

Article

Transforming Foreign Language Education: Exploring Educators' Practices and Perspectives in the (Post-)Pandemic Era

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated significant changes in foreign language education, forcing teachers to reconstruct their identities and redefine their roles as language educators. To better understand these adaptations and perspectives, it is crucial to study how the pandemic has influenced teaching practices. This mixed-methods study focused on the less-explored aspects of foreign language teaching during the pandemic, specifically examining how language teachers adapted and perceived their practices, including rapport building and learner autonomy, during emergency remote teaching (ERT) in higher education institutions. It also explored teachers' intentions for their teaching in the post-pandemic era. An online survey was conducted, involving 118 language educators primarily from Germany, with a smaller representation from New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The analysis of participants' responses revealed issues and opportunities regarding lesson formats, tool usage, rapport, and learner autonomy. Our findings offer insights into the desired changes participants envisioned for the post-pandemic era. The results highlight the opportunities ERT had created in terms of teacher development, and we offer suggestions to enhance professional development programmes based on these findings.

Keywords: emergency remote teaching; learner autonomy; rapport; social presence; online learning tools; teacher development



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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

As a consequence of the worldwide shift from on-site teaching to emergency remote education (ERE) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, experienced on-site language educators turned into novice online language teachers. They had to adapt their teaching and deal with online pedagogy and digital technology, apart from having to cope with stressors caused by the pandemic [1]. The research and teaching community promptly provided teacher trainers and practising teachers with pedagogical support during the forced migration to online teaching [2,3], including case studies of creative responses to the pandemic in language teaching (e.g., [4]). Much research regarding the shift from on-site to emergency remote teaching (ERT) focused on primary and secondary school level (e.g., [5,6]).

Research at the tertiary level has investigated language teachers' perceptions of the shift to ERE in different parts of the world (e.g., [7–11]). In a large-scale European study, Zamborová, Stefanutti and Klimová [12] investigated changes in professional practice during the pandemic among language teachers in language centres, regarding training, technology, and teachers' goals and challenges for the future of language teaching in higher education. The authors found that teachers reacted flexibly to the online learning environment and reported a negative impact of the online format on group dynamics. Zamborová et al. [12] also found that language teachers envisaged a combination of in-person and on-site learning in post-pandemic times. The current study adds to this line of

research in that it investigates aspects that have not been focused on in previous studies, including teachers' use of digital tools beyond videoconferencing software and teachers' reflections on rapport and learner autonomy.

1.1.1. Teaching Languages Online

The sudden digital transformation from on-site to online teaching during the pandemic meant that most teachers at higher institutions became novice online teachers. They were largely unaware of the particularities of online teaching and were overstrained regarding the use of technological resources and pedagogies. This lack of awareness was especially problematic because in online language teaching and learning, both teachers and learners need to be "encouraged to exercise self-determination in language learning, and in the selection and use of multiple technological resources" ([13], p. 9).

Regarding online teaching, teachers should not consider online language teaching as a suboptimal replacement for on-site teaching; instead, teachers need to be aware of the ontological and epistemological differences between online and on-site communication and the mediating effect of technologies because communication is both the means and the goal of teaching [14]. A study by Moorhouse et al. [15] conducted during the pandemic with language teachers showed that, in addition to on-site competencies, teachers need classroom interactional competence in online contexts (e-CIC), namely technological competencies, online environment management competencies, and online teacher interactional competencies. Interactional competencies are necessary because successful online language teaching needs to be dialogic: teachers need to help students internalise knowledge through interaction during dialogues [14].

1.1.2. Rapport

Rapport plays a crucial role in the interaction between learner and teacher [16]. Katz [17] identified corrective feedback and positive comments as essential to developing a positive teacher–student rapport. Maintaining rapport when teaching online can be challenging for teachers [18]. According to Katz [17], it is important to incorporate certain qualities from face-to-face classrooms into online education, including the ability to connect and increased interaction. Practical suggestions on how to develop rapport include keeping the webcam at eye level, looking at the camera to make eye contact with students, and watching the distance to the computer to include body language and gestures [19]. Sher [20] observed that promoting participation in discussions and treating students respectfully are effective methods for fostering rapport between teachers and students. Like in on-site teaching and learning, learners can develop a sense of belonging and community in an online setting, and participation and communication play an important role [4].

1.1.3. Social Presence

Research suggests that social presence is an important factor in building education communities. Garrison et al. [21] define social presence as "the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as 'real' people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used" (p. 94). Social presence plays an important role in online interaction ([22–24]) in that its development is essential for fostering an online community [25]. Social presence supports and enables learning in online environments [26], and experiencing social presence is likely to facilitate rapport building. At a basic level, online platforms used in education can help create social presence to a varying degree depending on the forms of interactivity they offer.

The term social presence extends to the understanding of a specific literacy to support remote learning readiness for a public emergency [27]. Establishing social presence as a means of interaction has been associated with higher levels of cognitive analysis through active engagement [28]. A study carried out at the beginning of the pandemic hypothesised that creating social presence in online language learning was especially important because of a general lack of social encounters during COVID-19 [29].

