Doi: https://doi.org/10.31578/jebs.v7i1.254

Face-to-Face, Hybrid and Online English as a Foreign Language Learning Efficiency in Higher Education (Georgian and Italian students' views)

Natela Doghonadze∗
Tamari Dolidze∗∗
Natia Vasadze∗∗∗

Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic and its waves have resulted in transitions from face-to-face activities to completely online learning, then to hybrid learning, and then to a peculiar face-to-face COVID-19-time learning (with masks, distance-keeping, etc.). As the situation tends to continue for an indefinite time, it is important to study the existing experience and to take the obtained results into consideration in the future practice. Therefore, the presented research attempted to study students' view on the experience of face-to-face (F-2-F), hybrid and online EFL teaching in universities during 2019-2021. With this purpose, a quantitative study was carried out through questioning the opinions of English as a foreign language (EFL) students in Georgia and Italy. The advantages and disadvantages of the three modes were assessed by 466 (430 of them from Georgia and 36 from Italy) volunteer respondents. The outcomes of the study were analyzed and elaborated in the forms of practical recommendations for more effective planning and implementation of EFL teaching during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: F2F; Hybrid; Distance Education; EFL

Introduction

We all acknowledge that the coronavirus pandemic has caused an unprecedented crisis in all areas of our life. According to United Nations Policy Brief: Education During Covid-19 and Beyond in the field of education, this emergency has led to the massive closure of face-to-face activities of educational institutions in more than 190 countries (UN, 2020) in order to prevent the spread of the virus and mitigate its impact, which more than ever required taking reasonable and effective measures and urgent steps at the management level at all levels of educational institutions, in particular higher education institutions (HEIs). Although today various countries speak about the third, fourth and even fifth waves of the pandemic (Hale et al., 2021) and the number of infected / deceased people keeps growing (Sanyaolu), many countries, due to successful vaccination, are returning to face-to-face or at least hybrid education. The experience of all the above modes is huge, however, insufficient large-scale studies have been conducted to analyze the lessons learnt and to apply the most efficient for the given concrete situation mode in a way which is not harmful either for health or for the quality of the obtained knowledge.

English as a foreign language has traditionally been taught via face-to-face (with a certain part of blended) learning until the World Health Organization announced Covid-19 as Pandemic on March 20, 2020 (WHO, 2020). Consequently, all levels of educational institutions, including Higher Educational Institutions had to primarily resolve an ultimate issue of continuing spring term 2020 through emergency transition to a new modality of teaching and learning EFL. Later, in summer 2020 due to a hot

∗ International Black Sea University, Georgia
∗∗ Batumi State Maritime Academy, Georgia
∗∗∗ Batumi State Maritime Academy, Georgia
Corresponding Email: nateladoghonadze@ibsu.edu.ge

summer and then in summer 2021 due to vaccination, the situation partially improved in some regions, which enabled some countries to return to the F-2-F or at least to move to the hybrid mode (Coghan, 2021; Deiparine, 2021; López Romero, 2021). In this situation, F-2-F learning became a novelty for some students and even some teachers, so it has become a necessity to study the lessons of moving from one educational mode to another. Was online learning really such a bad experience as some researchers, teachers, parents and students (Bird, Castleman, & Lohner, 2021; Hasan & Bao, 2020; Meccawy, Meccawi, & Alsobhi, 2021) claim? Has not education benefitted from online learning? If it has, in what ways? There are many questions to be answered, and much research to be held, instead of blaming unfounded any educational modes.

Literature review

The face-to-face mode of learning is the traditional way of mastering the English language requiring in-person contact between lecturers and students in a classroom with its appropriate facilities such as textbooks, exercise books, posters, projectors, white board, markers, etc. What is especially important, it entails live interaction amongst learners and their lecturer accompanied by body language, mimics, eye contact, which liven the process of communication and support understanding. Additionally, students submit their assignments, complete project-based tasks, take examinations, etc. The major role of instructors in F2F educational process is to motivate students, engage them in the learning process. With all promises that it can / should be student-centered, this mode is in fact rather teacher-centered, as the teacher is the one who plans, monitors, guides, and assesses the process. However, this approach guarantees intrinsically less motivated students' engagement in class. According to UNESCO (2020), "face-to-face teaching offers opportunities for student-teacher interaction that are difficult to replicate at a distance, particularly where there is inadequate training for distance education". Therefore, the following points could be highlighted while learning F2F: 1. Dialogue between learners and instructors; 2. Knowledge sharing among students which stimulates their involvement; 3. Eye-contact encouraging interrelation. These points are valuable mediators while teaching English as a foreign language.

According to Kemp and Frieve (2014), students prefer F-2-F learning for listening and speaking classes, but find writing and reading online classes comfortable enough. Miliszewska (2007) mentions that students believed F-2-F learning easier, permitting more effective knowledge and skill sharing, and getting help. Paul and Jefferson (2019) found that, contrary to (probably outdated) view that female students enjoy F-2-F classes more than online ones, while male students enjoy online classes more than female ones, for the 401 traditional and 147 online students, such difference did not exist.

According to Arias, Swinton, and Anderson (2018), "students in the face-to-face section have statistically significantly higher exam scores and statistically significantly greater improvement on the post-test instructor questions. There is no statistical difference in the improvement on the post-test overall nor in the improvement in the post-test standardized questions. These mixed results suggest that both course objectives and the mechanism used to assess the relative effectiveness of the two modes of education may play an important part in determining the relative effectiveness of alternative delivery methods" (p. 1).

