

The future of language education in the light of Covid

Lessons learned and ways forward

Learners' Voices

A selection of learner comments related to language teaching made in the open section of the May-June 2022 survey responses

Negatives

that while learning online, there was too much work to do every day because teachers required us to upload every task we did, which took too much of our time. Due to this, **most of us lost motivation to learn new words or improve our grammar skills.**

The lack of social interaction, being home alone, **not being able to chat with classmates during lessons, doing speaking activities was really hard**, it was difficult to interact with the teacher to ask questions during explanations.

Another thing we disliked was the fact that most of us felt that our grades were not fair. They became worse and did not reflect our real knowledge.

For some of us **it was difficult to learn vocabulary** because there was not enough communication and real practice

We had to produce voicemail messages, but for a hand-in we just read out what we had written down. **(no spontaneous language production)**

We didn't like **doing so many quizzes, short tests, and exercises, because either they were created with mistakes or the apps, didn't work properly.** Sometimes they stopped working and we had to wait for them to renew. The teacher had to double-check the answers.

generally speaking, the excessive use of breakout rooms was not particularly useful **because they lasted too long and we often ran out of things to say**

long oral and **theoretical explanations without any social and practical experience**

Listening activities were very difficult because it was difficult to hear properly because of poor sound quality and problems with our wifi

Different lessons in digital books were boring for example grammar, not enough information in the digital books

It was not useful to do some tasks which took too much of the lesson time. **For example, doing some listening tasks was a real challenge because of the poor quality of the Internet. Some reading or writing tasks were boring. Besides, some students finished them faster and had to wait for others. The lessons when we had to account for monologues or dialogues were not interesting.**

a lot of tasks, because **we write more than we talk.**

The quality of feedback was a problem. We used to send the teacher our homework but we did not check it in class and we did not know if we did it right. Besides, every task we did in the class had to be uploaded for the teacher to check. Teachers have to trust students.

We didn't enjoy lessons where the teacher did all the talking and didn't ask us any questions so we tended to switch off.

Some of us found some vocabulary practice tasks too easy. When working online, you have to wait for others to do the tasks.

Reading activities were boring when done individually

Studying with other students motivates us much more than remote learning. We like talking with other people face-to-face and working in pairs. We like discussing things in groups. **Also, it's easier to communicate with the teacher.** If we do not do tests well enough, it is easier to consult the teacher and analyze our mistakes, after which we can rewrite tests and get better grades, which was not always possible while learning online.

Especially for our language classes (we study English, German and Spanish) it is very difficult to do listening activities online and it's better when we are in class, **also for improving our pronunciation.** Speaking activities are also really difficult to organise - when we were put in breakout rooms to do a speaking activity we didn't always do the activity but tended to chat to each other.

Some students found group work to be the least useful method. **When the teacher gave tasks that had to be done in TEAMS rooms, some students kept silent if the teacher was not listening. This never happens in the classroom because the teacher sees all groups and makes sure everybody participates.**

Reading out loud during lessons. It was stressful and the quality was bad

Positives

Most of us liked learning English from home because we could be alone in our room and there were no distracting noises. We could concentrate better and give ourselves more time to think.

we agree that **using online platforms helped us develop our speaking and listening use.**

We enjoyed working from home because we received **more individual attention from the teacher.**

The fact that video lessons were shorter than usual, 40 minutes instead of 50/55 and that you had 10 min. break in between lessons

The different resources were more interactive and the lessons were more entertaining

We liked English lessons because we did different activities. We liked getting interesting tasks to do and getting better grades.

Accessibility of resources, **more easily to do research**

Some students mentioned that during the pandemic, they could pay more attention and devote **more time to their personal growth.** They have become more responsible for planning their learning and for their academic results.

Easy communication with classmates and teachers. Through long distance learning, **we'd be able to message our teachers either during class or on breaks, expecting a response almost the minute we sent our question.**

We improved our technical skills e.g. online meetings with teachers after lessons, **we learned how to manage our time, trying to take advantage of every single minute.**

Activities based on visual materials could help students interact

Most of us liked working in groups in TEAMS rooms when we were learning vocabulary and sometimes grammar. We could consult each other.

Information access was easier, the reading resources were very interesting and varied.

Helped to watch videos or movies and then have a discussion.