1.1.4. Learner Autonomy

ERE requires a high level of learners' self-management, which Little [30] refers to as "the principles of learner control and reflection" (p. 7). Stockwell and Reinders [31] point out that learners are unlikely to develop autonomy because of technology "but rather, technology has the potential to provide opportunities for engaging with the target language for learners who possess some degree of autonomy" (p. 43). The ability to exercise autonomy depends on the ability of learners to make reflective judgments about their learning in their institutional and social contexts [8]. The concept of learner autonomy does not imply learning in isolation; rather, formal and informal learning communities should be supported and encouraged and could include both teachers and students [32]. As part of this study, we examine teachers' views on whether and how students displayed autonomy during ERE.

1.2. The Current Study

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How did teachers adjust their teaching practices and expectations during the pandemic?
2. What were teachers' experiences and views regarding rapport building and learner autonomy during emergency remote teaching?
3. What were the teachers' expectations of language teaching and learning in the post-pandemic phase?

2. Materials and Methods

Following a mixed-methods design [33], we administered an online survey, thus combining elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The three researchers created the items for the survey jointly through intensive discussions. The survey contained a Likert scale and open-ended questions for breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. The qualitative data were analysed using a thematic approach to provide a rich and detailed description of the teachers' experiences and expectations. The study received ethical approval from the first author's institution.

2.1. Data Collection and Analysis

To find participants at higher institutions, we contacted different institutions, university teachers, and several associations, and sent messages via different forums and e-newsletters in Germany, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The survey used (see Appendix A) was created with SociSurvey, and the survey questions were available in German and English. The questions were piloted with five foreign language teaching experts, and the researchers revised the survey based on their feedback. The survey questions addressed biographical information, online teaching approaches and strategies, tools usage, questions regarding rapport building and learner autonomy, challenges, and how teachers envisaged post-pandemic instructional settings. Respondents gave informed consent before participating.

2.2. Participants

The target group consisted of foreign language educators at universities in Germany, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom. A total of 118 teachers completed the survey in April and May 2021. The responses from three participants were excluded from the analysis because they either answered only a fraction of the required responses or sped through the responses. Of the 115 responses included in the analysis, 99 were from teachers at different universities in Germany, 3 from New Zealand, 12 from the US and 1 from the United Kingdom. Among the participants, 81% were female, 15.5% male, and 3.4% preferred not to say. A total of 96.6% of the respondents worked for a state-funded university. Over half of the participants (54.3%) were teachers of English as a foreign language/as a lingua franca, and 45.7% were teachers of German as a foreign language. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants. As demonstrated in the

results section below, nearly all participants exclusively engaged in on-site teaching prior to the pandemic. Therefore, our study does not pertain to contexts where online teaching and blended approaches were already implemented before the pandemic.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information.

Background Information	N	%
Age		
20–30	3	2.6
31–40	23	19.8
41–50	33	19.8
51–60	39	33.6
61–70	15	12.9
>70	3	2.6
Years of experience		
5 years or less	11	9.5
More than 5	26	22.4
More than 10	19	16.4
More than 15	13	11.2
More than 20	31	26.7
More than 30	16	13.8
Working for state-funded university	112	96.6
Working for private university	9	7.8
Working for a language centre	84	72.4
Working for a department with a modern foreign languages degree programme	14	12.1
Teaching BA, MA and/or PhD students majoring in the foreign language they teach	42	36.2
Teaching students who take the foreign language out of interest	72	62.1
Teaching students who need a foreign language certificate or a foreign language module as part of their course	90	77.6
Tenured professor	8	6.9
On tenure track	1	0.9
Lecturer, docent—temporary	23	19.8
Lecturer, docent—permanent	53	45.7
Employed on hourly basis	26	22.4
Other	5	4.3

3. Results

The quantitative data analysis with SPSS25 comprised descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) and parametric and non-parametric tests (a Kruskal–Wallis test and chi-square tests). Two researchers coded the qualitative data independently and discussed any discrepancies until a consensus was reached. The researchers then analysed the data for thematic analysis [34]. We report on teachers' open-ended responses using G to indicate German quotes which were translated by the authors, and E for comments originally given in English.

3.1. Changes to Contact Mode, Teaching and Assessment Format

Research question 1 investigated how the participants adjusted their teaching practices and expectations during the pandemic. The responses to the question regarding their experience with online teaching before the pandemic showed that the vast majority of participants (99.1%) were novice online language teachers when the shift to online teaching occurred. Only 7.8% reported having taught a combination of on-site and online before the pandemic. Only 2.6% had any experience in hybrid teaching before the pandemic. Before the pandemic, 94% of participants had used some technological tools (e.g., the Internet, projector) in the classroom.

Regarding how teachers communicated with their students outside of class before and during the pandemic, the use of a learning management system (LMS) increased slightly. Whilst 68.1% of the participants used an LMS before the pandemic, 75.9% reported using an LMS during the pandemic. Before the shift to online teaching, 94% of participants used e-mails to communicate with students. During the pandemic, only 64.7% used e-mails for student communication for individual queries. Unsurprisingly, while 80.2% of participants had on-site meetings with their students before the pandemic, 73.3% of the participants carried out one-to-one student–teacher meetings via videoconferencing during the pandemic.

The new teaching conditions during the pandemic led some teachers (37.1%) to reduce their teaching time for online sessions and increase students' self-study phases instead during the pandemic. Institutional requirements might have played a role in this respect in that hourly paid lecturers were not necessarily free to decide on the length of their online lessons. Just over half of the participants (53.4%) changed the format of the final assessment to an alternative form of assessment to adapt to the conditions imposed by the pandemic.

