about 30 minutes. A link to the online questionnaire and information about the study were included in the email sent to individual respondents.

The questionnaire was piloted with six EFL teachers who provided feedback as regards the extent to which the statements: 1) appeared reasonable for gathering the intended information; 2) were relevant to the issue and 3) implied what the intended outcome was for the specific data collection tool. The high internal reliability of the research instrument was further attested through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient estimate ( $\alpha=0.87$ ).

#### 4. Research Findings and Discussion

The total number of participants in the present survey was 251 EFL teachers located all over Greece, the vast majority of whom (91%) were female. Almost half of the participants worked in the public sector (53%) while (46%) were employed in private schools or language institutions. All participants had an official EFL teaching licence while half of them (52%) were holders of an M.A. degree in TEFL or a relevant field. A similar percentage of respondents worked in primary or secondary schools (26% per educational context) with the remaining participants holding a position in a language school (24%), a higher education institution (8%) or offering lessons as freelance teachers (12%). Finally, as regards basic demographic information of our sample, the great majority of respondents had been teaching English as a foreign language for 11-20 years (41%) while a significant percentage (35%) had more than 20 years of teaching experience.

Once individuals' profiles were determined, data were subjected to descriptive data analysis using SPSS 28.0 software. A frequency distribution was produced after eliminating missing data and presenting all percentages as valid percentages. According to Wiersma (2008: 198), survey results frequently contain this kind of descriptive data because it allows the researcher to explore the central tendency of responses to each question, while the spread out of responses from that centre can also be explained in basic terms. Given the relatively short length of this paper and the extensive amount of information concerning each level of the rating scale (1-5), it was decided to include a selection of research findings that focused on the extremes of the scale, i.e. Strongly disagree/Disagree (1-2) vs. Agree/Strongly agree (4-5) or Never/Rarely (1-2) vs. Very often/Always (4-5).

To begin with, in relation to the first part of the questionnaire in which participants were asked to indicate their degree of familiarity with online teaching practices before the pandemic and rate their perceived level of confidence as regards their online teaching abilities (as shown below in Chart 1), 89.2% of the respondents stated that they had never (62%) or almost never (27%) taught online before the COVID-19 pandemic while half of them (51%) had received no training before their shift to emergency remote teaching (as can be seen in Chart 2).

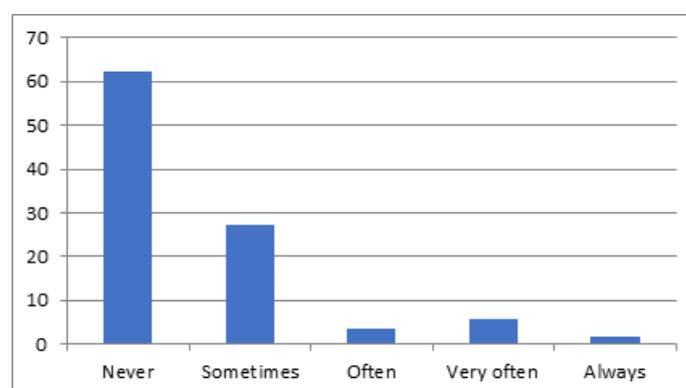


Chart 1: EFL teachers' experience with online teaching before COVID-19

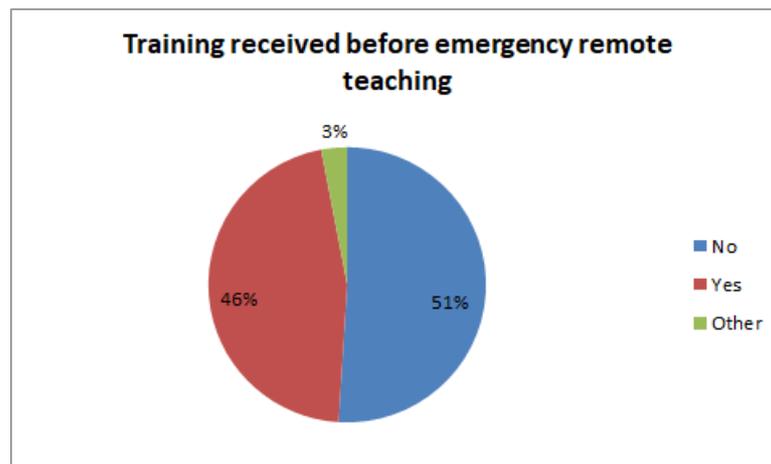


Chart 2: Training received by EFL teachers before shifting to emergency remote teaching

It is worth highlighting at this point that, as shown in Chart 3, the type of training EFL teachers reported receiving consisted mainly of material for individual training (i.e., having access to online seminars, instructional videos, etc.) (39%), while a limited percentage of them received training through their institution (19%) or by professional teacher trainers (14%) and 15% even resorted to informal training provided by colleagues or friends. Therefore, it might be assumed that despite EFL teachers' willingness to adjust to the new teaching conditions, their readiness had to be gauged and appropriately supported as remote teaching had not been an integral part of their teaching experiences before the pandemic breakout.