According to UNESCO (2021), the hybrid mode is "combining remote and in-classroom learning during school reopening and in preparation for potential resurgence". As it combines features of both F2F and online teaching/learning, it may be used as a transition step from totally F2F educational process, with both teachers and students unaccustomed to online learning, to complete e-learning. It also supports readjustment after lockdowns to come back to normal educational process and permits to maintain technology application at a high level. In hybrid learning, a teacher can decide whether to move all homework online or ask students to write it in exercise books (and, in case of necessity, send it online to the teacher), which is very helpful in case of transitions in both directions happening unexpectedly. It may involve part of learning online and part F-2-F, or some students

attending the class F-2-F (with all pandemic-time precaution measures), while others attend the same lesson online. "The precise nature of that mix, though, varies greatly from school to school, based on factors including the local rate of COVID-19 transmission, the availability of funds to support new instructional approaches, and the willingness of students and staff to return to buildings" (Lieberman, 2020, par.1). This approach is the most student-centered one in the pandemic conditions, as it is the students who choose whether to attend the class in-person or to participate in it online, and many parents and students are grateful for the possibility to make the choice. However, depending on how effectively it is applied and whether the teacher is qualified to apply it, the hybrid approach can be the best or the worst solution (Lieberman, 2020). The hybrid approach may be applied as flipped learning (theory teaching done through online video recordings, either professional or teacher-made, while language practice carried out in-class), which will make the lesson (in a real or virtual classroom) more creative, and students will be busy with more authentic activities. However, blended learning application is hardly possible in primary school, while in middle school may be applied only to easy materials/topics. In high schools and especially at university, blended learning is not only acceptable, but also recommended, in order to trigger student autonomy. Blended learning, however, is effective if accompanied by teacher follow-up, to see whether his/her students understood the material appropriately (Hwang, 2018).

According to Jost et al. (2021), hybrid learning (when possible) is the most effective way of teaching nowadays, as it permits to easily adjust to the shift to traditional or totally online learning without much additional planning and preparation. In 'normal' times, it permits to maximally apply the advantages and compensate the disadvantages of both approaches. Lischer et al. (2021) share this opinion. In their study, the students reported coping well during lockdown, but indicated that it was lecturers who were challenged by distance teaching, which, in turn, created some stress for the students. According to Lieberman (2020), about two thirds of US schools are applying the hybrid approach. In the US, African American, Latino, and Asian students mostly prefer completely remote regime. However, live-streaming regime is a problem for many schools. Parents with several children like hybrid or totally distant regime of communication with the school, as made their lives easier (no need to take children to and from different schools). Social distancing is not that harsh in hybrid learning. It is good that with hybrid model, not only students, but also teachers are given a choice of F-2-F or online classes, however, it creates challenges for small / private educational institutions (sometimes, there is only one teacher of the subject).

As result of the pandemic, the learning process altered dramatically and traditional F-2-F learning has been completely substituted by online learning. It combines the usage of scanned on-paper and Internet resources in the educational environment. It has a wide variety of benefits, e.g. it is flexible in time and space, depends on learners' own pace of learning, etc.

Sadeghi (2019) names the following advantages of online learning: study from anywhere at any time, saving significant amount of money, no commuting, flexibility to choose the course of learning, and saving time. According to Gopal, Singh, and Aggarwal (2021), in online learning student satisfaction depends on the qualification of instructor, course design, promptness of feedback, and student expectation. If this is provided, students' performance is positively impacted. Therefore, it is not so much the issue of the medium of teaching / learning, as that of a teacher's skill to teach online effectively.

Baber (2020) examined students' attitudes towards online learning during Covid-19 pandemic in India and South Korea and found it quite positive. On the other hand, Zboun and Farrah (2021), for example, found that the 82 Palestinian students in their study preferred F-2-F learning. Weak internet connectivity, poor interaction, low motivation, less participation and less understanding were the challenges of online learning that they named. As teaching via technologies is more expensive than the traditional teaching, it should be cost-effective, which requires teacher's qualification and motivation, to say nothing about extra time that teachers need to prepare for classes. The attitude towards online learning, besides the material factors (cost, quality of internet connection, hardware and software), may depend on cultural factor or on the degree to which technologies are available

for education in the corresponding country. However critical the students in Zboun and Farrah (2021) study were towards online learning, they admitted that it saves time, effort and money. And the materials are easy to be reviewed.

According to Hrastinski (2008), synchronous e-learning, which is supported by media such as videoconferencing and chat, is similar to F-2-F educational process, it is rather teacher-centered, although all the learning stages occur remotely with technology application:

- Time is pre-scheduled;
- It is (to a certain degree) interactive;
- It involves pair and group (distance) work;
- Via it projects may be completed;
- It includes assessment/evaluation, results of which are more subject to cheating compared to F-2-F assessment;
- E-resources are linked or sent via emails, chat boxes, etc.
- Teacher can to a certain degree control and provide that learners are involved in the process of learning.

As for asynchronous e-learning, which is facilitated by media such as e-mail and discussion boards, supports work relations among learners and with teachers, it is a purely student-centered approach which does not require learners' and teachers' immediate consideration. It requires from students:

- Self-discipline and organization;
- Ability to self-pace;
- Flexibility

(Hrastinski, 2008).

Method

The quantitative research method was applied, as it permits to assess the situation objectively. According to Queirós, Faria, and Almeida (2017), "the quantitative methodology seeks to obtain accurate and reliable measurements that allow a statistical analysis" (p. 369). Statistical calculations were done with SPSS 21.0 software.

Research questions

1. Did the teachers and students have experience of completely online or hybrid EFL teaching / learning?
2. How was the decision about moving online due to the pandemic made?
3. Was online teaching / learning comfortable and effective?
4. How did moving completely online impact the grades and the quality of learning?
5. Was teacher / student feedback received timely?
6. What were the challenges caused by suddenly moving to online teaching/learning?

Tool

To hold a survey on F2F, hybrid and online EFL learning, a questionnaire was made up, based on literature review. The participants had to choose their answers from 1 to 5 according to Likert scale (1-completely disagree, → 5 completely agree or 1-not at all, → 5 sufficient). The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions, one of them having nine sub-items (see the link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSemRCOnSW9Lk4Nt9CRlPEL5IkWFNI6bCYHgS3S5OU5syzRR3w/viewform?usp=sf_link).