3.2. Challenges and Advantages for Novice Online Teachers

Many novice online teachers perceived emergency remote teaching as stressful or even overwhelming. The increased workload was, after problems establishing rapport, the second most frequent answer to the open-ended question "What has been the biggest challenge for you during the pandemic?" (n = 23; 20%). Other answers in the same vein include screen fatigue (n = 5), a compromised work–life balance (n = 4), and e-mail overload (n = 3). It is likely that e-mails replaced personal communication if not mainly in student–teacher interaction, then in other areas of work. Thus, one respondent explained: "Keeping track of deadlines and appointments has become a blur of emails. Before, a lot of different channels could be used." (E47). Only three participants found little or no advantages in online teaching. For another small number of 13 respondents (11%), the main merit of ERE was that it brought to light the value of on-site teaching.

Apart from these few negative voices, almost all respondents found at least some positive aspects of online teaching. A total of 27.6% felt that the new teaching format meant more freedom to choose teaching materials and teaching methods; 41.4% of the participants perceived the increased use of visuals (e.g., videos) as an advantage of the online teaching format. One-third (33.6%) felt that more speaking time for students in the breakout rooms was an advantage of online teaching.

The qualitative data corroborate the recognition of new opportunities in online teaching. When asked to reflect on what they had learned by switching to online classes in the pandemic, 24 participants (20.86%) expressed their satisfaction about how well online teaching worked. For five respondents, emergency online teaching worked better than expected, and three appreciated the possibility to teach at all, realising that "education can also take place digitally" (G11). Three more teachers were happy that they and their students coped well with ERE and recognised "change is still possible; we can all adapt to circumstances, and adapt well" (E24). Thus, emergency online teaching was an empowering experience for those teachers who effectively adapted to it, despite the stressors mentioned above. Reflecting on the new possibilities, a participant stated that "blended learning has become indispensable in university teaching and can enrich teaching" (G34). A second teacher finds that "online learning is powerful" (E6) despite the increased prep time. Another respondent expressed their ambivalence: "Online videoconferencing is no replacement for face-to-face; and yet, it is quite awesome" (E60). Three participants found that the difference between on-site and online teaching was insignificant, or discovered that their teaching worked well in both settings: "Teaching is teaching. It doesn't matter if it is online or in-person" (E75), "students are students; I can teach well online, too" (E107). For five respondents, ERE helped them in their personal and professional development, regardless of increased workload and other difficulties: "I personally think the challenges (increased team exchange/use of LMSs and other digital tools) have actually turned out

to be opportunities to grow for myself, even at this late stage in my university career, and my team” (E24).

As another advantage of online teaching, four participants appreciated the freedom to teach or participate independent of location; one person liked that this “preserved resources” (G34). Some responses thematised peer support among language teachers during the pandemic. The lack of casual interaction with colleagues was the biggest challenge for a small number of respondents (n = 4). However, one participant felt that increased team support was a positive aspect of ERE: “team building/cooperation; improved digitisation of team members; pride in our achievements; positive feedback from students” (E24). Another participant pointed out that peer support led to “many creative and didactic impulses, great exchange” (G74).

3.3. Computer Literacy/Familiarity with Digital or Online Tools

The majority of respondents used five or more digital tools for their online classes. Figure 1 shows the frequencies and distribution of tools used.

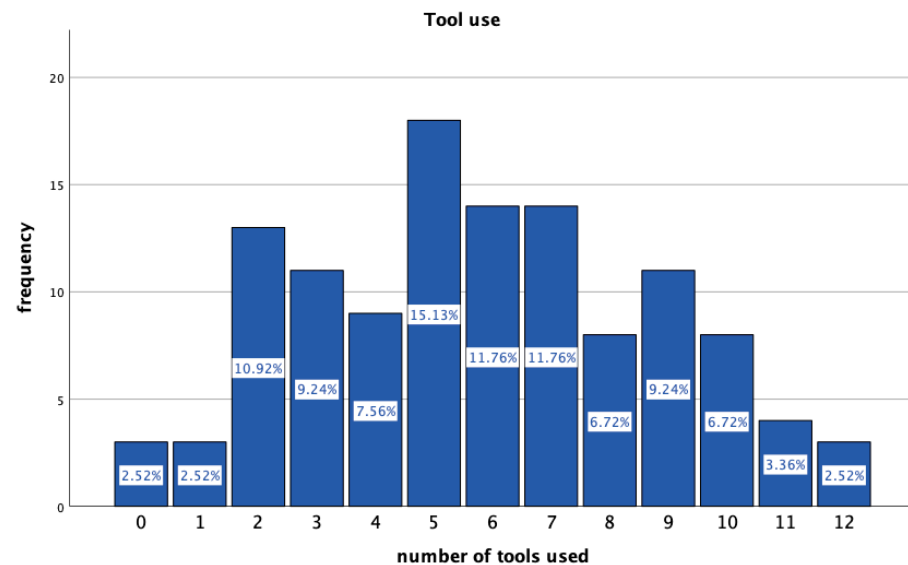


Figure 1. Frequencies and distribution of tools used.

Regarding the tools used, Table 2 shows the differences among English and German teachers.

Table 2. Use of tools according to the language taught.