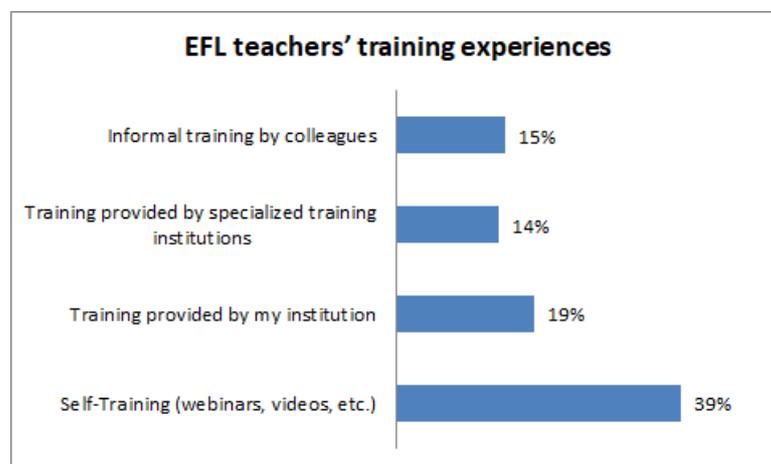


Chart 3: EFL teachers' training experiences on the use of digital tools for learning purposes

In order to explore participants' level of confidence when teaching online, their perceived online teaching abilities were investigated. It is worth bearing in mind that the great majority of respondents were asked to offer a combination of synchronous and asynchronous sessions (58%), while a limited percentage of them relied exclusively on synchronous teaching (16%) or asynchronous one (25%). As can be seen in Chart 4, most teachers expressed a high degree of confidence regarding their ability to utilise digital tools to enhance textbook-based content (Confident/Very Confident: 60%) as well as the ability to use different digital tools while teaching. (Confident/Very Confident: 52%), which could be interpreted as an indication of their familiarity with different digital tools before the pandemic (Chart 5).

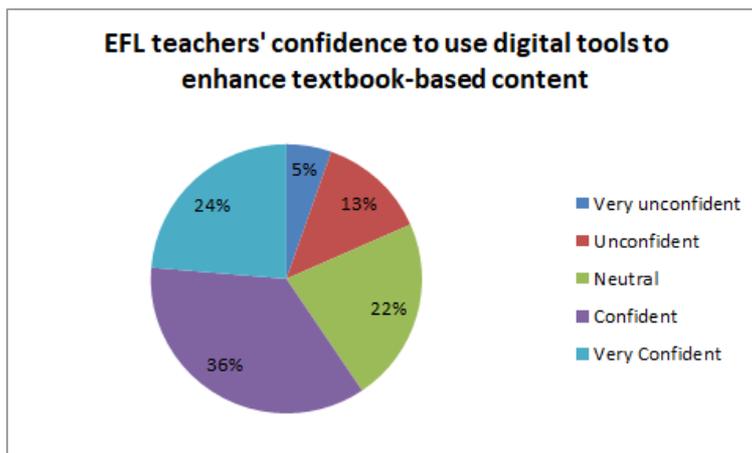


Chart 4: Confidence of EFL teachers in using digital tools to enhance textbook-based content

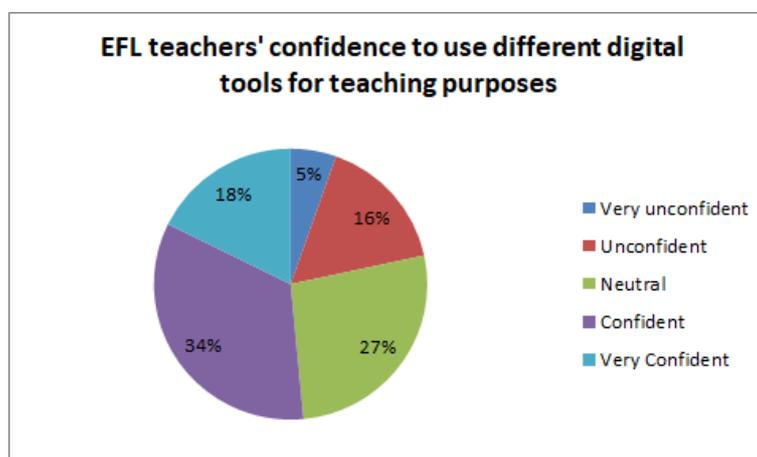


Chart 5: Confidence of EFL teachers in using digital tools

Nevertheless, such a familiarity was not treated as a prerequisite for effective online instruction since most teachers expressed their uncertainty (28%) or even lack of confidence (Unconfident/Very unconfident: 25%) when it came to implementing the existing curriculum online (Chart 6).

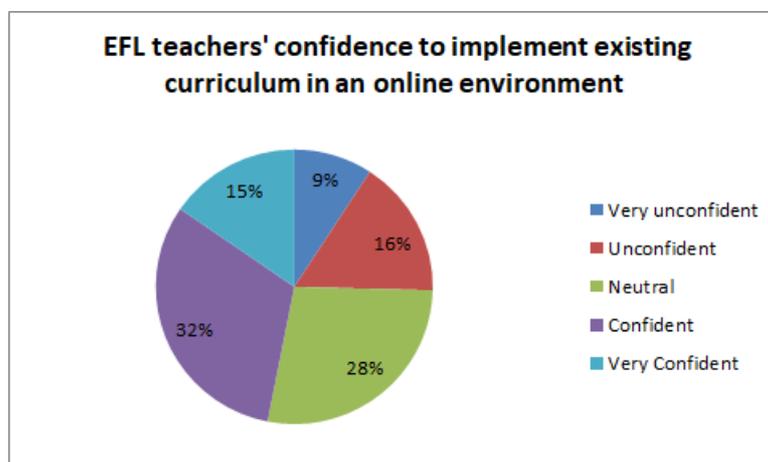


Chart 6: Online implementation of existing curriculum by EFL teachers

Moreover, as shown in Chart 7, 31% of respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the extent to which they could use different methods of online teaching including their lack of ability (34%) or limited confidence (31%) in assisting their students acquire new skills and knowledge in digital technology (Chart 8).

