# From offline to online. LSP classes in Spanish philology during the pandemic

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of the text is to present the author's didactic concept and tools and methods implemented in online LSP classes in Spanish philology in Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznań) during the pandemic. The starting point of this paper is to reflect on some factors which should be considered when preparing LSP classes at university level. The authors focus on some new ICT tools and methods implemented during online classes. The aim is to present as well student's opinions and comments about online classes to better adapt materials and digital resources to their needs and implement some innovations in higher education that can be beneficial also after the pandemic.

# 1. Offline and online LSP at the university level

Teaching language for specific purposes (LSP) is important in both philological faculties and other language study programmes, with the main goal of such classes being to prepare students for communication in a specific professional setting (Kic-Drgas, 2016, p. 39). However, it should be emphasised that their role does not consist only in developing communicative functions within various professional groups (Grucza, 2013, p. 6). Considering that the teaching of a LSP is closely related to the term "specialist language", it would be difficult to propose a methodology for classes without prior reflection on the common and differentiating elements of general language (GL) and specialist language, as these features should be considered by teachers in the planning and implementation of LSP courses (González Hernando, 2015, p. 2).

Assuming that we can work with texts that do not contain specialist elements, though it is impossible to find specialist texts without elements of general language, we conclude that GL is the foundation of specialised communication. However, we should all the while remember that (Kubiak, 2002):

- LSP differs from general language in specific features on many levels;
- LSP is not uniform in individual languages and is therefore not universal;
- there is no single LSP but only specialist languages of various fields.

The preparation of an LSP course is not an easy task due to the lack of specific top-down guidelines described in the "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment" (2003 [2001]). In university teaching, the implementation of LSP courses most often depends on the field of study and specialisation, and in philological faculties, usually on the abilities and preparation of the teaching staff. Additionally, attention must be paid to the profile and needs of students, bearing in mind, however, that curricula do not change frequently enough for these factors to be fully taken into account on the current basis. In teaching Spanish, the starting point for the preparation of curricula, textbooks as well as other teaching materials and exams is the "Cervantes Institute Teaching Plan" (2006), but this extensive document also does not provide guidelines for the preparation of a LSP course. As such, the most important questions in curriculum development are as follows:

- What should we teach? What field of specialisation should we choose, what competencies and skills should we develop and what activities should we propose?

- How should we teach? Should the teacher specialise in one specific LSP or teach several of them? How to conduct classes effectively?
- How do we define class objectives? What should we consider: students' career prospects, labour market...?
- Can a general language teacher conduct LSP classes? How does teacher training and professional development work in the case of LSPs?

In the era of a pandemic and prolonged online learning, we must also answer the following additional questions:
- How do we smoothly transition from classroom to online learning?
- Which tools should we choose?
- How do we motivate and activate students in remote classes?
- How do we evaluate and improve our professional skills and tools?

When designing curricula, preparing lesson materials or achieving educational goals, one should remember the specific character of a given group. Developmental psychology research indicates that adults can learn throughout their lives, showing great development potential resulting from crystallised intelligence (Strelau, 1987, p. 28). The concept of dividing intelligence into fluid and crystallised was proposed in 1971 by R. B. Cattell (see Strelau, 1987, pp. 27–28). Fluid intelligence is genetically dependent, whereas crystallised intelligence is the result of experience and learning, and as such, changes with age. It is greatly influenced by the culture in which a given person functions. For learning to be effective and efficient, it is necessary to provide optimal conditions, i.e. to consider what structure of knowledge to propose and how to utilise learners' skills, attitudes and habits. Adults learn best when they (Kazimierska, Lachowicz and Piotrowska, 2014, p. 3):
- can refer to their own experiences;
- have an impact on the course of classes;
- can express their views without fear of judgment;
- can make mistakes followed by feedback;
- are actively involved in the learning process;
- understand the meaning and value of what they learn.

Conversations with students during consultations show that mental and physical well-being affects the effectiveness of their knowledge acquisition process. On the other hand, excessively long and monotonous lectures, incompetent and unprepared lecturers, the impossibility of putting the acquired knowledge into practice, as well as failure to adapt to the needs and expectations of students,

may cause reluctance, resistance and very often irritation on their part. Classes during which certain learning outcomes are achieved should therefore correspond to David A. Kolb's learning cycle (1984, p. 21).