Tools	Language Taught	
	German	English
	Number	Number
Vide Conferencing tool (e.g., Zoom, Teams, Webex)	52	61
Digital whiteboard (e.g., Padlet, Jamboard)	21	24
Collaborative writing tools (e.g., Google docs)	22	22
Commercial language learning platform (e.g., Vista Higher Learning, Deutschfuchs, Speexx)	16	1
Educational videos from the web	25	34
Electronic version of a textbook	28	18
Online materials from different websites during the lesson	36	38
Students send their audio and/or video recordings for feedback	29	25
Interactive videos (e.g., Playposit, EdPuzzle, h5p)	11	8
My own video and/or audio recordings (e.g., with Screencast, mobile phone)	25	21
Quizzes (e.g., Kahoot, Wordwall.net)	27	21
Social media (e.g., Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook)	13	4
Wordclouds (e.g., with Answergarden)	13	13
Polls (e.g., Mentimeter, Zoom/Webex Survey)	30	29

Chi-squared test statistical analysis showed that the following four items were significantly different between the languages taught, namely, the use of commercial language learning platforms ($\chi^2(1) = 18.412, p < 0.01$), social media ($\chi^2(1) = 7.356, p < 0.5$), quizzes ($\chi^2(1) = 3.338, p < 0.5$), and the electronic version of a textbook ($\chi^2(1) = 6.605, p < 0.5$) with a small effect size for all items. The German teachers used these significantly more often than English teachers. The only statistically significant correlation regarding age and use of tools was found for Padlet or Jamboard ($\chi^2(3) = 9.727, p < 0.5$): 88.9% of educators above the age of 60 did not use these tools, compared to 57.5% of educators aged between 20 to 40 who did.

The main advantages of using online tools cited were flexibility ($n = 7$), collaborative learning ($n = 8$), and more autonomous learning due to the online learning designs ($n = 11$). Some respondents were dissatisfied with certain tools, or with the tools that their institution required them to use ($n = 7$). Two participants resented that they had to use Big Blue Button instead of Zoom. However, twelve respondents named Big Blue Button as one of their favourite online tools. In Germany, several respondents remarked that digitisation was not far enough along: "Germany is hopelessly behind in IT and internet matters" (E117), and the same participant felt that German academia had not been prepared to switch to online teaching.

Computer literacy and familiarity with digital tools were perceived as critical for successfully adapting to emergency remote education. Overall, all age groups reported that they felt they lacked computer skills. Interestingly, a Kruskal–Wallis test showed that the age group of 51–60 reported slightly higher computer skills than the other age groups ($H(3) = 8.324, p = 0.040$). All other groups chose the lowest category regarding skills. A lack of training and/or experience and familiarity with computer technology, digital tools, or specific tools for teaching online, was the third most frequent answer regarding the biggest challenge during the pandemic ($n = 19; 16.52\%$). This was frequently mentioned in connection with an increased workload, often attributed to the need for self-training, which was deemed necessary due to insufficient computer skills, and was regarded as a monotonous and time-consuming task. Only two respondents saw a lack of computer literacy among students as the biggest challenge during the pandemic. For one participant, a lack of training led to using only a few online tools (G5). On the other hand, gaining experience in online teaching, improving computer literacy, and becoming familiar with digital and online tools was a positive aspect of emergency online teaching for almost one-third of participants ($n = 35$), many of whom felt that they learned "a lot" (E84).

3.4. Rapport Building and Learner Autonomy during the Pandemic

3.4.1. Rapport Building

Research question 2 investigated teachers' experiences and views regarding rapport building and learner autonomy during ERT. The results suggest that rapport building was perceived to be a challenge. Less than half of the respondents (46.6%) believed that being able to establish rapport with learners on the online course was a positive aspect when teaching during the pandemic. A similar percentage of participants (43.1%) felt that they managed to help students feel like they belonged to a learning community.

Difficulty establishing rapport with students was the most frequent response when asked about the biggest challenge during the pandemic, cited by almost a quarter of the participants ($n = 28; 24.35\%$). The qualitative data point to reasons why establishing rapport was difficult for the novice online teachers. Teachers felt they could not be spontaneous in the new online classroom, and a respondent pointed out that it would have been easier to establish a rapport if the classes had been smaller (E67). Another teacher reflected that "students had or pretended to have technical problems and turned their cameras off" (G79) which was perceived to be the reason why it was challenging to establish rapport. However, a study on students' perspectives on the use or absence of web cameras during ERE suggests that some students do not feel it makes a difference whether the cameras are on or not [35].

Several teachers reflected on ways to improve building rapport online: “it is crucial to individually address students” (G19) and “there can be digital closeness” (G28). Two teachers commented that they found breakout rooms beneficial for establishing rapport and collaboration. However, a teacher remarked that breakout rooms did not help the teachers to reach the “back-row sulkers” (E113). Two teachers concluded from their online experience that online teaching required a new way of using their bodies when teaching. They felt they had to pay more attention to their facial expressions and gestures and how they looked at the camera. A teacher stated that rapport was easier to establish when the teaching followed rituals (E47). In an online teaching environment, remembering students’ names (G8), being available for the students (E29), and providing prompt feedback (G21) were felt to be essential, all of which could make the experience for the students more personal and positively influence students’ feeling of social presence. Cohesive responses, such as referring to another member of the community by name, are categories of social presence [36] and aid rapport building with the teachers and fellow students.

3.4.2. Learner Autonomy

ERE requires more autonomous learning on the students’ part. In terms of learner autonomy, many participants acknowledged that it played a central role in an online teaching and learning environment for students to be autonomous learners. A total of 42.2% of the participants believed that increased student autonomy was a positive aspect of online teaching. A similar number of participants (40.5%) reported having learnt to give students more autonomy during the pandemic.

