

CZU: [378.147:004:81-057.87]:303.4

[https://doi.org/10.59295/sum10\(200\)2024_23](https://doi.org/10.59295/sum10(200)2024_23)

ASSESSING THE POST-PANDEMIC IMPACT OF ON-LINE LEARNING ON TRANSLATION STUDENTS: INSIGHTS FROM THRID-YEAR UNDERGRADUATES AT MOLDOVA STATE UNIVERSITY

Ina SÎTNIC,

Universitatea de Stat din Moldova

This paper investigates the impact of online learning on translation students, focusing on the skills they developed and their adaptation process during the post-pandemic period. It contributes to the existing body of research in translator training by offering new insights into students' experiences with online learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath (R. Kasperè, 2021; E. Perez, S. Hodáková, 2021; M. Seresi, R. Eszenyi, E. Robin, 2021; N. Burkšaitienė, 2023). A questionnaire consisting of seventeen questions was administered to 15 third-year undergraduate students enrolled in the Translation and Interpreting programme at the Department of Translation, Interpretation, and Applied Linguistics, Moldova State University. The survey was designed to examine students' experiences and attitudes during and after the pandemic, assess their satisfaction with the online teaching and learning process, and gather perspectives on the skills they acquired, along with feedback on the educational experience in the post-pandemic context.

Keywords: *translator training, learning contexts, translation and interpreting skills, online learning.*

EVALUAREA IMPACTULUI POST-PANDEMIC AL ÎNVĂȚĂRII ON-LINE ASUPRA STUDENȚILOR TRADUCĂTORI: OBSERVAȚII LA STUDENȚII DIN ANUL TREI DE LA UNIVERSITATEA DE STAT DIN MOLDOVA

Lucrarea de față prezintă impactul învățării online asupra studenților la programul de studii Traducere și Interpretare, concentrându-se pe formarea și dezvoltarea competențelor și pe procesul de adaptare în timpul perioadei post-pandemice. Studiul efectuat contribuie la corpul existent de cercetare în domeniul formării traducătorilor, oferind noi perspective asupra experiențelor studenților privind învățarea online pe parcursul pandemiei COVID-19 și a consecințelor acesteia (R. Kasperè, 2021; E. Perez, S. Hodáková, 2021; M. Seresi, R. Eszenyi, E. Robin, 2021; N. Burkšaitienė, 2023). Un chestionar format din 17 întrebări a fost administrat unui eșantion de 15 studenți de licență din anul trei, de la Departamentul de Traducere, Interpretare și Lingvistică Aplicată, Universitatea de Stat din Moldova. Chestionarul a fost conceput pentru a cerceta experiențele și atitudinile studenților despre procesul de studii în timpul pandemiei și a perioadei post-pandemice, pentru a evalua gradul lor de satisfacție cu privire la procesul de predare și învățare online și pentru a acumula opinii cu privire la competențele dobândite și feedback cu privire la experiența educațională în contextul post-pandemic.

Cuvinte-cheie: *formarea traducătorilor, contexte de învățare, competențe de traducere și interpretare, învățare online.*

Perspectives on online learning

There are diverse perspectives regarding the concepts of *online learning* and *distance learning*, highlighting the necessity of distinguishing between the two. According to M. Moore and G. Kearsley [1, p. 2], distance learning refers to planned instruction that typically occurs in a location separate from teaching, requiring specialised course design techniques, instructional methods, communication strategies through electronic and other technological means, as well as specific organisational and administrative frameworks. In this context, technology serves as „the sole or principal means of communication” [1, p. 3]. Distance learning is characterised by delivering instruction to students who are physically separated from the instruc-

tor, while maintaining regular and substantive interaction, either synchronously - where students participate at a designated time — or asynchronously, allowing flexibility in accessing instructional content.

Conversely, online learning, the primary focus of this article, is defined as a subset of distance learning that exclusively relies on digital and internet-based technologies to deliver educational content and facilitate interactions. In online learning environments, students utilise the internet to access course materials, receive external support, and engage with instructors and peers. A wide array of internet tools and digital resources are available to create a dynamic online learning environment, supported by various media formats, including text, video, audio, and multimedia presentations, delivered synchronously or asynchronously. C. S. Sunal and V. H. Wright argue that distance education, e-learning, and online learning are often considered synonymous terms [2].

The use of online learning tools in translator and interpreter training is not a recent development. With the growing popularity of modern communication technologies, these tools have become integral to the professional toolkit for interpreters. Translation and interpretation platforms, forums, and specialised software are increasingly prevalent in the field. It is evident that students must actively engage with remote platforms and translation and interpreting technologies during their training to meet evolving market demands. Moreover, online tools can offer solutions to logistical challenges encountered in organising training programmes [3, p. 91].