Tool validation and piloting

All authors and seven more experts (totally 10 experts) in the area checked the formulations in the questionnaire and the coverage of the research questions by the questions asked. This was done to increase the face and content validity of the questionnaire (Taherdoost, 2018). All experts said 'yes' to all items, so the assessment of the questionnaire items was positive. As for the content validity, it was calculated according to the formula:

$$\mathrm{CVR} = \frac{n_e - (\frac{N}{2})}{\frac{N}{2}}$$

where "CVR is the content validity ratio, ne is the number of panel members indicating "essential,"

and N is the total number of panel members" (Taherdoost, 2018, p. 30). It was defined as .6-1 (see table 1) for various items, which, according to Taherdoost is appropriate (min. .62) (2018, p.31).

Table 1. Defining the content validity of the questionnaire

Item	N	N_e	CVR
1	5	10	1
2	5	10	1
3	5	9	.8
4	5	8	.6
5	5	9	.8
6	5	9	.8
7	5	10	1
8	5	8	.6
9	5	8	.6
10	5	10	1
11a	5	8	.6

11b	5	10	1
11c	5	10	1
11d	5	9	.8
11e	5	8	.6
11f	5	10	1
11g	5	10	1
11h	5	10	1
11i	5	8	.6
12	5	10	1
13	5	10	1

The questionnaire was then piloted to assess its reliability. The test-retest procedure was applied and Chronbach's Alpha was defined. Ten respondents who further did not take part in the research were asked to answer the questionnaire items twice, with a break of 10 minutes. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2a. Assessing the reliability of the questionnaire results (test)

item		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1	I have already had some experience of totally online teaching / learning before September 2020.	4	3	1	1	1	2.2	1.4
2	I have already had some experience of hybrid (mixed) teaching / learning before September 2020.	1	2	1	2	4	3.6	1.5
3	The decision about the mode was made after consulting students and staff.	3	2	0	3	2	2.9	1.7
4	I took part in decision-making	4	2	0	3	1	2.5	1.6

5	The taken decision was agreeable for me / I am satisfied with the decision taken	2	1	1	4	2	3.3	1.5
6	I have felt comfortable teaching / learning in the chosen mode.	1	2	1	4	2	3.4	1.3
7	Teaching / learning was as easy as before the pandemic.	2	2	1	4	1	3.0	1.4
8	The obtained grades were as high as (not lower than) before the pandemic.	0	1	1	3	5	4.2	1.0
9	The obtained grades are higher than before the pandemic.	0	2	1	3	4	3.9	1.2
10	I received teacher (student) feedback timely and effectively.	1	1	0	5	3	3.8	1.3
	Assess the challenges caused by suddenly moving to online teaching/learning							
11a	feeling lonely	3	1	1	3	2	3.0	1.6
11b	lack of materials	0	0	2	4	4	4.2	0.8
11c	technical skills	0	0	1	5	4	4.3	0.7
11d	other technical issues	2	1	2	4	1	3.1	1.4
11e	distractors and discipline	2	1	1	5	1	3.2	1.4
11f	lack of teacher / peer support	1	1	1	3	4	3.8	1.4
11g	lack of communication during the lesson	1	1	0	5	3	3.8	1.3
11h	engagement in the activities	1	2	1	4	2	3.4	1.3
11i	conflict between learning and teaching style	2	3	2	2	1	2.7	1.3

12	The gained knowledge has been as good as before the pandemic.	1	2	1	4	2	3.4	1.3
13	The gained knowledge was worse than before the pandemic	2	4	1	2	1	2.6	1.3

Table 2b. Assessing the reliability of the questionnaire results (retest)

item		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1	I have already had some experience of totally online teaching / learning before September 2020.	4	3	1	1	1	2.2	1.4
2	I have already had some experience of hybrid (mixed) teaching / learning before September 2020.	2	1	1	2	4	3.5	1.6
3	The decision about the mode was made after consulting students and staff.	3	2	0	3	2	2.9	1.7
4	I took part in decision-making	4	2	0	3	1	2.5	1.6
5	The taken decision was agreeable for me / I am satisfied with the decision taken	2	1	0	5	2	3.4	1.5
6	I have felt comfortable teaching / learning in the chosen mode.	1	2	1	4	2	3.4	1.3
7	Teaching / learning was as easy as before the pandemic.	2	2	1	4	1	3.0	1.4
8	The obtained grades were as high as (not	0	1	1	3	5	4.2	1.0

	lower than) before the pandemic.							
9	The obtained grades are higher than before the pandemic.	0	2	1	4	3	3.8	1.1
10	I received teacher (student) feedback timely and effectively.	1	1	1	4	3	3.7	1.3
	Assess the challenges caused by suddenly moving to online teaching/learning							
11a	feeling lonely	3	1	1	3	2	3.0	1.6
11b	lack of materials	0	0	2	4	4	4.2	0.8
11c	technical skills	0	0	1	5	4	4.3	0.7
11d	other technical issues	2	2	1	4	1	3.0	1.4
11e	distractors and discipline	2	1	1	5	1	3.2	1.4
11f	lack of teacher / peer support	1	1	1	3	4	3.8	1.4
11g	lack of communication during the lesson	1	1	0	5	3	3.8	1.3
11h	engagement in the activities	1	2	1	4	2	3.4	1.3
11i	conflict between learning and teaching style	2	3	1	2	2	2.9	1.5
12	The gained knowledge has been as good as before the pandemic.	1	2	1	4	2	3.4	1.3
13	The gained knowledge was worse than before the pandemic	2	4	1	2	1	2.6	1.3