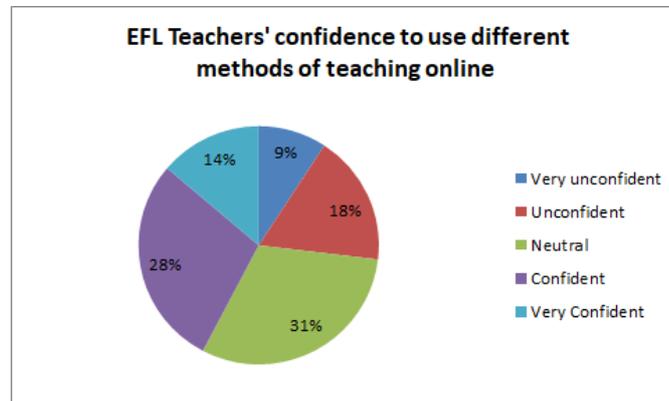


Chart 7: EFL teachers' confidence to use different online teaching methods

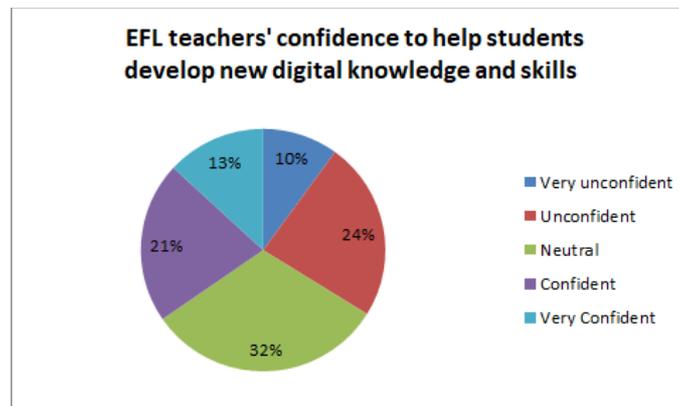


Chart 8: Enhancing EFL students' digital skills

Furthermore, as can be seen in Charts 9 and 10 below, the great majority of teachers acknowledged either their lack of confidence (Very unconfident/Unconfident: 44%) to encourage online cooperation between students or to modify instruction using online assessment techniques (Very unconfident/Unconfident: 36%).

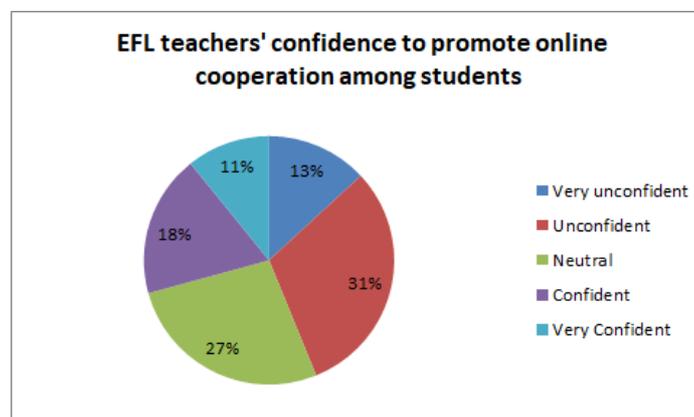


Chart 9: Promoting online cooperation among EFL students

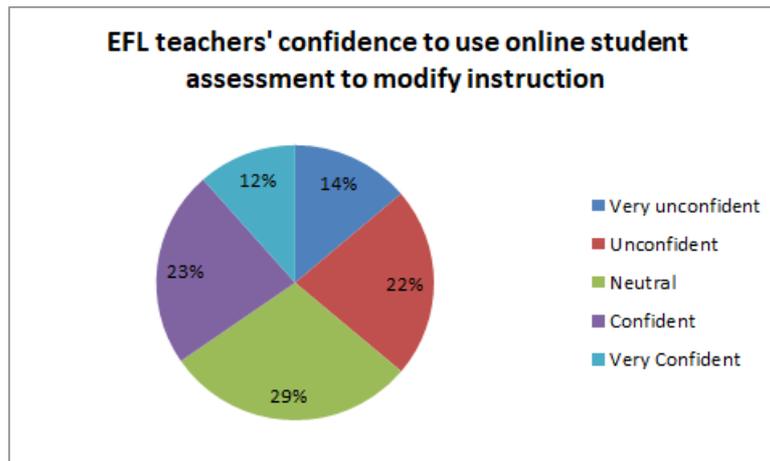


Chart 10: Using online student assessment to modify instruction

Such lack of confidence in trying out more interactive ways of teaching and assessing students while teaching online was further confirmed by EFL teachers' responses in relation to assigned online activities, the great majority of whom referred to independent study (83%) or self-assessment (65%), followed by a limited percentage of group work (28%), pair work (22%) or peer assessment (20%) as shown in Chart 11. Based on the above findings, it could be argued that, despite EFL teachers' overall knowledge of digital tools, their ability to use them for pedagogical purposes was limited or remained rather unexplored while the high percentage of expressed uncertainty with reference to different methods of online instruction could be an indicator of respondents' lack of familiarity with synchronous and asynchronous courses or even their reluctance to incorporate new methods in their everyday teaching practices.