Impact of the pandemic on translation and interpreting training

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant changes and challenges in many areas of life. The field of education, in particular, has undergone a rapid and profound shift as institutions adapted to remote and online learning modalities. Within this context, language and communication studies faced unique challenges, especially in the realm of translation and interpreting.

In a globalised world, translation and interpreting are fundamental for facilitating communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. During times of crisis, translation and interpreting must be evaluated in terms of the advantages and difficulties associated with online learning. While the increased time for practice and self-study, access to a variety of platforms, resources, and tools, and the acquisition of new skills are notable benefits, distance learning also presents significant challenges. These include a heavier workload for students, lack of interaction, insufficient collaboration, and physical and mental health effects [3, pp.102-104]. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional classroom-based approaches to translator and interpreter training, compelling educators and students to reevaluate and adapt their strategies.

This article looks into the multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' translation and interpreting skills, both during and after this transformative period. We have examined students' overall learning experiences with online education, their adaptation to new learning realities, the educational difficulties that arose due to the pandemic, the constraints on hands-on training, and the emotional impact of social isolation in online learning. Additionally, we surveyed students' opinions regarding the enhancement of the translation and interpreting curriculum. By soliciting feedback about the complexities of the educational landscape during the crisis and the subsequent transition back to traditional learning, we gain valuable insights into students' mindsets. These insights are crucial for understanding how all actors in the educational process should adapt to new environments and what transformations the educational system should undergo.

The training environment for translators and interpreters has undergone significant transformation since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift to distance learning profoundly impacted the educational process, compelling academia to adapt to new social and pedagogical realities. Educators were required to reconfigure their teaching methodologies, while students faced challenges in adapting, resulting in uncertainty for both groups. As in-person learning resumed, this period prompted reflection on prior practices and the exploration of future directions.

Since the pandemic's onset, professional linguists and researchers have investigated the effects of online learning on students and the educational process. For instance, E. Perez and S. Hodáková [4] examined the challenges faced in translation and interpreting training within the altered environment of the pandemic.

R. Kasperė and J. Motiejūnienė [5] provided insights from surveys of graduates and postgraduates regarding the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on the translator profession and training. Additionally, N. Burkšaitienė [6] reported on undergraduate translation students' perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This body of research underscores the necessity of adapting the translation and interpreting curriculum to better meet students' needs in an evolving educational landscape. Through this article, we aim to contribute to this ongoing dialogue by presenting a detailed analysis of the pandemic's impact on translation and interpreting education, ultimately advocating for strategic and responsive changes in teaching practices.

Adaptations in changing learning contexts at Moldova State University

Since the end of the pandemic, the academic community at Moldova State University has resorted to online learning in specific situational contexts related to adverse weather conditions (heavy snowfall, obstructed roadways) or the need to introduce remote interpreting strategies and techniques to groups of students from different study programmes as part of the theoretical course. The transition to online learning, even for intermittent periods, required the deployment of technical competencies developed pre-pandemic and the proficient management of digital resources and tools.

The study was conducted in the spring of 2024 and included a cohort of 15 students enrolled in the Translation and Interpreting programme in 2021 at the Department of Translation, Interpretation, and Applied Linguistics. The survey aimed to assess the impact of the pandemic and post-pandemic period on the development of student' translation and interpreting skills and training. Additionally, it sought to explore their experiences and attitudes towards the educational process during this time.

As follows, we will look into the participants' answers to the questions listed in the survey (Annex below). Regarding students' experiences with translation and interpreting courses during and after the pandemic, a significant number reported feeling more autonomous and actively engaged in tasks during in-person classes. Conversely, many acknowledged an increase in lethargy and procrastination when participating in online classes. Additional frustrations regarding online learning were attributed to unreliable internet connectivity and malfunctioning technological tools. As one student noted, „the primary issue is not the instruction, but the technology, which either fails to function properly or exacerbates existing challenges”. Furthermore, some participants expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of visual interaction, citing that certain teachers and students did not activate their cameras. One student remarked, „not seeing my teacher's face or my classmates was unpleasant”. Others claimed that during online classes they didn't feel very involved in classes and that they didn't improve their language skills significantly. On a personal level, the pandemic made some students become somewhat disengaged and less confident in their public speaking abilities.

During the pandemic, students resorted to a range of technologies and digital resources for online learning, including laptops, smartphones, online dictionaries (e.g., Hallo.ro, Reverso.net), video conferencing platforms (Zoom, Google Meet), the Moodle educational platform, and machine translation tools such as DeepL and Google Translate.