FIGURE 1. DIAGRAM OF KOLB'S LEARNING CYCLE
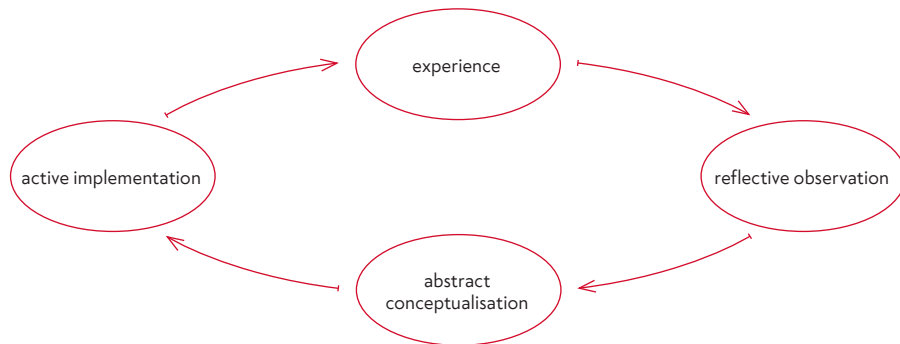


Source: Banaszak, Fojutowski and Moskwa (2020, p. 6).

In the model proposed by David Kolb, a learner should go through all four stages of the cycle for the learning process to be effective. By participating in certain activities, learners observe themselves and others, and the information reaches their senses. Then, in the reflection phase, they analyse what happened, process data and compare new experiences with what they already knew about the topic. The learning process continues, and in the next phase – conceptualisation, that is, creating theories – they combine facts and experiences using memory and abstract thinking. The last step is to put the acquired knowledge into practice. In the case of LSP classes, this can be implemented as a project, simulation, game or simply by applying the acquired information in professional activities.

The above form of teaching organisation and the application of work methods adapted to the assumed goals, with particular emphasis on the activity of students, could increase their motivation to learn and engage in classes. However, one should not forget about different learning styles and adapt them to the planned actions and activities in individual phases.

Table 1 presents Kolb's cycle and the corresponding learning styles distinguished by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford (1986), as well as proposals for activities and exercises that can be carried out with a group of learners (Kazimierska, Lachowicz and Piotrowska, 2014, pp. 5–8). Activists are individuals who learn through action and experience of taking risks – they are actors rather than passive observers. Reflectors focus on retrospection and pay attention to details;

they do not like to act under time pressure. Theorists like ideas, models and systems, abstract thinking, inquisitive questions and intellectual criticism, as well as structured actions without delving into feelings. In contrast, pragmatists want activities to relate to the future profession, i.e. they like to learn practical skills. Various activities can be proposed, bearing in mind the diversity of students' learning styles.

TABLE 1. KOLB'S CYCLE, LEARNING STYLES AND EXERCISE SUGGESTIONS

| Pragmatist (application, practice) | Activist (experience) |
|---|---|
| simulations, project work, role-playing, case studies and examples, activities and practical questions, application of theory into practice | games, simulations, group work, problem-solving, practical classes, using technical devices, creative activities, presentations, role-playing |
| Theorist (generating theories, hypotheses) | Reflector (observation, conclusions, reflection) |
| translation of ideas, closed tasks, theoretical discussions, attention to detail, debates, theoretical questions | demonstrations, self-assessment, repetition, reading, listening, film evaluation and analysis, examination of evidence |

Source: Own study.

# 2. Practical Spanish Language Programme: LSP (PNJH EFE) in the 2019/2020 summer semester

Until March 2020, the university's educational environment seemed to be long-term and well defined. Classes were conducted on campus, with new ICT technologies and tools used only as an element enriching the students' actual encounters with teachers in the physical space. By the second half of March 2020, it turned out that it was necessary to organise remote classes at a short notice, quickly adapting to a new pandemic situation the end of which could not be determined.