A teacher observed that in ERT, “students work more on their own; students upload recordings and videos” (E67). This presupposes that teachers give their students the opportunity to do so. Therefore, teachers who embraced technology potentially created more opportunities for their students to work autonomously. A participant stated that “digital learning encourages autonomy” (G109). Similarly, another participant pointed out that they “want to keep students empowered to learn on their own” (E67). It is likely that educators who saw the potential of different digital tools (e.g., online flashcards) could help learners reflect on how they can use different tools for self-directed learning.

3.4.3. Teaching and Institutional Policies in Post-Pandemic Times

Research question 3 examined the teachers’ expectations of post-pandemic language teaching and teacher education. The data showed that more than half of the participants (60.3%) wanted their institution to incorporate online teaching in the teaching format after the pandemic. Similarly, 58.6% felt that their institution should make or continue to make some tools (e.g., Padlet, Zoom, Mentimeter) available to instructors for free.

The qualitative answers confirm and specify these quantitative results. As for how to incorporate online course formats in post-pandemic times, responses included blended (n = 7), hybrid (n = 3), and online-only teaching (n = 2) as new possibilities in addition to on-site teaching only. However, hybrid teaching seems somewhat controversial: two respondents warned against hybrid teaching after the pandemic and another participant stated, “I’d like the institution to absolutely reject the idea of hybrid teaching” (E38). Participants mentioned the targeted use of videoconferencing for group activities, one-to-one sessions, or make-up sessions as other possibilities to incorporate online elements into post-pandemic teaching. Two respondents wanted to keep online office hours or online meetings, where appropriate, even when returning to on-site teaching. Two different respondents wanted to teach paperless in the future, using tablets or other technologies instead of paper.

In line with the finding that a majority of instructors wanted their institution to fund online tools even after the pandemic, about half of the respondents (n = 58; 50.4%) wanted to keep using digital tools for on-site teaching. Among these, about one-third (n = 17) mentioned learning management systems (LMSs) as tools they wanted to keep using. Other participants intended to incorporate online collaborative or interactive projects (n = 6),

such as collaborative writing ($n = 3$) and audio and video recordings of their students ($n = 4$). The rest of the respondents either did not specify which tools they wanted to keep, or mentioned one or more specific tools out of a wide range such as Flipgrid, Jamboard, Padlet, and Mentimeter.

The qualitative data give some insights into the teachers' motivation to integrate online tools in the post-pandemic period. One respondent perceived online tools as an opportunity for a more engaging teaching approach. "I would like to include chat and website feedback (Padlets) into the physical classroom, in order to get quieter learners involved" (E47). A different participant felt that they "would like to make more use of various technical tools to supplement and increase versatility" (G112). Another participant pointed out that "there is greater flexibility for students through online components" (G8).

While integrating online aspects and digital tools ranked highest when asked about how respondents wanted to change their teaching practices in post-pandemic times ($n = 28$; 24.35%), other aspects were also mentioned. These included more emphasis on discussion, active participation, communication, interpersonal skills, interaction, and specifically (more) group activities. One participant wanted to continue using a welcome ritual adopted during their online classes during the pandemic. In addition, more effective use of on-site teaching time (through a combination with online self-study) and gamification were mentioned. Most of these points refer to teaching practices that might have been difficult to keep up and thus were thoroughly missed during ERT by novice online teachers, as described in the section about rapport building. Teachers drew very different conclusions from these challenges. On the one hand, about ten percent of respondents wanted to go back to 100% on-site teaching, and were not interested in introducing any aspects of online teaching into on-site teaching after the pandemic ($n = 12$). On the other hand, a similar number of teachers ($n = 10$) felt that breaking with conventions, leaving their comfort zone, and trying new teaching methods was a positive aspect of ERE that they wanted to keep ("New things can also be good", G83).

Concerning changes respondents wanted their institution to make for the post-pandemic phase, one respondent suggested "freedom regarding the choice of means and methods" (G37). In contrast, another participant demanded more consistent standards for how to teach, as "some colleagues put readers online and then don't check in with students for the whole semester" (G26). Other respondents wanted their institution to recognise the importance of on-site teaching. A discussion on the institutional level seems to be warranted, as one participant stated: "I would like to see an open reflection on the training during the pandemic, I would like to see an open discourse on all the aspects mentioned in the survey, more freedom in my decisions as well as support from the institution, strategic work should be done" (G36).

3.4.4. Learner Autonomy in the Post-Pandemic Phase

Learner autonomy appears to be an important aspect of future teaching that was brought to light during the pandemic. The term itself was cited in this context by 16 respondents (13.91%). Learner autonomy was mentioned twice as an aspect of on-line teaching that teachers wanted to emphasise for post-pandemic times. Five respondents stressed the importance of learner autonomy as one of their lessons learned and admitted being surprised by the degree of autonomy that students were able to show during the pandemic. When asked how they wanted to change their teaching practices in the future, nine respondents mentioned the importance of learner autonomy. The answers included "giving students more autonomy" (E6), or "allowing more autonomy; less spoon-feeding" (G54). One participant appreciated the student autonomy needed for online language learning and pointed out that it had implications for their on-site classroom teaching: "I will encourage the students to work more independently, formulate, work and think, without machines" (G45). Another participant elaborated: "Many students lack the learner autonomy to deal with the flipped classroom approach but it is worth helping them get

there. (. . .) I want to make self-study materials available to students and help them to have a more personalized learning experience" (E104).