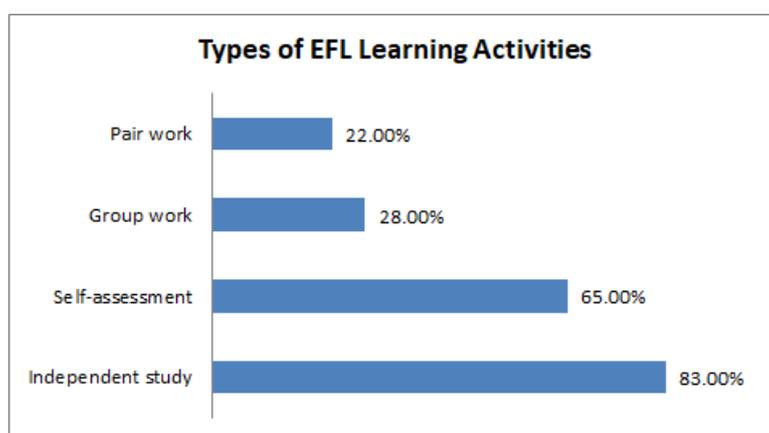


Chart 11: Types of EFL learning activities assigned during COVID-19

In the second section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to rate how satisfied they felt as regards their online teaching practices (Chart 12) and degree of guidance and support provided to them (Chart 13) along with equipment provision (Chart 14). Descriptive data analysis revealed that for a significant percentage of participants online teaching was not a positive experience (Very unsatisfied/Neutral: 64%) which could be partly attributed to the fact that the great majority of educators were not provided neither with the necessary guidance and support (Very unsatisfied/Unsatisfied: 50%) nor with the appropriate equipment (Very unsatisfied/Unsatisfied: 75%). Furthermore, such emotions could be partly explained by the emotional pressure and sense of

uncertainty experienced by most individuals during the pandemic and the limited or non-existent experience that EFL teachers had with online teaching practices prior to the pandemic.