In the Spanish Philology master's degree programme, the Practical Spanish Language Programme – language for specific purposes (PNJH: *EFE Español con fines específicos*) segment covers three semesters. The table below describes the hourly and thematic schedule of the classes. The relatively small number of hours assigned to individual components is due to curriculum limitations. Business language exercises were intentionally included in the summer semester due to the upcoming internships or students' employment during the summer break. The 30-hour press language block, implemented in the first semester

of the second year, was to introduce students to the current socio-political issues in the Spanish-speaking culture.

TABLE 2. HOURLY SCHEDULE OF SPANISH LSP CLASSES IN SPANISH PHILOLOGY

| Master's Degree | Winter semester | Summer semester |
|---|---|---|
| Year I | – | EFE / Business Spanish (30 hours) |
| Year II | EFE / Spanish – health-related issues (15 hours)<br>EFE / Spanish – tourism-related issues (15 hours)<br>EFE / Spanish – press language (30 hours) | EFE / Business Spanish (30 hours) |

Source: Own study.

It is worth adding that in the 2019/2020 summer semester, 25 students studied Business Spanish in the second year of the master's degree programme.

## 2.1. Transition from the "real world" to virtual communication

The COVID-19 pandemic meant that ninety-minute meetings held once a week in the classroom had to be moved into the virtual space overnight. Printed/photocopied materials that previously made it possible to build a multisource dossier (with such things as original materials prepared by teachers) had to be scanned and downloaded. Whiteboards and pens were replaced with a shared screen on which important words and expressions that required students' attention were written. Various technical problems related to the operation of the MS Teams platform on which all the classes were held had to be overcome in the first weeks. It turned out that although students do belong to "a specific community of people for whom digital technology is a natural, albeit still distinct, environment" (Krauze-Sikorska and Klichowski, 2013, p. 70), they were not always able to handle the MS Teams platform. There were issues with the setup, browser or smartphone use. Sometimes, problems resulted from the low bandwidths or network overload, which made it difficult to conduct classes.

## 2.2. Forms and methods of work

Class materials were sent to the group e-mail, as well as uploaded to and shared on the MS Teams platform (in the II HISP MGR EFE/Negocios group during

the 2019/2020 summer semester). Classes were held in real-time as scheduled. The lecturer delivered content using the screen-sharing function to present text and audio-visual materials. Students typically solved class exercises jointly or individually and less often in pairs for the sake of working time optimisation (making up for time lost due to technical problems). Students were encouraged to participate in discussions and to make individual statements; this included, for example, making a short commentary on the news related to the functioning of the world economy during the pandemic at the beginning of the classes.

Working in pairs after classes and on an ongoing basis, students did homework and exercises consisting in preparing brief overviews of selected economic issues they wanted to explore (students chose their topics from a previously presented list). The results of their work were consulted with and approved by the tutor.

The semester evaluation consisted of a grade for a written test prepared within MS Forms form, as well as a grade for working in pairs. Components of the evaluation changed compared to stationary classes due to the special mode of teaching in the 2019/2020 summer semester.

## 2.3. Survey and its results

Students were asked to complete a short questionnaire after the end of the semester. In total, 16 out of 25 class participants submitted their answers. As part of the first question, they assessed LSP online classes as compared to stationary classes – the average mark was 3.56 on the 5-point Likert scale (5 – very good; 4 – good; 3 – average; 2 – poor; 1 – very poor). The second question concerned the advantages of distance learning in the context of Spanish LSP classes (PNJH EFE). The students mentioned such benefits as:

- "Easier access to materials".
- "Convenience and safety resulting from the lack of need to travel to the university and more freedom in time management".
- "Opportunity to improve proficiency in online tools. It was much easier to make presentations and discuss assigned topics. Working from home was comfortable and pleasant because the tutor knew how to operate the programme and helped solve problems".
- "Writing notes on a virtual board – the possibility of completing files online".

Thanks to online learning, the students did not have to fill out materials for classes or take notes in the traditional form. The remote mode also made studying easier in terms of time management (no need to commute to the university) and improved students' sense of security in the context of the pandemic. Moreover,

it also enabled them to develop digital competencies through the introduction of new tools.