Apart from these direct references to learner autonomy, it appears as an important underlying concept in the aspects of online teaching and learning teachers wanted to introduce in their on-site teaching in the post-pandemic period. A total of 34 respondents, i.e., almost one-third of the participants, mentioned one or more of the following aspects as desirable to be established long-term: a flipped classroom approach ($n = 16$), asynchronous learning ($n = 15$), and self-study phases ($n = 8$). All of these methods require a high degree of learner autonomy.

4. Discussion

This study investigated foreign language teachers' adaptations and perceptions of their practices during ERT and beyond at higher education institutions, mostly in German state-funded universities and some universities in English-speaking countries. It examined teachers' views on rapport building and on learner autonomy in ER education. The findings showed that the novice online language teachers adjusted to the new conditions in different ways, for instance, by employing various digital tools and resources, changing the proportion of self-study phases, and introducing online one-to-one meetings with their students. Interestingly, the data show that the number of e-mails teachers sent to students during ERE dropped considerably. This might be because the teachers relied more on other means of communication such as communication via the LMS and one-to-one online student-teacher meetings.

The results showed that teachers struggled with challenges inherent to ERE: increased workload, under-preparedness for online teaching, issues with technology, and lack of technical and social support. The challenge of increased workload is in line with studies demonstrating that digital technologies do not alleviate teachers' work [37], particularly if educators have to use digital technologies suddenly and in the context of a health crisis, which affects people's mental health [38].

Regarding rapport, many teachers realised that they had to change the way they connected with the students to achieve "digital closeness", as one respondent put it. For example, some respondents changed their body language and applied social presence literacy to develop rapport with their students, thus potentially promoting social presence. Almost half of the respondents felt that they could establish rapport with their students during the pandemic. About the same number of respondents reported that they managed to help students feel like they belonged to a learning community. Teachers might intuitively be aware of the connection between social presence and active engagement [28]. This is supported by the fact that participants perceived establishing rapport as the biggest challenge during ERE. The group of participants that managed to establish rapport in the ERE setting might have been more successful in translating strategies to create social presence from on-site to online teaching.

Regarding learner autonomy, participants reported that they recognised and appreciated the need for more student autonomy during online teaching. Half of the respondents reported having learnt to give students more autonomy and foster learner autonomy. This suggests that, as a result of the pandemic, language teachers facilitated learner autonomy, which in turn helped students gain skills for life-long learning. Some respondents purposefully used the online learning design to support their students' autonomy. It is likely that some teachers reflected and analysed their students' level of autonomy in more depth because of the ER teaching format.

While teachers identified a range of challenges during ERE, some felt that they developed professionally as educators. Many teachers became inspired by what they had learnt during the pandemic and wanted to incorporate some aspects, for instance, certain online tools or learning formats such as collaborative writing, in their teaching in post-pandemic times. This is in line with Moorhouse and Kohnke [10], who identified two groups of

teachers during the pandemic: the “surviving” group whose job satisfaction suffered, and the “thriving” group, who gained motivation and new perspectives.

5. Conclusions

This study showed that the respondents had different levels of reflectivity regarding their ERT, different pedagogical adaptation practices, and different degrees of openness regarding teaching online. The results suggest that explicit strategies to manage online environments are needed [15]. Teacher trainers, who themselves need a high level of proficiency with technology [39], need to be aware that teachers’ level of technology integration partly depends on whether teachers use transmissive (i.e., a teacher-centred approach) or constructivist pedagogies (i.e., a student-focused approach) [40]. Cheung [41] argues that when transmissive pedagogies predominate in on-site settings, introducing innovative pedagogies at a high level of technology integration in synchronous online teaching is likely to be more difficult. We argue that during the pandemic, ERT put teachers with transmissive pedagogical approaches in a position where they were not fully in charge in that they had less authority, for instance, regarding their students’ camera use. This is likely to negatively impact teachers’ attitude towards online teaching.

Drawing from this study, we argue that raising teachers’ consciousness about features conducive to rapport building is crucial. For instance, discussing research on the use of the webcam for teaching a foreign language online [19,42,43] and the use of comments and their impact on social presence and rapport, is valuable. The results of this study showed that, to enhance the quality of online teaching, training should include discussions based on theoretical models on how to effectively foster rapport, social presence, and learner autonomy in an online setting.

As part of their teacher training programmes and professional development, language teachers and trainers teaching online should be exposed extensively to good examples of constructivist pedagogies that foster autonomy; for instance, they could watch video recordings of online language teaching sessions showing how learner-centred interactive activities can be facilitated. Examples of the use of breakout rooms for collaboration and speaking practice, the fishbowl discussion technique in the main room, and activities with tools that facilitate and encourage co-construction of meaning are beneficial. It is important to acknowledge that conversational turn-taking online can be more challenging than in on-site settings [44], due to, for instance, transition time on videoconferencing platforms. Therefore, educators need to explicitly reflect on such challenges and deal with them in an adaptive manner to ensure effective teaching and learning experiences for their students.

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

A number of limitations must be noted regarding the present study. First, the biggest limitation in this study is the unequal sample size due to the high number of participants from Germany. Therefore, the results are a reflection of the trend predominately in German higher education settings. Second, using further instruments such as semi-structured interviews would have strengthened the findings.