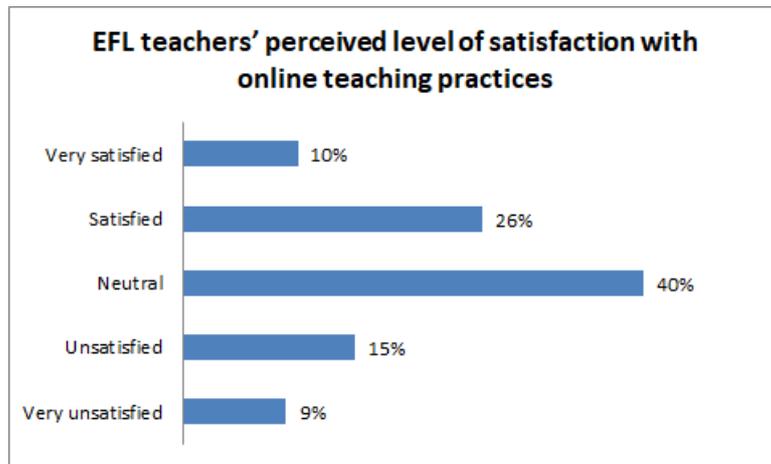


Chart 12: Online teaching practices during COVID-19

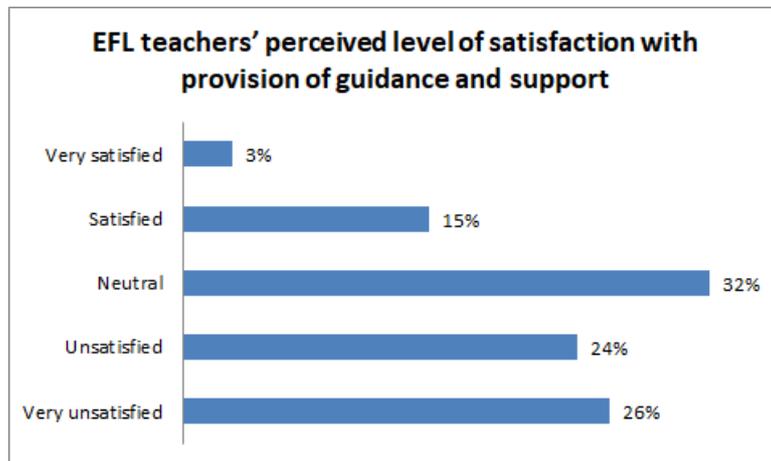


Chart 13: EFL Teachers' perception of guidance and support during COVID-19

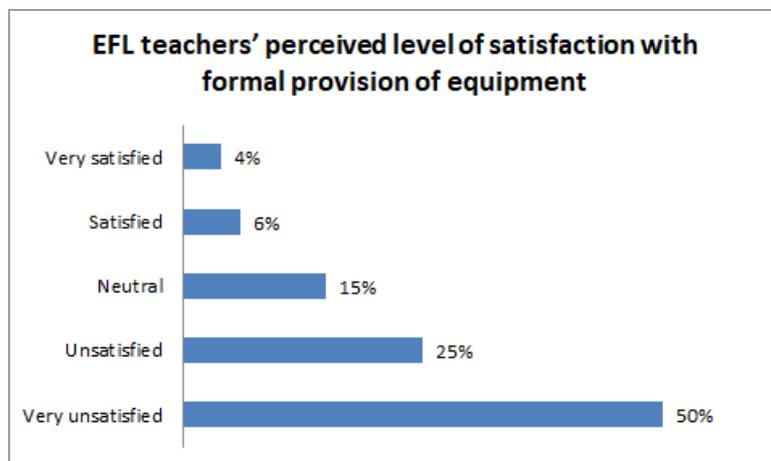


Chart 14: Formal provision of equipment during COVID-19

Despite such an expression of negative emotions, a high percentage of EFL teachers (72%) expressed a positive attitude towards using some of the online resources when returning to their face-to-face lessons and stressed the need for more professional training in online teaching practices (70%). As can be seen in Chart 15 below, when asked to identify their training needs in order of priority, there was a strong preference among participants for feasible and realistic suggestions on techniques appropriate when teaching online (75%), followed by practical demonstrations on transforming an onsite lesson into an online one from a pedagogical perspective (66%), the practical aspects of online assessment (65%), technical expertise in using different tools (55%), courses offered online on specific teaching techniques (51%), and participation in professional development communities or events (39%).

These findings could be treated as an indication of EFL teachers' willingness to do their best to teach effectively during the pandemic, despite feeling more confident and competent when having face-to-face contact with their students.

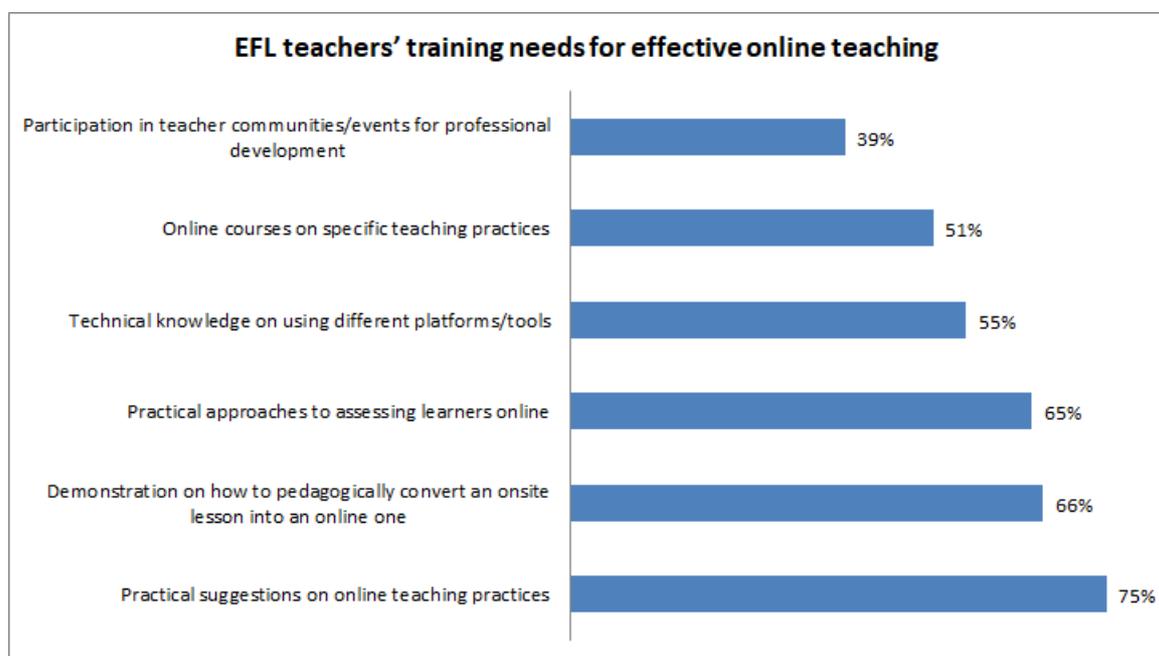


Chart 15: EFL teachers' training needs for effective online teaching

There is no doubt that nearly every aspect of our society was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, thus everyone had to adapt and learn how to juggle their personal and professional lives in a new way. This article presented a selection of the results of our inquiry on how English language teachers in Greece during the COVID-19 school closures in March 2020 adapted to online instruction. Our research questions focused on how EFL teachers in all areas of education dealt with difficulties in these uncharted areas and what variables might explain how they did so. Based on their responses, our participants provided insightful information that may be utilised to inform future training sessions in various teaching disciplines. These insights can help participants identify their online teaching practices' areas of strength and weakness.

Data collected in this survey could be considered to be a fairly accurate representation of the reality of language instructors as regards their actions to transfer their teaching online, the training shortages and infrastructure issues they faced alongside the experienced difficulty of staying afloat while developing the necessary skills for students to be digitally literate. More specifically, according to the descriptive data analysis, teachers expressed confidence when it came to using digital tools for personal purposes, but hesitation when it came to utilising them for pedagogical purposes, including

work in groups, provision of feedback, online assessments, and so on. The findings further indicated that despite the fact that a majority of teachers held postgraduate degrees, indicating their high level of qualification, they were hampered by their inability to use technology and digital tools effectively for teaching purposes, unaware of the fact that the key difference for success with digital learning is identifying the digital competencies that teachers need and providing training to help them acquire those competencies. (Carrier & Nye, 2017, p. 209 cited in Giannikas *et al.*, 2022). As a result of the lack of training, the transfer from face-to-face to online teaching was limited, and teachers lost self-confidence and even disbelieved in the process and results of their new professional norm. Teachers stated that they were familiar with a range of digital tools, but were hesitant when it came to using them for teaching purposes within a socially meaningful, communicative context.