Another question concerned the disadvantages of distance learning as perceived by the students.

- "Hampered information exchange due to very limited non-verbal communication. Lesser involvement of students in the classes. Various problems of a technical nature, e.g. connection-, sound-related".
- "Technical problems regarding the Internet connection, lesser sense of responsibility [while] speaking or preparing on the part of the students; more difficult access to a lecturer in the event of a problem or if you want to ask a question privately".
- "It is more difficult to focus while at home; I was benefitting much less [from classes] and I was less involved in distance learning activities than in face-to-face activities".
- "Online classes are much more tiresome than traditional ones; I find it harder to focus".
- "It bothered me that I did not know when I could take the floor and speak online because I did not physically see who was 'getting ready' for making a comment. The lack of live interaction with the tutor made me remember less. Reporting attendance on Teams was also a failure".
- "Household members and neighbours disturbing lectures and classes. Poor Internet connection; crashes resulting in missing classes. Lack of focus. No interaction".
- "Problems with communication (five speakers at a time). Disturbances in the reception of content delivered by students and teachers (e.g. due to a poor connection)".
- "Technical problems – no direct contact with the teacher; a feeling of alienation; it costs me a lot to speak up during classes".

This question showed that interpersonal relations and non-verbal communication are very important factors in the classroom. Technical problems and spending long hours in front of the computer negatively affected the students' concentration. The disabled webcams also made them feel insecure when they were to speak, which translated into limited class dynamics.

Finally, the students were asked what would help them find their way and improve the implementation of the online LSP Spanish classes. The proposals included such solutions as training in the use of the MS Teams platform, turning on cameras, recording classes and designating a place to store files for classes.

## 2.4. Stationary and distance education

As evidenced by the survey results, the perception of classes was very diverse, ranging from very positive since the students acquired and practised ICT skills, to frustration rooted in the lack of contact with other students and a feeling of being lost, alienated or even lonely. Interestingly, some people found the lack of physical, direct contact (like in a classroom environment) demotivating, while others considered being "hidden" an opportunity – not having to face others, they willingly participated in discussions, spoke up or partook in solving problems together with others.

## 2.5. Technical problems

While the questionnaires contained repeated comments regarding technical problems, these problems were not caused by teachers but by external factors. The classes could not always run smoothly due to heavy Internet traffic. Despite the initial enthusiasm resulting from the opportunity to see each other online, the cameras had to be switched off eventually so that all participants could hear each other, and the meetings could work.

Recording classes turned out to be a very helpful solution. The students appreciated that option because it gave them a certain sense of security – they were able to "catch up" in case of absence due to technical (equipment) or personal reasons (e.g. unforeseen circumstances). Moreover, they could go back to the material in question if they did not have enough time to write down what they considered important or interesting, or if they did not understand something.

From the perspective of the trainer, recording required overcoming own fears and limitations. Nevertheless, the positive aspects of recording meetings prevailed, as the procedure turned out to be an invaluable support in situations where the students lost connection for any reason. Importantly, the teacher did not assume that the students' "disappearances" during the classes were deliberate. The teacher and the students had a "gentleman's agreement" in this regard, making the latter act more responsibly and maturely.

Undoubtedly, the possibility of using recordings as a tool for self-evaluation turned out to be an added value – it enabled the trainers to improve their professional skills and tools, introduce new solutions and enhance the attractiveness and volume of the presented content.

## 2.6. Access to materials

One comment contained a suggestion concerning the materials for the classes. In stationary learning, the students received them successively on paper, and only occasionally in an electronic version. Since the mode of conducting classes

changed, all materials were delivered in digital form on an ongoing basis (scanned paper documents and texts in an electronic form) and were available both in the group's e-mail box and the course folder on the MS Teams platform. Some of the exercises were presented directly during classes and exclusively on the MS Teams platform, which could confuse those participants who read the content of the classes asynchronously.

## 3. New online teaching solutions in the 2020/2021 winter semester

The following subchapter is didactic and constitutes a description of our own experiences with delivering remote classes that began in March 2020.