Meeting people from all over the world online in class. For example native speakers to improve your pronunciation.

we agree that doing mock tests written, spoken and oral online was just as effective as doing them in class.

Reading activities helped us find out more exciting information

Many of us liked grammar lessons when the teacher used many visual aids to explain new grammar or revise what had been learned earlier. It was good that the teacher encouraged us to ask any questions if something was not clear and gave us extra help.

Many students enjoyed learning vocabulary and grammar online. Teachers prepared good presentations to explain new material and many assignments for students to practice using different Microsoft tools, internet websites, apps, etc. KAHOOT and QUIZLET were especially helpful.

We appreciated the visual aids the teacher prepared to help us learn grammar. We also liked it that we did tasks from our textbooks and workbooks instead of having to look at the computer screen all the time.

We liked when teachers offered us active methods, like games, for learning new material, it made us feel more engaged in the lesson

Some of us liked doing individual tasks from the textbook and workbook because we did not have to look at the computer screen and could do them at our own pace. It was good that the tasks had to be uploaded for the teacher to check and that the teacher gave feedback and the next lesson explained things again if she saw that we were making mistakes.

Many liked the way teachers organized learning. It was good not to look all the time at the computer screen because part of lesson time was devoted to learning from textbooks & workbooks. **Some students learned better when the teacher gave tasks for the whole lesson and they could do the tasks at their own pace.** Others liked using Class Note in Microsoft TEAMS as an easy tool to upload their work and get teachers' feedback.

Teachers' Voices

A selection of comments made by teachers in the open section of their May-June 2022 survey responses. The main themes to emerge were:

1. An increasing familiarity with using IT in language teaching and a greater awareness of the possibilities it offers

I'm not afraid to use ICT in my class anymore. It's motivating and fun.

Online practices became more usual, we now use them in everyday teaching much more often than earlier (all possible online tools, internet classrooms, students submitting their work into e.g. Google classroom, posting lectures online for them to be available also for later when things need to be learnt, etc.)

I am more comfortable when using digital tools in my teaching practice, which has a positive effect on my students in terms of their teacher (me) being confident and able to keep up with the changes

I have incorporated blended learning practices more substantially in my teaching. **Students have become familiar with the use of remote learning platforms and the participation in virtual communities of practice and, as a result, they can take better advantage of these tools as learning environments outside the school setting.**

We are also on occasion still using the same distant learning tools, like the online classroom and online exercises. This is because students love them and they are easy and fun to do.

J'utilise beaucoup plus l'outil informatique qu'auparavant et je fonctionne parfois en classe inversée. J'ai mis en place plein de capsules vidéo pour aider les élèves à revoir la leçon mais aussi des tutoriels pour qu'ils puissent utiliser des outils spécifiques comme dictaphone de l'ENT. **Je mets désormais systématiquement les documents supports, les corrigés des exercices et autres enregistrements (de réception + de production - résumé) en ligne.**

I have finally learnt how to properly and efficiently use some of the ICT equipment that I didn't bother to use in the pre-pandemic times, I have learnt to use different platforms (Zoom, MS Teams, exam.net) for my lessons and also different virtual classrooms. I could not say that I had become a techno guru, but to some extent, the pandemic has helped me become aware of these issues.

Pour moi, **la pandémie a été un réel défi...mais aussi une provocation.** C'était un défi car j'ai du changer mes pratiques de classe, même si j'ai utilisé déjà des applications pour enseigner le lexique et la grammaire. **J'ai adapté mes cours aux besoins d'apprentissages de mes apprenants,** en intégrant des applications des jeux interactifs dans les cours. C'était une provocation parce que j'ai investi beaucoup de temps à préparer mes cours, beaucoup plus qu'avant la pandémie. Pour me mettre à jour avec les plateformes, je me suis inscrite à des cours en ligne (gratuits ou payants) sur les applications de Google et Microsoft Teams dans l'apprentissage de langues. **Pour les mettre en place durant les cours en ligne, parfois, j'ai fait appel à mes élèves qui m'ont maintes fois aidé à fabriquer des jeux interactifs sur Kahoot ou d'autres applications. De cette façon-là, on a appris ensemble et ils n'ont pas senti que leur effort n'est pas apprécié.** J'ai adapté également les stratégies d'évaluation, en essayant de privilégier l'évaluation de la production orale et l'interaction durant les cours en ligne.