It is worth highlighting at this point that the social and communicative elements of any language lesson, in whatever form, are not only vital in a language classroom, but are also essential when humans are isolated and communication is restricted. As teachers lacked understanding of what teaching approaches would work best in a remote learning environment to foster student collaboration, their students' communication and collaboration was compromised. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the lack of available resources also caused distress among EFL teachers, as most of the respondents believed that using EFL websites and creating their own materials was necessary in order to work online, considering this pedagogical practice to be consistent with remote teaching. Confusion existed regarding textbooks and their application to online environments. It may be because of this confusion that most EFL teachers turned to online resources. Nevertheless, such a reaction can be considered a positive outcome, since most teachers indicated that they would use these resources when returning to face-to-face instruction.

Based on the findings of the present study, we can conclude that, when rushed into online training, we cannot expect teachers to immediately alter their teaching strategies, materials, or even pedagogical viewpoints. "Normal" no longer exists. To completely avoid turmoil would be unfeasible. However, as the facts have shown, in order for teachers to obtain the confidence they need to function in a world that is always changing, they must receive the proper training and become digitally literate. Teachers, administrators and other education support workers may have their job streams changed as they learn and test out these new approaches. These changes don't have to be seen negatively because they might inspire hope that the education sector is moving in the right direction aiming for something more solid and of a high-quality. Although the findings of this survey indicate that Greek EFL educators understood that teaching online and onsite differs significantly, it should be stated that online education also adheres to the principles of good quality education and, thus, there is no fundamental difference between the teaching approaches in question.

## 6. Conclusion

It appears from the findings of this study that there is a need for a greater amount of training and knowledge regarding teachers' digital literacy in Greece in order to ensure a smooth transition to the new norm in language education. Due to the lack of or limited digital literacy competence among practitioners within the Greek context, doubts are raised about the effectiveness of remote/online teaching functions when they are handled in the manner that they were during the COVID-19 crisis. In addition to influencing the way educational leaders support practitioners and evaluate their online teaching, the research described above sheds light on the present state of teaching in Greece, indicating an inability to prepare beyond what is comfortable and an inability to understand digital literacy among teachers. Moreover, teacher educators, policy makers, and teachers alike should clarify objectives related to online learning and address relevant competencies required for effective use of digital tools during further partial closures and reopenings of schools. When faced with unprecedented challenges such as the lockdown in 2020, it is important to consider specific factors in the areas of teacher competence, digital literacy, and teacher education. In addition, as indicated by

the findings of the present study, pre- and in-service teacher training programs are needed to develop teachers' online teaching competencies. The chance for teacher education cannot be missed when it comes to preparing practitioners for the new digital era.

Although this study reveals promising results, it poses a number of challenges and limitations that we hope will be overcome in future studies. Having said that, it is worth acknowledging the fact that since EFL teachers made their own interpretations to questionnaire items and reported their attitudes and beliefs to the best of their conscious knowledge, we must be wary of the limitations of opinion data. As in other questionnaire-based studies, at best, findings indicate trends in perceived remote teaching attitudes and abilities. It should also be noted that other attitudes that were not included in the questionnaire might have been expressed, or even that the reported ones might have been experienced more or less often than participants indicated. Having said that, the data analysis and interpretation processes were carried out bearing in mind the inherent limitations of the instrument and the difficulties some respondents may have had "in understanding the questions and in forming an 'inner picture' of their own answers" (Oppenheim, 2001, p. 121). On the other hand, the fact that a large number of responses were collected, following a standardised set of procedures, could add to the validity of the present findings. In other words, given the high internal reliability of the research instrument that was further attested through its Cronbach's Alpha coefficient estimates ( $\alpha=0.87$ ), the collected data could be considered as reflective of the general kind of challenges, feelings of dissatisfaction and uncertainty EFL educators experienced while delivering synchronous and asynchronous lessons during the first phase of the pandemic.

Schools' failure to respond to unforeseen circumstances and the rushed remote teaching solution has made it imperative for teacher education to be aligned with all the new requirements of the digital era. To equip language educators with the confidence and effectiveness they need, we need to focus on preparation, digital awareness, and inclusive training processes. In order to achieve this change, teacher education must shift from a technical paradigm to a more emancipatory underpinning philosophy. As a community, we learned valuable lessons during the pandemic, and we need to leverage these lessons to prepare teachers for future crises. Teachers in Greece and throughout the world can begin to embrace the constructs mentioned in this paper by investing in skill-based programs in order to tackle any future crisis. COVID-19 has disrupted the lives and safety of millions while also drawing attention to systemic inequalities that must be addressed. However, we must not forget that the experience of the pandemic has the potential to bind all nations together or to fragment them.