In the 2019/2020 summer semester, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to transfer classroom activities to various online platforms, look for appropriate tools to conduct them, adapt forms of evaluation accordingly, as well as get used to new working conditions, without sufficient support or training since no one foresaw this situation. At that time, numerous preparations and efforts were undertaken to ensure that the needs and proposals of the students collected in the form of questionnaires would be considered in the next winter semester (2020/2021), which was also delivered entirely online. We focused on not sacrificing the content, making the most of the possibilities of distance learning, as well as engaging the students, ensuring good relationships and atmosphere in the classroom, providing the students with feedback and motivating them in many ways by proposing many diverse activities. We wanted to apply the learning styles of the students, bearing in mind that we conduct as many as 60 hours of Spanish for specific purposes classes in the winter semester.

Even though we cannot improve the quality of the Internet connection or resolve all technical problems, we do have the capacity to stimulate good group relations and create a good atmosphere that translates into more effective learning. Hence, the students were requested to have their cameras turned on from the very start to ensure more non-verbal communication and maintain focus and dynamics of work (it is more difficult to get up and leave or focus on some other activity with the camera on). This also makes it easier for the teacher to check if the students understand the discussed material. While switching the webcam on during online learning provides a mere substitute for real classroom interaction, it does make it possible to increase participant involvement. As a result, the level of stress resulting from limited social contacts is reduced and making open statements and group integration are facilitated. Previous experiences, as well as several updates

introduced by MS Teams and other platforms over the holidays, reduced the impact that enabling webcams had on the connection quality, especially in small groups.

## 3.1. Evaluation

Taking into account the nature of the classes delivered, i.e. the practical learning of the Spanish LSP, it was necessary to consider changing the form of evaluation. Since written tests did not always work in online teaching, the final grade was the product of several activities that had the appropriate proportional value. The percentage distribution of different forms of evaluation during Spanish LSP distance classes, as presented below, was intended to consider student activity both during individual and group work. Further, we wanted to enable the development of soft skills like negotiation, cooperation, public speaking, presentations, creativity, flexibility, responsibility for the implementation of tasks, a sense of duty and the ability to adapt to the new way of conducting classes (in our case, online).

FIGURE 2. COMPONENTS OF THE GRADE – SPANISH LSP (PNJH EFE)



- Written assignment – module 1 – health-related issues
- Activity in classes – module 1
- Written assignment – module 2 – press language
- Activity in classes – module 2
- Group or individual presentation
- Editing an article – tourism-related issues

Source: Own study.

As far as class activity is concerned, the aspects considered included preparation for the meeting, participation in discussions, as well as the performance of exercises both during classes and offline. At the end of the semester, the students were also to prepare one or two issues of a specialist journal (depending on the group size). The 2020/2021 winter semester saw the release of a single issue of "América Latina sin secretos", which focused mainly on tourism in Spanish-speaking countries in America.

## 3.2. Working methods, that is, learning by doing

Online classes do not limit the possibilities of introducing various forms of work. Apart from interaction and having open discussions, the students can be asked to work in pairs or small groups. The latter form of work turned out to be very

effective, especially during translation exercises concerning patients' history, medical records and the course of diseases. The introduction of a new function of separate rooms has been a great asset for the MS Teams platform users.

Changing the form of work from stationary to online does not necessarily translate into a modification of the previously applied teaching methods; nevertheless, online classes should be carried out in a much more dynamic manner if technical conditions so allow (which was pointed out by the students in the surveys when addressing distraction and the lack of commitment). That is why we introduced a new activity during language lessons – an Oxford-style debate on the ongoing lockdown in Poland and other European countries. An Oxford-style debate is a very formalised form of a discussion between two four-person teams, although teams can be bigger for the purpose of the classes. The thesis of each debate should be a clear statement that can be confirmed or refuted (Kruszyński and Tarnowski, 2019, p. 10). The discussion is chaired by the Marshal who controls the time of speeches and ensures the smooth course of each speech. Apart from being very engaging and requiring group work, the debates allow participants to improve their skills in communication, public speaking, argumentation, stress management, as well as managing the time of speeches and discussions according to strictly defined rules. The organisation of an Oxford-style debate, considering each speaker's role, is shown in figure 3.