Table 2c. Assessing the reliability of the questionnaire results (Chronbach's Alpha)

item		Variable 1 ($Mean_{1)}$	Variable 2 ($Mean_{2)}$
1	I have already had some experience of totally online teaching / learning before September 2020.	2.2	2.2
2	I have already had some experience of hybrid (mixed) teaching / learning before September 2020.	3.6	3.5
3	The decision about the mode was made after consulting students and staff.	2.9	2.9
4	I took part in decision-making	2.5	2.5
5	The taken decision was agreeable for me / I am satisfied with the decision taken	3.3	3.4
6	I have felt comfortable teaching / learning in the chosen mode.	3.4	3.4
7	Teaching / learning was as easy as before the pandemic.	3.0	3.0
8	The obtained grades were as high as (not lower than) before the pandemic.	4.2	4.2
9	The obtained grades are higher than before the pandemic.	3.9	3.8
10	I received teacher (student) feedback timely and effectively.	3.8	3.7

11a	feeling lonely	3.0	3.0
11b	lack of materials	4.2	4.2
11c	technical skills	4.3	4.3
11d	other technical issues	3.1	3.0
11e	distractors and discipline	3.2	3.2
11f	lack of teacher / peer support	3.8	3.8
11g	lack of communication during the lesson	3.8	3.8
11h	engagement in the activities	3.4	3.4
11i	conflict between learning and teaching style	2.7	2.9
12	The gained knowledge has been as good as before the pandemic.	3.4	3.4
13	The gained knowledge was worse than before the pandemic	2.6	2.6
Var. 1	Pearson correlation Sig N	1 21	.994 .000
Var. 2	Pearson correlation Sig N	0.994 21	1 .000 21

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

This reveals that the correlation between the testing and retesting results is very high (0.994), which means that the questionnaire is very reliable.

Procedure

The survey was executed remotely with the help of application 'Google forms', where lecturers and students of EFL field from various HEIs of Georgia took part. The survey was disseminated online to EFL teachers and students from different HEIs in Georgia and Italy.

Respondents

The population of the research was EFL teachers and students in higher education institutions (HEIs), three in Georgia and one Italy. As in the conditions of the pandemic, as well as without the involvement of the Ministry or some international organization it was impossible to provide a representative sampling, convenience sampling which can be done through placing the questionnaire link on social media (Facebook) was applied.

The preliminary results of the survey obtained in May were published in Doghonadze, Dolidze and Vasadze (2021), however, the questionnaire was not blocked by the time of the publication, as we viewed 95 respondents only from Georgia as not sufficient. We addressed more students and teachers to participate, also requested colleagues from Italy to help us. Eventually, by September 2021 the total number of participants was 466 (see table 3).

Table 3. Demographic data of the respondents

	Georgia	Italy
teachers	46	18
students	360	42
total	406	60

Results and Analysis

Viewing the Likert-type scale as an interval one (Sawamura, Morishita, & Ishigooka, 2014) means that the mean results of up to 2.2 were viewed as very negative, between 2.3 and 2.7 as negative, between 2.8 and 3.2 as neutral, between 3.3 and 3.7 as positive, and above 3.8 as very positive. SD equal to or below .5 revealed more or less homogeneous views, while higher SD revealed heterogeneous views.

Table 4a. Questionnaire results (Georgia, 46 teachers)

item		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1	I have already had some experience of totally online teaching before September 2020.	18	6	7	7	8	2.6	1.6
2	I have already had some experience of hybrid (mixed) teaching before September 2020.	8	12	7	9	10	3.0	1.4
3	The decision about the mode was made after consulting students and staff.	18	17	5	3	3	2.0	1.1

4	I took part in decision-making.	41	0	0	3	2	1.1	.6
5	The taken decision was agreeable for me / I am satisfied with the decision taken.	3	4	11	13	15	3.8	1.2
6	I have felt comfortable teaching in the chosen mode.	3	4	13	14	12	3.6	1.2
7	Teaching was as easy as before the pandemic.	7	12	11	9	7	2.9	1.3
8	The obtained grades were as high as (not lower than) before the pandemic.	7	5	11	20	3	3.2	1.2
9	The obtained grades are higher than before the pandemic.	8	6	18	9	5	2.9	1.2
10	I received student feedback timely and effectively.	0	6	18	16	7	3.5	0.9
	Assess the challenges caused by suddenly moving to online teaching/learning							
11a	feeling lonely	6	7	15	12	6	3.1	1.2
11b	lack of materials	10	10	14	9	3	2.7	1.2
11c	technical skills	8	9	18	9	2	2.7	1.1
11d	other technical issues	7	10	17	10	2	2.8	1.0
11e	distractors and discipline	5	10	15	11	5	3.0	1.1
11f	lack of teacher / peer support	9	10	17	7	3	2.7	1.1
11g	lack of communication during the lesson	12	7	14	10	3	2.7	1.2
11h	engagement in the activities	3	9	16	12	6	3.2	1.1

11i	conflict between learning and teaching style	10	9	17	7	3	2.7	1.1
12	The gained knowledge has been as good as before the pandemic.	4	7	15	13	7	3.3	1.2
13	The gained knowledge was worse than before the pandemic	7	13	14	8	4	2.7	1.1