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## Appendix 1

1<sup>st</sup> April till 30<sup>th</sup> May 2020

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfAWizub856QxCX\\_k7bjBKwBKE5UMat5cfYKdxJ2-loaB2CmQ/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfAWizub856QxCX_k7bjBKwBKE5UMat5cfYKdxJ2-loaB2CmQ/viewform?usp=sf_link)

### Language Educators Working Online during the COVID-19 Pandemic

This survey is part of an international project intended for language teachers, teacher trainers and university lecturers who were obliged to move from face-to-face teaching to teaching online. This research project aims to gain understanding of whether and to what extent language educators from various institutions and sectors felt ready to move to online teaching, given COVID-19 and gauge their training needs. Your responses will be confidential. If you choose to supply your email address for further participation, your responses will be de-identified for any publication or dissemination purposes. You can withdraw your data at any time by contacting XXX at XXX.

\*Please note:

- The survey will only take about 15 minutes to complete.
  - You will be asked questions about your teaching experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.
    - You can withdraw at any time if you are not comfortable answering any of the questions.
    - Your participation will remain completely anonymous.
    - The data collected will be analyzed by the researchers mentioned below and only for research purposes related to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Please feel free to share this questionnaire with your colleagues.  
We appreciate your input and time spent responding to the survey questions.  
The researchers,  
Dina Tsagari (OsloMet, Norway), Jenny Liontou (NKUA, Greece) & Christina Giannikas (CUT, Cyprus)

#### A. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

In this first section, we would like to know more about you and your teaching background.

1. How do you identify your gender?\*
- Female
  - Male
  - Prefer not to say
2. Which country are you working in now?\*
- 
3. Which sector of education do you work for?\*
- Private
  - Public
4. Where do you work?\*
- Primary school
  - Secondary school
  - Higher/Further education
  - Language school/institution
  - I am a freelance teacher
  - I am a freelance teacher trainer
  - Other:
- 5a. What language do you teach/train teachers in?\*
- English
  - French
  - German
  - Spanish
  - Italian



- Chinese
- Greek
- Other:

5b. You are teaching/training in this language as\*

- First language
- Second/Foreign language
- Third/Multiple language
- Language for Academic/Special Purposes
- Other:

6. How long have you been teaching/training in this language?\*

- Less than two years
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- More than 20 years

7. What is your highest qualification/certification?\*

- BA
- CELTA Certified
- DELTA Certified
- PGCE (Qualified Teacher Status)
- C2 Language Qualification
- MA/MSc
- PhD
- Other:

8a. Have you ever taught online before COVID-19?\*

- Always
- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

8b. Have you ever taught blended courses before? ('Blended': combination of online and face-to-face instruction)\*

- Always
- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

9. Have you ever received training on how to teach online?\*

- Yes
- No
- Other:

10. If yes, what kind of training was it? (You can choose more than one answer)

- Self-training (i.e. attending webinars, watching videos, reading online articles, etc.)
- Training provided by my institution
- Training provided by specialised training institutions
- Informal training by colleagues
- Other:

11. Does anyone else at home work/study remotely during the COVID-19 crisis?\*

- Yes
- No

12. What device do you use when working from home? (Choose as many as you use)\*

- Laptop
- Desktop/PC
- Tablet/iPad
- Mobile Phone
- Other:

## B. ONLINE TEACHING

In this section, we would like to know more about your online teaching, the tools and approaches you use.

13. As a result of COVID-19, did you have to move your face-to-face classes to an online platform?\*

- Yes, all of it.
- No, none of it.
- Yes, some of it.

14. What percentage of your teaching do you do online during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please provide a whole number, e.g. 20%, 30%, etc.\*

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15. Which online platform/Learning Management System (LMS) do you use? (Choose as many as you use)\*

- Moodle
- Itslearning
- Canvas
- Blackboard
- Google Classroom
- Microsoft Teams
- Zoom
- Skype
- BigBlueButton
- GotoMeet
- Webex
- Google Meet
- Edmodo
- Messenger
- Padlet
- Wikis
- Email
- Adobe Connect
- Open edX
- Showbie
- AnyMeeting
- Other:

16. To what extent did your school/institution decide that you need to transition your face-to-face courses/classes to an online platform?\*

- It was mandatory.
- It was not mandatory.

17. How many days were you given to prepare your courses/classes to go online?\*

---

18. Please tick what is true for you. You can select more than one option (1: To a lesser extent-5: Very confident).

"I am confident in my ability to..."\*

- implement existing curriculum in an online environment.
- use different methods of teaching online.
- use different digital tools for teaching purposes.

- help students develop new digital knowledge and skills.
- promote online cooperation among students.
- manage online cooperation among students.
- use digital tools to enhance textbook-based content.
- use online student assessment to modify instruction.
- implement existing curriculum in an online environment.
- use different methods of teaching online.
- use different digital tools for teaching purposes.
- help students develop new digital knowledge and skills.
- promote online cooperation among students.
- manage online cooperation among students.
- use digital tools to enhance textbook-based content.
- use online student assessment to modify instruction.

19. Do you encourage your students to engage in any of these activities when you teach online? (Choose as many as you use)\*

- Pair work
- Group work
- Independent study
- Self-assessment
- Peer-assessment
- Other:

20. When teaching online, is your preference synchronous or asynchronous? \*Synchronous (using video-conferencing systems, such as Zoom, Skype, Adobe connect in real-time) \*Asynchronous (using tools such as discussion forums, wikis or e-mail in non-real time)\*

- Synchronous
- Asynchronous
- A combination of the two
- Other:

21a. Have you observed any changes in your practice while teaching online?\*

- Yes
- No

21b. If yes, please give some examples.