**FIGURE 3. RULES AND TASKS OF SPEAKERS DURING AN OXFORD-STYLE DEBATE**
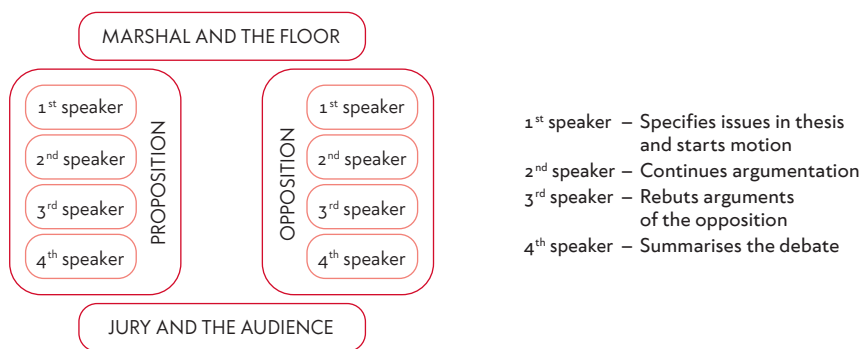


Source: Kruszyński and Tarnowski (2019, p. 10).

Moving from offline to online mode also requires a shift in attitudes to exercises and activities, both assessed and non-assessed. The tasks should be creative and inventive, with fewer imitative content. Exercises such as dubbing the speeches of politicians, fragments of television programs, interviews, etc.

are very effective in higher-level groups. However, it is crucial to be very precise when selecting a short fragment, which should be played several times and muted, as well as when setting the amount of time to complete the task. It would also be worth providing a topic or issue that will be the leitmotif of the prepared dubbing. Before the public presentation, everyone should have enough time to watch the film again, mute it, and practice synchronisation.

Student presentations have as many supporters as opponents. Nonetheless, allowing students to choose topics and conduct the presentations as they wish may result in making online classes more dynamic, facilitating group work, and increasing learners' involvement. Before that, however, it is necessary to define the time and criteria for the presentation and exercises that the speakers should prepare for their fellow students and discuss their plan with the teachers during classes. Giving the floor to the students themselves will allow them to look at online classes from a brand new perspective as they will take on the role of lecturers and will have to present the selected topic themselves, as well as carry out exercises and other activities according to their own scenario. Furthermore, it will be their responsibility to engage other members of the group.

## 3.3. Feedback

A properly conducted assessment and feedback on its effectiveness are essential in today's student-centred learning paradigm. Yet feedback should not be confused with the overall final mark. It is not our intention to discuss whether grades should be removed from university language classes – we merely wish to introduce brief feedback from the teacher and other group members. In the 2020/2021 winter semester, we asked the students to grade the presentations prepared by their colleagues in the following categories (on a scale from 1 to 10):

- presentation of the selected topic;
- selection of materials and prepared activities for the presentation of the topic;
- preparation and conducting of classes;
- opportunity to participate in activities conducted by fellow students and motivation to actively participate in the activities.

The students also had the opportunity to comment on the speeches.

Reliable feedback that should be provided immediately after a specific task is a vital aspect of the course. Each student presentation was reviewed in a one-on-one conversation with the lecturer, with all defects, shortcomings and errors, as well as positive aspects, discussed during its course. The students also had the opportunity to self-evaluate the presented topic and to address other

students' comments which, although sometimes critical, were usually constructive. By using this form of work and offering students the opportunity to decide on the course of classes and activities, it was they (and not the teacher) who were at the centre of the educational process.

## 3.4. Tools

Online classes offer great opportunities to use a variety of motivating, engaging and attention-focusing tools. Each of the available remote work platforms offers additional features that facilitate collaboration and the organisation of classes. Spanish LSP courses were conducted on the MS Teams platform in a team created specifically for this purpose. All materials were uploaded to the team's folders so there was no need to send them anything via e-mail (which proved problematic in the previous semester). With webcams enabled, everyone was visible during the classes in the "Large Gallery" or "Together" modes, which improved communication and increased the dynamics of meetings. The new "Raise Hand" function improved the quality and smooth course of the meetings. The chat proved also very useful, serving not only as a lesson board but also as a way of activating students (e.g. by allowing several students to submit answers simultaneously). Group work was facilitated by the previously mentioned separate rooms, which made it possible to work in various configurations. Despite the many inconveniences of online teaching, we believe that the MS Teams platform has improved our contact with the students and allowed us to reply to and exchange messages faster thanks to the selected team chat and private chat functionalities.