Third, the study used a self-reporting online mixed-methods survey to explore teachers’ perceptions and experiences, which may not reflect the teachers’ actual practices. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into language educators’ practices and expectations during the pandemic and expectations for the post-pandemic era at higher education institutions.

Researchers of computer-assisted language learning (e.g., [45]) have predicted that the pandemic may permanently alter the field of language education. This study has shown some of the changes in teachers’ perceptions that occurred during the pandemic, for instance, regarding the role of learner autonomy. It also demonstrated (forced) shifts in teaching approaches and, subsequently, some teachers’ willingness to make changes to their post-pandemic teaching practices based on their ERT experience.

Further investigations are warranted to investigate teachers' online teaching practices in post-ERT time, with a focus on how teachers view and foster learner autonomy and rapport building in a non-ERT context. Moreover, research investigating the connection between rapport building and body language use in online language teaching settings is needed to inform regular and emergency remote teaching.

More research is also needed to explore whether and to what extent the influence of ERT on teachers' perspectives and practices regarding the utilisation of visuals (e.g., videos), body language, and digital tools has impacted their on-site teaching practices.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire

1. **To which gender identity do you most identify? male/female/diverse**
2. **Age**
 - 20–30
 - 31–40
 - 41–50
 - 51–60
 - 61–70
 - >70
3. **What language(s) do you teach? If you teach both languages, please complete one questionnaire per language.**
 - English
 - German
4. **What kind of students do you teach? Select all that apply.**
 - BA, MA and/or PhD students majoring in the foreign language you teach
 - university students taking the foreign language out of interest
 - university students who need a foreign language certificate or a foreign language module as part of their course
 - university students taking the foreign language out of interest
 - university students who need a foreign language certificate or a foreign language module as part of their course
5. **What was the average number of students in class before pandemic?**
 - between 5 and 10
 - between 11 and 15
 - between 16 and 20
 - between 21 and 30
 - between 31 and 40
 - more than 40

6. **What is/was the average number of students in class when teaching online during the pandemic?**
 - between 5 and 10
 - between 11 and 15
 - between 16 and 20
 - between 21 and 30
 - between 31 and 40
 - more than 40
7. **Where is the institution you work for?**
 - Germany
 - New Zealand
 - UK
 - USA
8. **How many years of teaching experience at university level do you have?**
 - more than 30
 - more than 20
 - more than 15
 - more than 10
 - more than 5
 - 5 years or less
9. **What kind of contract are you on with your institution?**
 - tenured (professor)
 - on tenure track
 - lecturer, docent—temporary
 - lecturer, docent—permanent
 - I am employed on an hourly basis.
 - other
10. **How many hours (60 min) per week do you teach on average?**
11. **What kind of institution do you work for? Select all that apply.**
 - state-funded university
 - private university
12. **What kind of Higher Education department do you work in?**
 - Department with a modern foreign language degree programme
 - both
 - other
13. **How did you teach before the pandemic in terms of space? Select all that apply.**
 - in the physical classroom with some technology (e.g., the Internet, projector)
 - in the physical classroom without much technology (but with CD-player or similar)
 - in-person and online
 - online only
 - asynchronously (without real-time contact)
 - synchronously (with real-time contact, e.g., online meetings or real-time chats)
 - hybrid (in the physical classroom with students joining with their devices from outside at the same time)
14. **How did you communicate with your learners before the pandemic? Select all that apply.**
 - e-mail
 - WhatsApp or similar
 - LMS (e.g., Moodle, ILIAS, Blackboard, Edmodo....)
 - in-person meetings
 - none of these

- Other: _____
15. **How has the way you communicate with your learners during the pandemic changed? Select all that apply.**
- I use an LMS (e.g., Moodle, ILIAS, Blackboard, Edmodo....) (more frequently)
 - I use e-mail (more frequently)
 - I use WhatsApp or similar (more frequently)
 - face-to-face meetings via a video-conferencing tool
 - Other: _____
16. **How long have you been teaching/have you taught online since the pandemic began in February 2020?**
- between 1 and 5 months
 - between 6 and 8 months
 - between 9 and 11 months
 - 12 months and ongoing
 - never
17. **What was the percentage of your in-person teaching practice and your online teaching in 2020? Online: _____ In-Person: _____**
18. **What has been the percentage of your in-person teaching practice and online teaching in 2021 so far? Online: _____ In-Person: _____**
19. **What are/were the biggest challenges when teaching online during the pandemic? Select all that apply.**
- number of students per class
 - increased workload
 - problem to establish rapport with students
 - lack of materials for online lessons
 - lack of IT support
 - lack of computer skills
 - lack of training in teaching online
 - lack of training in searching for material online
 - realization that I cannot teach online the way I teach in-person
 - realization that transferring my classroom materials to online teaching does not work well
 - my institution made it difficult to use different tools because of possible data protection issues
 - my institution did not want to pay for subscription of tools I find useful (e.g., Padlet)
20. **What has been the biggest challenge for you during the pandemic? Feel free to use an idea from the previous question (nr. 19) or other ideas.**
21. **If you had a higher workload due to online teaching during the pandemic, what are the reasons? Select all that apply.**
- higher preparation effort due to new didactic requirements
 - higher preparation effort due to new creation of materials, especially for asynchronous teaching phases
 - more time for marking is/was required, especially due to asynchronous course sections
 - splitting my groups and therefore more (unpaid) teaching hours
 - familiarisation with computer technology and/or digital tools
 - more time required for communication with students outside of the real-time teaching phases
22. **What positive aspects have you found when teaching online during the pandemic? Select all that apply.**
- students' increasing autonomy