L'enseignement en ligne a apporté des « bénéfiques » surtout aux professeurs qui voulaient transmettre les informations dans une autre manière. Ils ont dû apprendre savoir manier des outils qu'ils utilisaient rarement jusqu'alors, chercher la meilleure plate-forme en ce qui concerne les

exercices qui mettent mieux en évidence l'information et qui pourraient plaire aux enfants. Tout a été « autre chose » pour les professeurs et les élèves en même temps.

Digital technology, 21st century skills, and emotional intelligence are crucial for the future, and I am very excited at being involved and helping to drive such if I can.

I would like other teachers to be more comfortable when using digital tools, since teachers of foreign languages (of English especially) have shown during pandemics as the first ones to implement them.

J'aimerais voir **plus de TICE dans les exercices tout le temps** , J'ai appris à faire des énoncés plus clairs , imaginer les questions que peuvent poser les élèves .

It is necessary to create the conditions that promote the use of ICT to increase learning effectiveness, to develop students' ability to learn, as well as prepare pupils for life in modern information society.

the use of technology and zoom sessions, **the increased interaction and creativity by teachers** and students alike, the opportunity to share experiences and resources globally, availability of authentic resources. The new opportunities arising from all of this - a silver lining.

During the pandemic, the majority of students spent more time on-line and on various apps as the normally do. This means that they were in more contact with the English language than usual (especially those who do not like computers, phones, etc.). **In general, after coming back from the pandemic, the students' English was much better than it had been. I think it has a lot to do with spending a lot of time on-line.**

Les élèves ont gagné en autonomie , ils savent utiliser les TICE , ont l'habitude de se consulter en dehors des heures de cours entre eux , mais aussi le professeur , ils sont plus connectés.

2. But other teachers pointed out the difficulties and limitations of remote learning and reliance on technology

Beaucoup moins de spontanéité chez les élèves au retour des périodes en distanciel, il a été très difficile de remettre la classe au travail notamment au niveau de l'expression orale.

Some of the pupils weren't really active during remote learning (personal problems, bad internet connection...) and needed extra lessons after returning back to school

This experience was quite stressful and exhausting. **We all spent a lot more time sitting and staring at a computer so we also experienced different kinds of physical pains.**

I learnt how important it is **for children and teachers to have physical contact**. So, in the future I would hope for traditional ways of teaching and learning in person.

I agree with the children. I never ever want to have the whole class online. Especially I do not want the hybrid teaching again (part of the students in class, part of them online). it was exhausting and difficult, **no one got my full attention and there were lots of questions and explanations.**

I learned that **no technology can make up for the live contact that I have with students**, I can easily follow the in the live classroom and "read" them, whereas in on-line classes it is almost impossible to see how they are doing.

Raising awareness why **remote learning is NOT a solution for our children**, especially in the language instruction.

The lesson I have learnt was that **students can be not honest while working at home.**

Most of my classes have between 25 and 30 students in them and my job as a mother tongue English conversation teacher is to work mainly on speaking which I found extremely difficult during the pandemic and I honestly don't know how it can be addressed because even if in one of the schools I work in we were using Zoom with its breakout rooms **whenever I tried to use them most of the students just used them as an opportunity to chat to their friends in Italian and didn't do whatever I had asked them to do in English and without the Breakout rooms speaking activities are almost impossible with such big numbers online.**

The pandemic exposed the poor technological equipment in Greek public schools and, to a certain extent, educators' and students' inability to adapt to the new technological reality. **ICT have mostly been treated superficially as means of presentation of knowledge, instead of means of literacy practice and as learning environments.**

3. Some teachers became much more aware of learners' needs for socialisation, and of their individual problems

I personally am more aware that each student has his or her own problems at home (some more some less) and these problems reflect on their work at school. We, adults, should help them.

I have also become more aware of the health issues my students suffered during the online lessons and how I attended to those issues.

A more nurturing environment has always been my goal but even a better one should be created now so as to cater for all the needs to be covered and special interests that the learners have to safeguard their wellbeing, academic performance and their mental health in particular.

I wish I had spent more time focused on individuals. I wish our school would give more emphasis on individual students, especially those who simply "disappeared" from our reach during the pandemic.

Isolation had a negative effect on all, teachers and students. There could be a solution in organizing informal class meetings once a week to enable to communicate with classmates to those who do not have their own cellphones.