## 3.5. Meeting with an expert

Online work also made it possible to organise a meeting with an expert, the president of the guides association in the state of Hidalgo, Mexico. As part of the PNJH EFE LSP course, the students were able to talk about the tourism industry during the pandemic and discuss other aspects of tourist guides' work in Mexico. Such events bring new opportunities, allowing us to leave the confines of the classroom and get in touch with subject matter experts. While online classes made this form of meetings possible, the return to the stationary mode of learning does not mean that they should be done away with. It is possible to introduce such options permanently by holding online meetings in traditional lecture halls equipped with computers and appropriate screens (or connected to a projector).

## 3.6. Questionnaire and its results

After the end of the 2020/2021 winter semester, we once again asked the students about their thoughts on online classes. The group of students who shared their

thoughts during the previous semester did not participate in the survey. A total of 10 second-year Spanish philology master's degree programme students took part in the study.

In the first question, the students were again asked to grade the LSP online classes compared to the stationary classes – this time the average was 4.2 on a 5-point Likert scale. The second question concerned the advantages of distance learning in the context of Spanish LSP classes. The following opinions appeared among students' comments:

- "You can easily use materials that are on the Internet".
- "We were able to talk to a guide from Mexico, which would probably not have happened if not for the online classes".
- "We were able to work on audio-visual materials more often, which enriched the classes substantially, as we not only read articles but also listened to and watched various news and videos; we learnt about specific problems related to politics, health system and tourism in Latin American countries".
- "Making the most of different teaching methods, programmes and tools".
- "I believe that online classes allow you to process more material and develop your Internet and computer skills".
- "Lots of genuine materials. It is possible that there would be less during the classes at the university. More time for learning right after class with no need to commute".

The opinions quoted above present those elements of distance learning that the students appreciated. Some of them were convinced that it was possible to implement more substantial batches of material; others appreciated the variety of forms of knowledge transfer and applied didactic tools that enabled such things as meeting an expert. Moreover, just like in the preceding survey, the students emphasised the lack of need to commute to the university, better time management and more frequent use of audio-visual materials.

Another question focused on the disadvantages of online learning:

- "Spending long hours in front of a laptop screen is very tiring".
- "Video 'stuttering', but it's understandable".
- "We did not have direct contact with friends from the group or the lecturer; it was much more difficult to focus while at home (without changing the location)".
- "The most burdensome part for me was working in many windows simultaneously, for example, when we had to watch a movie about

the politics of a selected South American country, take notes and answer questions in a document, and have MS Teams open, all at the same time".

- ”Among the disadvantages of distance learning in the context of EFE classes is the lack of dynamics typical for stationary classes where, in my opinion, it is easier to initiate and carry on a discussion. Another disadvantage is the reduced motivation of [...] students. It seems to me that it is much easier to mobilise to do things and engage in tasks performance when we are physically in the room".
- ”Internet connection, difficult group tasks, much more material to be prepared independently than in traditional learning, lack of paper-based materials – strained eyes, many hours spent in front of a computer, every day".
- ”Distance learning makes it difficult to carry out some activities, for example working in groups".

The students' answers again showed that using the computer for many hours can be very tiring. Remote learning also made it difficult to work in a group, reducing students' motivation and commitment. The issues of technical problems and the need for direct contact with the teacher and colleagues were brought up again.

The three biggest problems and obstacles in online learning identified by the students in the fourth question concerned:

- online materials (not in a traditional form);
- housing conditions (lack of concentration, other household members, etc.);
- no contact with a teacher or students.

Among the most motivating factors that made students actively participate in classes were:

- genuine materials (articles, films, recordings);
- current topics of classes;
- interactive exercises;
- atmosphere and mutual relations.