---

22a. Does your online teaching practice reflect your classroom teaching practice?\*

- Always
- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

22b. If so, how?

---

23. Do you assign any homework now that you teach online?\*

- Always
- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

24. Do you assign the same amount of homework you assigned before the shift to online teaching?\*



- Always
- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

25. What kind of homework do you normally assign? Please choose as many as you use. "I assign homework from..."\*

- an e-learning platform or learning websites.
- materials I design.
- students' courseware material.
- authentic material, such as newspapers and magazines.
- Other:

### C. RESOURCES AND FEEDBACK

In this section, we would like to know more about the resources and feedback you use in your online teaching.

26. What resources did you use when making the transition to online teaching? (You can choose more than one)\*

- I have used my own ideas.
- I have used resources I found online.
- I have sought advice from someone with more online teaching experience.
- I have been working closely with some of my colleagues.
- I have received official guidelines/training from my institution.
- Other:

27. Did you use online resources before COVID-19?\*

- Always
- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

28a. Do you plan to use any of the online resources when you return to the classroom?\*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

28b. If so, which ones?

---

29. What type of feedback do you give your students when you teach online? (Choose as many as you use)\*

- Grades/points/letter grades
- Oral feedback to individual students
- Written comments to individual students
- Video feedback to individual students
- Collective feedback to groups of students
- Involve students in giving feedback to each other
- Other:

### D. TRANSITION FROM ONSITE TO ONLINE TEACHING

In this section, we would like to find out more about how you handled the shift from onsite to online.

30. Have you had a positive experience in the transition to the online mode of teaching and learning?\*

1: Strongly Disagree .... 5: Strongly Agree

31. The most positive aspects of transitioning to an online mode of teaching have been...\*

---

32. The main challenges of transitioning to online teaching have been...\*

---

33. Briefly describe the most important changes you had to make as you moved to an online mode of teaching.\*

---

#### **E. ONLINE SUPPORT**

In this section, we would like to know more about the readiness of the Educational/Institutional Leadership in your respective countries to respond to online teaching in COVID-19

34. The Educational Leadership (e.g. Ministry of Education/University/Institution) in my context was ready for the education emergency.\*

1: Strongly Disagree .... 5: Strongly Agree

35. The Educational Leadership (e.g. Ministry of Education/University/Institution) has provided detailed guidance and support for online teaching in my education sector.\*

1: Strongly Disagree .... 5: Strongly Agree

36. The Educational Leadership (e.g. Ministry of Education/University/Institution) has provided language educators with the necessary equipment to carry out online teaching.\*

1: Strongly Disagree .... 5: Strongly Agree

37. Please select the statement that is true for you. You can select more than one. "Specifically in our institution..."\*

- a strong vision towards online learning is present.
- professional development for online learning is supported.
- specific objectives of the implementation of online learning have been set.
- the available ICT infrastructure is taken into account.
- attention is paid to the processes of changing to online learning.
- a professional development strategy towards online learning has been adopted.
- very little has been done to support us in shifting to online teaching
- Other:

#### **F. STUDENT RESPONSE**

In this section, we would like to know more about the effects of the educational crisis on your students.

38. My students have the necessary equipment to support themselves during their online learning period (i.e. laptop, quality internet connection, etc.).\*

1: Strongly Disagree .... 5: Strongly Agree

39. My students were willing to attend online lessons.\*

1: Strongly Disagree .... 5: Strongly Agree

40. My students were provided with guidelines on accessing and using online platforms.\*

1: Strongly Disagree .... 5: Strongly Agree

41. My students are familiar with online tools for educational purposes.\*

1: Strongly Disagree .... 5: Strongly Agree

42. My students are as cooperative online as they are in the classroom.\*

1: Strongly Disagree .... 5: Strongly Agree

43. My students have positive learning outcomes via online education.\*

1: Strongly Disagree .... 5: Strongly Agree

#### **G. TEACHER EDUCATION NEEDS**



In this final section, we would like to know about your training needs in online teaching.

44. Please select the statement that is true for you. You can select more than one. "Before COVID-19, I used to..."\*

- attend teacher training webinars.
- search online for ideas to improve my teaching practices.
- participate in eTwinning, Erasmus+ exchange programs.
- participate in teacher communities for professional development in educational technology.
- try out various digital tools for classroom use.
- Other:

45. Do you feel you need training in online teaching?\*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

46. If yes, what do you feel your training needs are? (Choose as many as you need)

- Technical knowledge on using different online platforms.
- Online courses on specific teaching practices.
- Practical approaches to assessing learners online.
- A demonstration on how to pedagogically convert an onsite lesson into an online one.
- Practical suggestions on online teaching practices.
- Participation in teacher communities/events for professional development.
- Other:

47. Who would you prefer to be your trainers?

- Ministry of Education
- Certified trainers
- Head teachers/directors
- University faculty members
- Educational consultants
- Other:

#### FOLLOW-UP PARTICIPATION

We will be doing follow-up interviews to find more about your online experience and how you have or still coping with the challenges of teaching under COVID-19 pandemic.

48. Would you be willing to participate in the follow-up study?\*

- Yes
- No

49. If yes, please provide your email address and we will get in touch with you soon.

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