Overall, 73.3% of students expressed *satisfaction* with the quality of translation and interpreting classes *during the pandemic*, while 86% reported *satisfaction* with the quality of these classes *post-pandemic*. Participants in the study indicated a marked improvement in their translation and interpreting competencies. *Initially*, 20% of students rated their *skills* as poor; however, *during the pandemic*, 66.6% assessed their skills as *good*. *After the pandemic*, 60% of students reported that their skills had advanced to a *very good* level. A significant majority (75%) noted substantial *improvement* in areas such as *technical proficiency*, *linguistic accuracy*, *research capabilities*, *self-discipline*, and *time management during the pandemic*.

Students reported *greater engagement in in-person classes* compared to online learning, citing enhanced focus, increased interaction with peers and instructors, and more active participation in lessons. They also benefited from immediate feedback, a more immersive learning environment, better perception of emotional cues, and smoother transitions between various phases of the didactic process. Only one student indicated no difference in engagement between in-person and online classes, emphasising personal responsibility in academic improvement regardless of the learning format.

All respondents reported increased confidence in their translation and interpreting abilities post-pandemic compared to during the pandemic period. However, 80% of students stated that online classes had no impact on the development of these skills.

The respondents in our study recommended a more active learning approach for improving the quality of online education, emphasising the need for discussions and group projects. Additionally, immediately following the pandemic, most students expressed a preference for a blended learning model, wherein theoretical courses would be conducted online „for convenience and efficiency”, while practical sessions, such as translation seminars and interpretation laboratories, would take place in-person „for better teacher-student interaction”. As one participant noted, „This would allow flexibility while ensuring essential face-to-face interaction and practical exercises”.

Another key finding is the importance students placed on adaptability. They admitted that the pandemic forced them „to adapt to new learning methods”, which they believe will be beneficial in the evolving field of translation and interpreting. One participant further highlighted the positive impact of online learning, stating: „Online learning had a positive impact on our experience because we learned how to adapt to the situation and how to use online platforms”. Additional recommendations for effective education targeted the implementation of a system of continuous evaluation and timely feedback to help students identify areas of improvement and encourage their growth.

These findings suggest that revising the curriculum and teaching methods may be necessary to more effectively meet the evolving needs of students at both the individual and group levels.

Conclusions

The transition to online learning during and after the COVID-19 pandemic at the Department of Translation, Interpretation and Applied Linguistics highlighted both challenges and opportunities in translation and interpreting education. Students developed technical competencies and adapted to new learning methods, despite frustrations with technology and reduced face-to-face interaction. Many reported significant improvements in their translation and interpreting skills, particularly in technical and language proficiency, research abilities, self-discipline, and time management.

While in-person classes generally foster greater engagement and effectiveness, online learning contributes positively by encouraging adaptability. The study suggests that a blended learning model, combining online theoretical instruction with in-person practical training, could enhance educational quality. The experience underscores the importance of flexibility, continuous evaluation, and immediate feedback. The skills and resilience developed during this period will benefit students in their future professional endeavours.

References:

1. MOORE, M., KEARSLEY, G. *Distance education: A systems view*. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2011. 384 p.
2. SUNAL, C. S., WRIGHT, V. H. *Online Learning*. In: Seel, N. M. eds. *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*. Springer, Boston, MA. 2012. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6_388
3. SERESI, M., ESZENYI, R., ROBIN, E. eds. *Distance education in translator and interpreter training. Methodological lessons during the Covid-19 pandemic*. ELTE, 2021, 167p.
4. PEREZ, E., HODAKOVA, S. *Translator and interpreter training during the COVID-19 pandemic: Procedural, technical and psychosocial factors in remote training*. In: *Current Trends in Translation Teaching and Learning*, 2021, pp. 276-312.
5. KASPERE, R., MOTIEJŪNIENĖ, J. *Impacts of global pandemic on translator's career and translator training*. In: *Current Trends in Translation Teaching and Learning E*, 2021, pp. 154-195.
6. BURKŠAITIENĖ, N. *Undergraduate Translation Students' Perceptions of Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. In: *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 2023, No. 1, pp. 381-399.