- more freedom to choose teaching materials and teaching methods
 - use of visuals (e.g., videos) has increased
 - more speaking time for my students in the breakout rooms
 - being able to establish a rapport with my learners even though the course was online
 - more flexibility regarding our teaching schedule
 - possibility to teach at all
 - Other: _____
23. **How has your teaching developed during the emergency online teaching phase? Select all that apply.**
- I adapted my in-person class to online synchronously.
 - I learnt about new tools to teach online.
 - I learnt how to use a flipped classroom approach (i.e., students had to work on tasks before the online lesson and be prepared to use their new knowledge).
 - I changed the format of my final exam to an alternative form of assessment.
 - I learnt to give students more autonomy.
 - I managed to help students feel like they belong to a learning community.
 - I reduced the teaching time for online sessions and increased students' self-study phases instead. Other: _____
24. **What online tools have you included in your online teaching concept with your students? Select all that apply.**
- Videoconferencing tool (e.g., Zoom, BBB, Teams, Webex...)
 - Padlet, Jamboard
 - Google docs, Yopad, for collaborative writing
 - commercial language learning platform (e.g., BlinkLearning, Vista Higher Learning, Deutschfuchs, Speexx)
 - social media (e.g., Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook)
 - polls (e.g., Mentimeter, Zoom/Webex Survey)
 - wordclouds (e.g., with Answergarden)
 - quizzes (e.g., Kahoot, Wordwall.net)
 - my own video and/or audio recordings (e.g., with Screencast, Camtasia, my mobile phone) interactive videos, i.e., videos with stops where students need to answer questions (e.g., with Playposit, EdPuzzle, h5p)
 - students send me their audio and/or video recordings for feedback
 - online materials from different websites during the lesson
 - the electronic version of a textbook with the students using the hardcopy of the textbook educational videos from the web
 - Other: _____
25. **Please name your favourite online tools (up to three) which you use in your teaching or which you ask your students to use.**
26. **On average, what is the percentage of individual speaking time your students get in online sessions?**
- around 10%
 - below 20%
 - 20–40%
 - 40–60%
 - 60–80%
 - above 80%
27. **How much time (in percent) have you allocated to asynchronous study (i.e., when students work by themselves) and synchronous teaching (your online sessions), per group?**
- asynchronous: _____

- synchronous: _____
28. **In your opinion, what is the ideal class size when teaching online?**
- 1–5
 - 6–10
 - 11–15
 - 16–20
 - 21–26
 - 27
29. **When teaching online, how much asynchronous (students working by themselves) and synchronous work (online sessions) is best?**
- 50% asynchronous and 50% synchronous
 - 70% asynchronous and 30% synchronous
 - 30% asynchronous and 70% synchronous
30. **Students have more opportunities for interacting with each other during my on-line sessions compared to my in-person sessions.**
- completely disagree
 - mostly disagree
 - slightly disagree
 - slightly agree
 - mostly agree
 - completely agree
31. **My online sessions are similar in terms of how I teach to my in-person lessons.**
- completely disagree
 - mostly disagree
 - slightly disagree
 - slightly agree
 - mostly agree
 - completely agree
32. **I would like to use some tools from the web but my institution does not want me to because of potential data protection issues.**
- completely disagree
 - mostly disagree
 - slightly disagree
 - slightly agree
 - mostly agree
 - completely agree
33. **How much has preparation time for each online session and for preparing homework increased for you?**
- by more than 80%
 - by about 60/70%
 - by about 40/50%
 - by about 20/30%
 - by about 10%
 - not at all
34. **Has your assessment changed during the pandemic? How?**
35. **When the pandemic is over, students will expect a variety of formats (in-person, online, blended, hybrid)**
- completely disagree
 - mostly disagree
 - slightly disagree
 - slightly agree

- mostly agree
 - completely agree
36. **When the pandemic is over, I would like to be able to choose from a variety of teaching formats (in-person, online, blended, hybrid).**
- completely disagree
 - mostly disagree
 - slightly disagree
 - slightly agree
 - mostly agree
 - completely agree
37. **When the pandemic is over, how would you like to teach?**
- in-person only, like I did before the pandemic
 - mainly in-person but with some tools I have used during emergency online teaching
 - a combination of online and in-person
 - online only
 - hybrid (=in-person but with students joining the class on their devices from wherever they are)
38. **When the pandemic is over: Which aspects of online teaching and learning you used during the pandemic do you want to introduce in your in-person teaching?**
39. **What have you learned by switching to online classes in the pandemic?**
40. **Do you want to change the way you assess students after the pandemic? How?**
41. **What would you like your institution to do regarding your teaching in the future, after the pandemic? Select all that apply.**
- Online teaching should be incorporated in the teaching format.
 - Online teaching should be considered equal to in-person teaching.
 - Online teaching needs to be paid better than in-person teaching because preparing for it is more time-consuming.
 - My institution should make or continue to make some tools (e.g., Padlet, Zoom, Mentimeter) available to instructors for free.
 - Other: _____
42. **What do you want to change in terms of your teaching practices after the pandemic?**
43. **Please add any comments you would like to make.**

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