Table 4b. Questionnaire results (Georgia, 360 students)

item		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1	I have already had some experience of totally online learning before September 2020.	144	47	54	58	57	2.5	1.5
2	I have already had some experience of hybrid (mixed) learning before September 2020.	140	45	50	62	63	2.7	1.6
3	The decision about the mode was made after consulting students and staff.	151	159	50	0	0	1.7	.7
4	I took part in decision-making.	301	59	0	0	0	1.1	.4
5	The taken decision was agreeable for me / I am satisfied with the decision taken.	22	24	95	97	122	3.8	1.1
6	I have felt comfortable learning in the chosen mode.	23	24	102	113	98	3.7	1.1
7	Learning was as easy as before the pandemic.	44	119	118	41	38	2.8	1.1
8	The obtained grades were as high as (not	37	38	152	86	47	3.2	1.1

	lower than) before the pandemic.							
9	The obtained grades are higher than before the pandemic.	34	32	148	91	55	3.4	1.4
10	I received teacher feedback timely and effectively.	29	52	116	109	54	3.3	1.1
	Assess the challenges caused by suddenly moving to online teaching/learning							
11a	feeling lonely	25	61	120	101	53	3.4	2.9
11b	lack of materials	83	79	108	68	22	2.9	2.4
11c	technical skills	65	72	137	68	18	2.6	1.0
11d	other technical issues	53	76	130	83	18	2.8	1.1
11e	distractors and discipline	61	76	115	72	36	2.9	1.2
11f	lack of teacher / peer support	69	76	137	55	23	2.8	1.2
11g	lack of communication during the lesson	52	90	112	80	26	2.8	1.1
11h	engagement in the activities	25	72	126	101	36	3.2	1.9
11i	conflict between learning and teaching style	61	93	130	51	25	2.7	1.1
12	The gained knowledge has been as good as before the pandemic.	27	53	126	104	50	3.3	1.1
13	The gained knowledge was worse than before the pandemic	71	86	117	58	28	2.7	1.2

Table 4c. Questionnaire results (Italy, 18 teachers)

item		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1	I have already had some experience of totally	3	1	0	8	6	3.7	1.4

	online teaching before September 2020.							
2	I have already had some experience of hybrid (mixed) teaching before September 2020.	1	0	0	8	9	4.3	1.0
3	The decision about the mode was made after consulting students and staff.	14	1	2	1	0	1.4	.9
4	I took part in decision-making	16	1	0	1	0	1.2	0.7
5	The taken decision was agreeable for me / I am satisfied with the decision taken	3	3	3	4	5	3.3	1.5
6	I have felt comfortable teaching in the chosen mode.	2	4	3	4	5	3.3	1.4
7	Teaching was as easy as before the pandemic.	3	4	4	3	4	3.1	1.4
8	The obtained grades were as high as (not lower than) before the pandemic.	3	5	5	3	2	2.8	1.2
9	The obtained grades are higher than before the pandemic.	4	7	5	2	0	2.3	1.0
10	I received student feedback timely and effectively.	0	0	9	8	1	3.6	.6
	Assess the challenges caused by suddenly moving to online teaching/learning							
11a	feeling lonely	0	3	5	7	3	3.6	1.0
11b	lack of materials	3	5	6	3	1	2.7	1.1
11c	technical skills	5	4	7	1	1	2.4	1/1
11d	other technical issues	4	5	6	2	1	2.5	1.1

11e	distractors and discipline	1	2	7	5	3	3.4	1.1
11f	lack of teacher / peer support	3	4	7	3	1	2.7	1.1
11g	lack of communication during the lesson	1	1	9	5	2	3.3	1.0
11h	engagement in the activities	1	3	6	5	3	3.3	1.1
11i	conflict between learning and teaching style	3	8	5	2	0	2.3	11.0
12	The gained knowledge has been as good as before the pandemic.	1	3	3	5	6	3.7	1.3
13	The gained knowledge was worse than before the pandemic	4	5	3	3	3	2.7	1.5

Table 4c. Questionnaire results (Italy, 42 students)

item		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1	I have already had some experience of totally online learning before September 2020.	2	2	1	21	16	4.1	1.0
2	I have already had some experience of hybrid (mixed) learning before September 2020.	0	2	1	22	17	4.3	.7
3	The decision about the mode was made after consulting students and staff.	38	2	2	0	0	1.1	.5
4	I took part in decision-making	39	3	0	0	0	1.1	.3
5	The taken decision was agreeable for me / I am	3	4	10	11	14	3.7	1.2

	satisfied with the decision taken							
6	I have felt comfortable learning in the chosen mode.	2	4	12	13	11	3.6	1.1
7	Learning was as easy as before the pandemic.	8	10	12	8	4	2.8	1.2
8	The obtained grades were as high as (not lower than) before the pandemic.	6	8	11	10	11	3.1	1.3
9	The obtained grades are higher than before the pandemic.	3	6	10	12	11	3.5	1.2
10	I received teacher feedback timely and effectively.	3	4	16	14	5	3.3	1.1
	Assess the challenges caused by suddenly moving to online teaching/learning							
11a	feeling lonely	3	4	16	13	6	3.4	1.1
11b	lack of materials	7	9	14	9	3	2.8	1.2
11c	technical skills	8	10	14	8	2	2.7	1.1
11d	other technical issues	10	12	13	5	2	2.5	1.1
11e	distractors and discipline	6	11	13	9	4	2.9	1.1
11f	lack of teacher / peer support	8	8	16	7	3	2.7	1.2
11g	lack of communication during the lesson	4	9	12	12	5	3.1	1.2
11h	engagement in the activities	3	7	16	11	5	3.2	1.1
11i	conflict between learning and teaching style	8	14	13	5	2	2.5	1.1
12	The gained knowledge has been as good as before the pandemic.	4	8	10	13	7	3.3	1.2

13	The gained knowledge was worse than before the pandemic	9	12	12	6	3	2.6	1.2

The standard deviation in the majority of items is higher than .5, which reveals the variety of views on the majority of items. Wherever the views were more or less homogeneous, there is a comment below on it.

While in Georgia quite few teachers (M=2.6) agreed that they had experience of teaching online before the pandemic, in Italy their ratio was higher (M=3.7). And while in Georgia quite few students (M=2.5) agreed that they had had experience of learning online before the pandemic, in Italy their ratio was higher (M=4.1). It is interesting, that the students (M=2.5) in Georgia had had even (insignificantly) less experience of online learning than teachers (M=2.6).