The differences between **successful pupils and pupils with learning difficulties** have grown bigger during the pandemic.

I have learned that sometimes we miss the obvious, the student's struggle to do the task. During the pandemics I connected more with some students with problems and could see how helpless they are during the studying.

More time should be spent on listening and talking to students about their fears, worries, ...

By far the most important lesson I learned was the importance of the social aspect of learning. **My students suffered a great deal from a sense of isolation.** In my previous teaching position (which was at the height of the pandemic) I had students who were unable to attend because they were experiencing severe anxiety and depression

So it means that we should **train our students various ways of reducing stress** and helping them to concentrate better. We should also help them with time management skills as well as giving some students more individual attention

I think that the most important lesson was to be empathetic and **try to understand that students can be as scared and lonely as us**. Communication and sharing experiences can help a lot in these situations.

4. The Covid experience led teachers to reflect on their practice and how the experience of Covid had changed it

There is more emphasis on the speaking skills as they were mainly neglected during the pandemic. We also develop our student's digital skills.

The work is more varied when it comes to IT, **we now use ZOOM for many individual consultations or even parents' evenings**, the use of e-classroom is now present in most teachers' work.

The pandemic forced me to implement teaching strategies to assist language learning that were on the back burner, and it deepened the ties between myself and my students, a closer bond. Loved searching for training and the challenge of still helping the students though no longer in school. Liked the quiet and increased autonomy re schedule too. **I would add though that Covid has transformed my teaching and has given me the necessary 'push' to introduce active learning and research and emotional intelligence as part of my teaching practice-** something I had always planned to do but had never gotten around to.

As a teacher I feel now more active and willing to teach, **to discuss with my students, to check if they are ok**. We all feel like passing together over hard times and this situation has connected us in a specific way

We as teachers were on the spot and needed to make sure to use appropriate techniques and learn more online and digital tools to adjust teaching to online environment. It was more challenging to motivate students and make sure they all have access to online classes. **The community of teachers networked, shared materials and resources, organized webinars and tried to keep up.**

I use more ICT; **I focus more on differentiation** because the differences between the students' individual levels of English have increased during the pandemics

Students are encouraged to take short speaking tasks at the beginning of each lesson. This is because **speaking was somewhat neglected during the lockdown** or students didn't have many opportunities to speak.

I have continued using **more visual support in my face-to-face learning** and I have stayed in contact with individual students via chats that we used during the remote learning.

I have learnt that the most important thing is to keep the contact going, show learners you care, set challenging but fun activities, and do more action research to improve teaching and learning.

I believe everything is changed after the pandemic, people, schools, teaching and there is no turning back. **Hybrid or mixed education is the future**, all we have to do is to get well prepared for this next level of education

The outdated curricula, the competitive and exam-centred nature of our education system **do not provide for differentiated learning practices and students' active involvement in the learning procedure**. As a result, students have not developed the necessary knowledge and skills for autonomous learning, which became apparent during the pandemic when the teacher's supervision was minimised

If remote learning happened again, I would prepare less content and not be stressed by following the curriculum, I would rather focus on the knowledge of the students. So, quality over quantity.

I believe perhaps some aspects of the distance learning were quite effective. **Students needed to take responsibility for their work and do it in due time and proper manner. They could not rely all the time for someone to help them.** And they also need time to practice what they have learnt in peace and quiet and work in their own pace. **So perhaps one day a month would be wonderful to do that from the comfort of the home.**

on est capables d'adapter en permanence nos pratiques de classe (réorganiser les contenus à enseigner, intégrer les applications digitales dans la planification des leçons etc) et à **se faire sien toute sorte d'instruments digitaux sans lesquels, à mon avis, on ne pourra plus "fonctionner" à l'avenir.**

For me as a language teacher it was great to see how some of the quietest students (in face-to-face classes) were becoming more and more independent in their studying. **When coming back after lockdown phases, they were starting to participate more as they had become more self-confident after periods of remote learning**

The most important positive aspects of learning online could be the fact that **both students and teachers need more modern techniques in the educational process so that they can widen their knowledge of the globalised learning community,** that there should be a change in the pedagogical approach, that **while it is true to say that applications can boost students' learning, they still cannot boost their motivation or help them in their social lives, which my students have rated as being the most important problem of online school during the pandemic.**

Frank Heyworth, July-August 2022