Certain aspects identified by the students as problematic or motivating are contradictory in some respects, often due to the individual students' needs. Although they previously considered the lack of direct contact a problem, the atmosphere and mutual relations during online classes were indicated as motivating and stimulating factors. Discrepancies were also evident in terms of training aids. Some students appreciate working on genuine materials (related to the current topic of the classes) while others prefer traditional aids.

# 4. Summary

In the first online semester (2019/2020 summer semester), students were asked to address four issues:

1. Evaluate distance learning as compared to stationary classes (5 – very good, 4 – good, 3 – average, 2 – poor, 1 – very poor).
2. What do you consider to be the advantages of distance learning in the context of PNJH EFE classes? (provide examples)
3. What do you consider to be the disadvantages of distance learning in the context of PNJH EFE classes and/or what obstacles did you encounter in the 2019/2020 summer semester?
4. What would help you to better adjust to and implement the PNJH EFE programme in the case of online classes?

When preparing materials and classes for the 2020/2021 winter semester, we particularly considered such things as comments on factors that would help the students adjust to and pursue the course of study better. This is why we put more emphasis on active forms of education, such as the Oxford-style debate, students' presentations, interactive exercises and a meeting with an expert. All materials were stored in one place and organised in folders. Further, we used more interactive tools during classes (e.g. Kahoot!, Quizlet, Learnote, LearningApps or WordArt).

After the subsequent semester, conducted entirely online, we asked the students the same questions 1-3. In question no. 4, they were asked to choose the three biggest problems and obstacles in online learning, whereas in question no. 5 they were asked to identify three elements that motivated them to actively participate in the classes.

Thanks to the experience gained in the first months of online education, better preparation of both classes and materials, as well as considering the comments and needs expressed by the students, distance learning in the second semester was evaluated higher (4.2) than in the first semester (3.56).

The analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of online classes in the 2019/2020 summer semester and the 2020/2021 winter semester pointed to several common issues. The main disadvantages include technical problems, the need to spend many hours using a computer and the lack of direct contact with the lecturer and fellow students. As far as the advantages are concerned, the respondents frequently mentioned saving time, developing new digital competencies, easy access to materials and updating audio-visual documents.

In the survey conducted in the second semester of distance learning, the students focused on new forms and methods of work, while in the first, their focus was on the very transition to distance learning mode and the resulting difficulties.

Comparing the two semesters, we noticed that technical issues, a problem previously reported by students, did not appear that often in the second semester; this may be because the creators and administrators of the tools and platforms used by our university put in effort to improve their functionality and reduce the number of class disruptions. In addition, the MS Teams platform received new functions that increased the class dynamics. The only change in the MS Teams platform that we believe to be negative concerns the privacy policy of recordings that were previously automatically stored in Microsoft Stream and made available for download exclusively to the meeting organiser (other participants could only view the material). However, as of the 2020/2021 academic year, the recordings are available for download and viewing to all meeting participants, which is why some lecturers gave up on recording their classes altogether.

We realise that there are still problems beyond the realm of our agency, such as the quality of Internet connections and our students' housing conditions. All the more, we should focus on those elements within our power that engage and motivate the students and help us deliver more dynamic content. All the tools we use should also have a specific and well-thought-out function, instead of being just a break or pure entertainment. We should also remember about issues that the students deem the most important, namely genuine materials, current topics, interactive exercises, and the virtual 'classroom' atmosphere and good mutual relations. It is worth recalling the words of Mark Sparvell, an educational leader at Microsoft: "The greatest potential for technology in education is to humanise the learning, not simply digitise the content".

Following the outbreak of the pandemic, both teachers and students radically redefined their roles in the higher education system. Thanks to the wider introduction of digital resources and more creative evaluation methods, a very rapid transformation took place – one that would likely take many years under normal circumstances. New solutions, often very innovative, will probably remain with us even after the pandemic ends. E-learning requires a lot of commitment on both sides – faculty staff and students – and only with their cooperation is it possible to succeed. Therefore, we fully agree with Paul Cowell (2021), who argues that distance learning has contributed to a change in the perception of students – lecturers started to treat them more like partners in the educational process.

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