With the experience of hybrid teaching / learning, the situation was better than with completely online teaching / learning in both countries. While in Georgia teachers neither agreed, nor disagreed (M=3.0) that they had had experience of hybrid teaching before the pandemic, in Italy there were more teachers who had had such experience (M=4.3). And while in Georgia few students (M=2.7) agreed that they had experience of hybrid learning before the pandemic, in Italy their ratio was higher (M=4.3). From the first two items of the questionnaire, we can conclude that both teachers and students were somehow prepared to online teaching /learning, however, very few of them said they were really prepared. Although now, after all changes have occurred in education system, all teachers and students have certain experience of both online and hybrid teaching / learning, taking into consideration how quickly the changes occurred, Georgian teachers and students still need more support in this direction.

According to the majority of the Georgian teachers, the decision about the mode was not made after consulting students and staff (M=2.0), and they did not participate in it personally (M=1.1). According to the majority of the Italian teachers, the decision about the mode was not made after consulting students and staff (M=1.4), and they did not participate in it personally (M=1.2). According to the majority of the Georgian students, the decision about the mode was not made after consulting students and staff (M=1.7), and they did not participate in it personally. And their view on personal participation was quite unanimous (M=1.1, SD=.3). According to the majority of the Italian students, the decision about the mode was not made after consulting students and staff (M=1.1, SD=.5), and they did not participate in it personally (M=1.1, SD=.3), and they were quite unanimous in this view. There is no big difference in the views on participation in decision making concerning moving totally to the online mode between the countries.

Although the decision made was not agreed with students and staff, the Georgian teachers were more or less satisfied with it (M=3.8). The majority of them felt more or less comfortable with it (M=3.6). On the other hand, the Italian teachers were less satisfied with it (M=3.3). The majority of them felt more or less comfortable with it (M=3.3). This may mean that they were more critical about it, however, the number of the respondents not let us make conclusions. The Georgian students were more or less satisfied with the decision made (M=3.8). The majority of them felt more or less comfortable with it (M=3.7). On the other hand, the Italian students were a little less satisfied with it (M=3.6). The majority of them felt comfortable with it (M=3.6). Once again, this may mean that they were more critical about it than their Georgian counterparts, however, their limited number does not let us make conclusions.

The Georgian teachers neither disagreed nor agreed that teaching online was as easy for them as teaching F-2-F (M=2.9). The Georgian students shared their opinion (M=2.8). The Italian teachers were not sure they agree that teaching online was as

easy for them as teaching F-2-F (M=3.1). Their better attitude compared to the Georgian teachers can be explained by their better preparedness to completely online teaching. The Italian students shared the Georgian students' opinion (M=2.8).

The Georgian teachers neither agreed, nor disagreed (M=3.2) that students' grades are as high as they were before the pandemic. They neither disagreed nor agreed that the grades got higher (M=2.9). As for the Georgian students, they also neither agreed, nor disagreed (M=3.2) that the grades are as high as they were before the pandemic. At the same time, they contradicted teachers and claimed that grades had even increased a little (M=3.4). The high SD=1.4 explains this difference in views, as they judge by their own and their friends' grades, which may be different. From this point of view teachers' views look more realistic. Concerning the Italian teachers, they disagreed (M=2.8) that the grades are as high as they were before the pandemic. They even more disagreed that the grades got higher (M=2.3). As for the Italian students, they neither agreed, nor disagreed (M=3.1) that the grades are as high as they were before the pandemic. They stated that grades had increased to a certain degree (M=3.5). The quite high SD=1.2 might be responsible for this difference in views, as they, like the Georgian students, are more aware of their own and their friends' grades, which may be different. From this point of view teachers' views look more realistic. Thus, the teachers in both countries believed that grades have remained more or less on the same level after the pandemic as before it (which is not bad), while students think that the grades have increased to a certain degree, which may be ascribed to the subjectivity of (or incomplete information dealing with) assessment or due to, as many teachers (Holden, Norris, & Kuhlmeier, 2021; Raines et al. 2011) claim, a greater ease of cheating during the online assessment.

The Georgian teachers more or less confirmed that they received student feedback timely and effectively (M=3.9). The Georgian students were more reserved about teacher feedback received timely and effectively (M=3.3). So, it is possible to say that the situation did not really get worse. The Italian teachers more or less confirmed that they received student feedback timely and effectively (M=3.6, SD=.9) and were relatively unanimous about it. The Italian students were more reserved about teacher feedback received timely and effectively (M=3.3). So, it is possible to say that in both countries the situation did not really get worse from the point of view of receiving feedback in online teaching/learning.

As for the challenges caused by suddenly moving to online teaching/learning, according to the Georgian teachers, they were reasonable enough (2.7<M<3.2), while the major challenges were engagement in the activities (M=3.2) and feeling lonely (M=3.1). For the Georgian students, also, students reasonably assessed other challenges, and only the challenges of feeling lonely (M=3.4) and lack of engagement in the activities (M=3.2) were relatively strong. Basically, the students agreed with the teachers. For the Italian teachers, the major challenges, like the Georgian teachers, were engagement in the activities (M=3.3) and feeling lonely (M=3.6), but they also named distractors and discipline (M=3.4) and lack of communication during the lesson (M=3.3) as major challenges. However, while the Georgian teachers named the remaining factors as neither important, not unimportant, the Italian teachers named them as unimportant (2.2<M<2.7). This difference for items 11c and 11d deals with more advanced technological skills of the Italian teachers and students, than those of the Georgian ones (as seen from items 1 and 2), and as Italy is a more developed country), as well as, possibly, cultural peculiarity, but, of course, for making conclusion, a larger scale survey with Italian teachers would be needed. Among the major factors of challenges the Italian students name feeling lonely (M=3.4), lack of engagement in the activities (M=3.2), and (less important), like the Italian teachers, lack of communication in class (M=3.1). As unimportant (but existing) factors they view other than technical skills technical problems (M=2.5) and conflict between learning and teaching style (M=2.5). As for other factors, they neither agree, nor disagree about their importance.