N.B.: *Articolul a fost prezentat în cadrul conferinței cu participare internațională „Traduceri (traducători) fără frontiere”, desfășurată la 27 septembrie 2024, Facultatea de Litere, Universitatea de Stat din Moldova.*

Date despre autor:**Ina SÎTNIC**, doctor în filologie, lector universitar, Facultatea de Litere, Universitatea de Stat din Moldova.**E-mail:** inasitnic@gmail.com**ORCID:** 0000-0002-8177-9866

Prezentat la 01.10.2024

ANNEX**Survey on the pandemic and post-pandemic impact of students' translation and interpreting training**

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your feedback is essential in assessing the impact of the pandemic and post-pandemic period on the development of your translation and interpreting skills and training. Read the questions below and answer them independently. Circle or underline the option(s) that best fit(s) your opinion. State your point of view in the provided space. This survey is for scientific purposes only.

Academic year, group: _____**When were you enrolled in the Translation and Interpreting study programme? (year)** _____**SECTION 1: STUDENTS' SATISFACTION DURING THE PANDEMIC**

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied were you with the quality of translation and interpreting classes during the pandemic?

1. Very dissatisfied	2. Dissatisfied	3. Satisfied	4. Very satisfied	5. Extremely satisfied
----------------------	-----------------	--------------	-------------------	------------------------

2. Did you face any challenges in adapting to online learning during the pandemic? If yes, please describe.

No, I did not face any challenge.	Yes, I faced some challenges.
-----------------------------------	-------------------------------

The main challenge(s) were _____

3. Were you able to access the necessary technology and resources for online learning during the pandemic? If yes, enumerate.

No, I wasn't able to access the necessary technology.	Yes, I used the following technology and language/translation tools _____
---	---

4. Did you feel that the online classes adequately met your educational needs?

No, the online classes did not meet my needs.	Yes, the online classes met my needs.
---	---------------------------------------

5. Did you notice any specific improvements in your translation and interpreting skills during the pandemic? If yes, please describe.

No, I did not notice any improvement in my skills.	Yes, I did notice improvements in my skills. They were mainly related to the following skills (underline one or several options): technical proficiency, language proficiency, self-discipline, critical thinking, editing and proofreading, research skills, time efficiency, others.
--	---

SECTION 2: STUDENTS' SATISFACTION AFTER THE PANDEMIC

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied have you been with the quality of translation and interpreting classes after the pandemic?

1. Very dissatisfied	2. Dissatisfied	3. Satisfied	4. Very satisfied	5. Extremely satisfied
----------------------	-----------------	--------------	-------------------	------------------------

7. Have there been any noticeable changes in your learning experience since returning to in-person classes after the pandemic?

I haven't noticed any particular changes.	Yes, there have been important changes, namely _____
---	--

8. Do you feel more engaged in in-person classes compared to online learning? Justify.

No, I don't feel more engaged because ...	Yes, I do feel more engaged because ...
---	---

SECTION 3: DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING SKILLS

9. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your TR and interpreting skills during the pandemic?

1. Very poor	2. Poor	3. Good	4. Very good	5. Excellent
--------------	---------	---------	--------------	--------------

10. Have you noticed any specific improvements in your translation and interpreting skills during the pandemic? If yes, please describe.

No, I haven't noticed any particular improvement.	Yes, I did notice substantial improvement.
---	--

11. Did you find any particular aspects of translation or interpreting more challenging to develop during online classes? Please mention.

No, I didn't face any particular challenging aspects.	For me, it was particularly challenging to develop (underline) interpersonal skills, listening skills, spontaneity, body language interpretation, confidence in public speaking. Others _____
---	--

SECTION 4: POST-PANDEMIC SKILL EVALUATION

12. On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you rate your TR and interpreting skills now, after the pandemic?

Very poor	Poor	Good	Very good	Excellent
-----------	------	------	-----------	-----------

13. What specific skills or knowledge have you gained or improved upon since the pandemic in your translation and interpreting classes? Underline from the options below: *technical proficiency, language proficiency, translation and interpreting techniques, research skills, time management*. Others _____

14. Do you feel more confident in your translation and interpreting skills now compared to how you developed your skills during the pandemic?

Yes, I do feel more confident, but the online classes did not have any impact on my skills.	Yes, I do feel more confident. The online classes helped me develop more skills.	I don't feel any particular changes in my confidence now compared to the pandemic period.
---	--	---

SECTION 5: OVERALL ASSESSMENT

15. Overall, do you feel that online learning had a positive, negative, or neutral impact on your translation and interpreting skills? Please explain.

Positive impact because...	Negative impact because...	Neutral impact because...
----------------------------	----------------------------	---------------------------

16. What recommendations do you have for enhancing the TR and interpreting curriculum or learning experience post-pandemic? Write your answer in the space provided below: _____

Additional Comments:

17. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with translation and interpreting during the pandemic and afterward in your classes? Write below. _____