Concerning the knowledge gained during the online teaching / learning, the Georgian teachers agree that the gained knowledge has been as good as before the pandemic (M=3.3). This is confirmed by their rejection of the view that the gained knowledge has been worse than before the pandemic (M=2.7). The Georgian students' answers are identic (M=3.1 and M=2.7).

The Italian teachers agree that the gained knowledge has been as good as before the pandemic (M=3.7). This is confirmed by their rejection of the view that the gained knowledge has been worse than before the pandemic (M=2.7). And, finally, the Italian students agree that the gained knowledge has been as good as before the pandemic (M=3.3). This is confirmed by their rejection of the view that the gained knowledge has been worse than before the pandemic (M=2.6). The views of the Georgian and Italian respondents on the issue are similar.

Discussion

Concerning teachers and students not having sufficient experience of completely online or hybrid EFL teaching / learning our findings for Georgia supported the idea, while for Italian teachers they did not confirm the idea (the mean of 3.7 revealed that they were more or less prepared). Zheng, Bender, and Lyon (2021), state that US teachers may have lacked prior experience of online teaching before the pandemic. So, it looks like the situation differed in different countries, but was far from perfect in all of them.

The decision of moving online due to the pandemic was made without consulting teachers and students, as it was found in our study. Fernandez and Shaw (2020) state that, although the US universities apply shared leadership style, the decision had to be taken quickly, so during the crisis there was no time for opinion polls, and they were held only afterwards. This finding is n line with our study.

The participants of the current study confirmed that they were more or less satisfied with the online studies resulting from the pandemic crisis. Halil et al. (2020) came to a similar finding for Saudi Arabia medical students. According to Zheng, Bender and Lyon (2020), dental students in the US also found online learning quite agreeable. These results support our findings.

In our study, the grades and the quality of learning did not decrease in Georgian universities, while the Italian teachers and students believe that they decreased a little in their country. According to Zheng, Bender and Lyon (2020), dental students in the US obtained similar or better grades during online learning as during F-2-F learning. Gonzalez et al. (2020) claim that in Spanish universities the students' productivity increased. The results in various studies / countries / majors do differ, but no research states that they decreased significantly. To compare, the school results did decrease (Engzell, Frey, & Verhagen, 2021). This certainly needs further research, however, most probably, the cause is that schools were not as well prepared to the study mode transfer as HEIs.

Teacher / student feedback was received timely in both Georgia and Italy in our research. This is an agreement with Tanis (2020), according to whom students valued teachers' efforts to provide timely feedback to them in the conditions of online teaching.

The major challenges caused by suddenly moving to online teaching/learning defined in our research were engagement in the activities and feeling lonely for both Georgian and Italian respondents, while the Italian teachers also named distractors and discipline and the lack of communication during the lesson, and the Italian students named the lack of communication in class. Zalat, Hamed and Bolbol (2021) state that the highest barriers to e-learning were insufficient / unstable internet connectivity (40%), inadequate computer labs (36%), lack of computers/ laptops (32%), and technical problems (32%). Kwary and Fauzie (2018) name isolation as an important disadvantage of online learning. The total list of factors is more or less the same everywhere, while the major factors named in different studies vary.

Conclusion

The findings of the current study are quite congruent with the results obtained in variant countries. They state that the higher education system was to a certain degree prepared to the sudden change of the mode of the educational process, which permitted it to move to online education more or less painlessly, however, if the purely online education continues, both students and teachers will need more support in order to provide high quality of education, as well as teacher and student well-being. Teachers' and students' challenges have to be better studied and reacted to.

References:

Arias, J.J., Swinton, J. & Anderson, K. (2018). Online vs. face-to-face: A comparison of student outcomes with random assignment. *E-Journal of Business Education & Scholarship of Teaching,* 12(2), 1-23.

Baber, H. (2020). Determinants of students' perceived learning outcome and satisfaction in online learning during the pandemic of COVID-19. *Journal of Education and e-Learning Research,* 7(3), 285-292.

Bird, K., Castleman, B. & Lohner, G. (2021). Negative impacts from the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 crisis: Evidence from a statewide community college system. EdWorkingPaper No. 20-299. Providense, RI: Annenberg Institute at Brown University. Retrieved from https://www.edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai20-299.pdf

Coughan, S. (2021, September 9). Universities told to give students face-to-face teaching. *BBC News.* Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/education-58504263

Deiparine, C. (2021, September 20). Philippines approves limited return to classroom learning. *Philstar Global.* Retrieved from https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2021/09/20/2128404/philippines-approves-limited-return-classroom-learning

Doghonadze, N. Dolidze, T. and Vasadze, N. (2021). Comparing effectiveness of F2F, hybrid and online English as a foreign language learning in higher education. Proceedings of IRCEELT conference. Tbilisi: International Black Sea University.

Engzell, P., Frey, A., & Verhagen, M. (2021). Learning loss due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America,* 118(17), article e2022376118. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2022376118

Fernandez, A.A. & Shaw, G.P. (2020). Academic leadership in a time of crisis: The coronavirus and COVID-19. *Journal of Leadership Studies,* 14(1), 39-45.

Gonzalez, T., de la Rubia, M.A., Hincz, K.P., Comas-Lopez, M., Subirats, L., Fort, S., & Sacha, G.M. Influence of COVID-19 confinement on students' performance in higher education. *Plos One, 15(10), article* e0239490. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239490

Gopal, R., Singh, V., & Aggarwal, A. (2021). Impact of online classes on the satisfaction and performance of students during the pandemic period of COVID-19. *Education and Information Technologies*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10523-1

Hale, T., Angrist, N., Hale, A., Kira, B., Majumdar, S., Petherik, A., Phillips, T. Sridhar, D., Thompson, R., Webster, S., & Zhang, Y. (2021). Government responses and COVID-19 deaths: Global evidence across multiple pandemic waves. Plos One, 16(7), article e0253116. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0253116

Halil, R., Mansour, A., Fadda, W., Almisnid, K., Aldamegh, M, Al-Nafeesah, A., Alkhalifah, A., & Al-wutaid, O. (2020). The sudden transition to synchronized online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia: A qualitative study exploring medical students' perspectives. *BMC Medical Education,* 20, article 285. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02208-z

Hasan, N. & Bao, Y. (2020). Impact of "e-Learning crack-up" perception on psychological distress among college students during COVID-19 pandemic: A mediating role of "fear of academic year loss". *Child Youth survey Review,* 118, article 105355. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105355

Holden, O., Norris, M., & Kuhlmeier, V. (2021). Academic integrity in online assessment: A research review. Frontiers in Education, 6, https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.639814

Hrastinski, S. (2008). Asynchronous and synchronous e-learning. *Educause Review*. Retrieved from https://er.educause.edu/articles/2008/11/asynchronous-and-synchronous-elearning

Hwang, A. Online and hybrid learning. Journal of Management Education, 42(4), 557-563. doi:10.1177/1052562918777550

Jost, N., Jossen, S., Rothen, N., & Martarelli, C. (2021). The advantage of distributed practice in a blended learning setting. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26, 3097–3113.

Kemp, N. & Frieve, R. (2014). Face-to-face or face-to-screen? Undergraduates' opinions and test performance in classroom vs. online learning. *Frontiers of Psychology*, 5, article 1278. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01278

Kwary, D.A. & Fauzie, S. (2018) Students' achievement and opinions on the implementation of e-learning for phonetics and phonology lectures at Airlangga University. Educação e Pesquisa, *44*. https://doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634201710173240

Lieberman, M. (2020, November 11). How hybrid learning is (and is not) working during COVID-19: 6 case studies. *Education Week*. Retrieved May 13, 2021 from https://www.edweek.org/leadership/how-hybrid-learning-is-and-is-not-workingduring-covid-19-6-case-studies/2020/11

Lischer, S., Safi, N. & Dickson, C. (2021). Remote Learning and Students' Mental Health during the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Mixed-Method Enquiry. Nature Public Health Emergency Collection. DOI: 10.1007/s11125-020-09530-w

López Romero, V. (2021, September 05). How to Handle the Return to Face-to-Face Classes with the Children? *Latinamerican Post.* Retrieved from https://latinamericanpost.com/38212-how-to-handle-the-return-to-face-to-face-classes-with-the-children

Meccawy, Z., Meccawi, M., & Alsobhi, A. (2021). Assessment in 'survival mode': Student and faculty perceptions of online assessment practices in HE during Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal for International Integrity,* 17, article 16. Retrieved from https://edintegrity.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1007/s40979-021-00083-9

Miliszewska, I. (2007). Is it fully 'on' or partly 'off'? The case of fully online provision of transnational education. *Journal of Information Technology Education*, 6, 499-514.

Paul, J. & Jefferson, F. (2019). A comparative analysis of student performance in an online vs. face-to-face environmental science course from 2009 to 2016. *Frontiers in Computer Science,* 1. Retrieved from https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomp.2019.00007/full

Queirós, A., Faria, D., & Almeida, F. (2017). Strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative research methods. *European Journal of European Studies,* 3(9), 369-386.

Raines, D., Ricci, P., Brown, S., Eggenberger, T., Hindle, T., & Schiff, M. (2011). Cheating in online courses: The student definition. *The Journal of Effective Teaching,* 11(1), 80-89.

Sadeghi, M. (2019). A shift from classroom to distance learning: Advantages and limitations. International Journal of Research English Education, 4, 80–88.

Sanyaolu, A., Ocorie, C., Hosein, Z., Patidar, R. Desai, P., Prakash, S., Jaferi, U., Mangat, J., & Marinkovic, A. (2021). Global Pandemicity of COVID-19: Situation Report as of June 9, 2020. Infectious Deceases: Research and Treatment, 14, 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1177/1178633721991260

Sawamura, J., Morishita, S., & Ishigooka, J. (2014). Interpretation for scales of measurement linking with abstract algebra. *Journal of Clinical Bioinformatics*, 4(9), 1-9.

Taherdoost, H. (2016). Validity and reliability of the research instrument; how to test the validation of a questionnaire / survey in a research. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM)*, 5(3), 28-36.

Tanis, C.J. (2020). The seven principles of online learning: Feedback from faculty and alumni on its importance for teaching and learning. *Research in Learning Technology*, 28, 1-25. https://doi.org/10.25304/rlt.v28.2319

UNESCO. (2020). *Education and COVID-19: Challenges and opportunities*. Retrieved May 14, 2021 from https://en.ccunesco.ca/idealab/education-and-covid-19-challenges-and-opportunities

UNESCO. (2021). COVID-19 response – hybrid learning. Retrieved May 13.2021 from https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco-covid-19-response-toolkit-hybrid-learning.pdf

United Nations (2020). *Policy Brief: Education during Covid-19 and Beyond*. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/08/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf

WHO (2020). WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020

Zalat, M.M., Hamed, M.S., & Bolbol, S.A. (2021). The experiences, challenges, and acceptance of e-learning as a tool for teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic among university medical staff. *Plos One*, 16(3), article e0248758. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0248758

Zboun, J. & Farrah, M. (2021). Students' perspective on online language learning during Corona pandemic: benefits and challenges. Indonesian EFL Journal (IEFLJ), 7(1), 13-20.

Zheng, M., Bender, D. & Lyon, C. (2021). Online learning during COVID-19 produced equivalent or better student course performance as compared with pre-pandemic: Empirical evidence from a school-wide comparative study. *BMC Medical Education,* 21, article 495. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-021-02909-z