Università
Ca'Foscari
Venezia

Corso di Laurea Magistrale

in Scienze del Linguaggio

Tesi di Laurea

Assessing and Evaluating Upper Secondary School Students of Foreign Languages During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Anno Accademico
2019 / 2020

Abstract

Abstract in English:

The new human coronavirus disease (Covid-19), forced many countries to enter long periods of full lockdown and practice social distancing, reinforcing the need of efficient and widespread means of telecommunication and digitalisation. Schools in Italy have been closed for months, forcing students and teachers to adopt distance learning (DL). DL brought to the educational system new opportunities of using technology and new challenges. Particularly with regard to evaluation and assessment of foreign languages in upper secondary school, teachers have been asked to find new ways of grading their students, embracing different techniques to apply to online testing.
This study has the purpose of investigating assessment and evaluation methods chosen by upper secondary school teachers, the efficacy of the methods and the chosen techniques during the pandemic, through two questionnaires issued to upper secondary school students and teachers of foreign languages.

Abstract in Italian:

La malattia da nuovo Coronavirus (Covid-19) ha costretto molti paesi ad adottare lunghi periodi di lockdown totale e a praticare il distanziamento sociale, sottolineando quindi la necessità di avere mezzi di comunicazione e digitalizzazione efficienti ed accessibili a tutti. In Italia, le scuole sono rimaste chiuse per mesi, obbligando studenti ed insegnanti a fare ricorso alla didattica a distanza (DaD). La DaD ha offerto al sistema scolastico nuove opportunità di utilizzare la tecnologia e nuove sfide. In particolare riguardo alla valutazione e al modo di verificare l'apprendimento delle lingue straniere nelle scuole superiori, agli insegnanti è stato chiesto di trovare nuovi modi di valutare i loro studenti, includendo metodologie online che testassero i progressi effettuati.
Il presente studio ha lo scopo di investigare i metodi di verifica e valutazione scelti dagli insegnanti durante la pandemia attraverso la somministrazione di due questionari a studenti delle scuole superiori e ad insegnanti di lingue straniere.

Introduction

Currently, countries all over the world have been affected by the new human coronavirus disease (Covid-19), a disease that according to the scientists spread from a cluster located in Wuhan City, China, and affected the world's population starting from late December 2019. In March 2020, the *World Health Organisation* declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic. As for March 29, 2021 with more than 127 million confirmed cases and more than 2.79 million deaths, the Covid-19 pandemic is still an on-going emergency for most of the countries in the world.

With the virus forcing entire countries to enter long periods of full lockdowns and people to practice social distancing to avoid the spread of contagion. Covid-19 has exacerbated the adoption of digitalisation in Italy. In Italy, everyone from large companies to small businesses, from public administration to the single citizen, has adopted new methods and tools to facilitate access and communication. This process of digitalisation has affected the world of education as well; schools have been forced to adopt new ways of teaching and learning, which include teaching methods and instruments, as well as a whole new conception of school itself. Moreover, not all teachers were trained on how to use technology and on how to use technology in the educational environment in an effective way. One third of the Italian families do not own a computer or a tablet[1], and 300.000 families with students do not have access to the Internet[2]. The technological disparity between students and teachers highlights how distance learning (in Italian *Didattica a distanza*; *DaD*) needs accurate planning and has specific characteristics that teachers and learners must adopt in order not to deepen the digital divide and social exclusion.

One of the issues that teachers have brought to surface about distance learning (DL) concerns evaluation and assessment. It cannot be denied that evaluation and assessment

1 According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (in Italian Istituto Nazionale di Statistica; Istat), period: 2018/2019.

2 According to the third Auditel-Censis report concerning the post-lockdown Italy (October 2020).

of the students are a crucial part of the educational process. It is also undeniable that evaluating and assessing are some of the most difficult parts of the teacher's job even in normal circumstances as teachers are asked to summarise a nine-month period into a mark. Evaluating and assessing with DL has proven to be additionally demanding due to the difficulties that oral and written online tests carried.

In this thesis, divided into four chapters, the different ways of evaluating and assessing will be discussed, highlighting the change in methods, tools and perceptions brought by the advent of Coronavirus in the context of foreign language teaching and learning in high schools.

In the first chapter, the student and the teacher, the main actors of learning will be described, to give provide the reader with essential knowledge that will help understanding the following chapters. The chapter deals with the characteristics that can be observed in the students, such as multiple intelligences, cognitive and learning styles, personality traits and relational and socio-cultural factors, as well as motivation, also mentioning the role that student diversity has on the mixed-ability classroom (MAC). The characteristics of the ideal teacher are also presented in this chapter, discussing the different role that the teacher as a guide, as a parent, as a friend and as a philosopher has in learning and how important each of these roles are for the students.

Chapter 2 explains what distance learning and blended learning are, giving the idea of how the Italian educational system changed in the times of Covid-19 and summarising what teachers could do to ensure quality learning. Some platforms and instruments will be proposed and norms and regulations given by the MIUR (the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research; in Italian: *Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca*) throughout the emergency[3] will be summarised. The characteristics of the student and the differences between in-presence education and distance education will be discussed and the different technologies and methods used

[3] Last update: January 2021.

in in-presence teaching and virtual teaching will be analysed, also mentioning the role that mixed-ability classes have in the choice of platforms and methods.

Chapter 3 focuses on the main topic of this thesis: assessment and evaluation, especially of foreign languages in upper secondary schools. The different tests and methods to assess will be presented (e.g.: formative and summative assessment and self-assessment, objective and subjective tests), aiming at outlining the main differences between assessing in presence and in distance learning situation. Then, instruments and platforms useful for assessment and evaluation, self-assessment and feedback will be presented, to give the readers some suggestions on possible platforms and to give the idea of how diverse and varied is the digital panorama. To conclude, the guidelines on evaluation given by the MIUR during the Covid-19 emergency will be summarised.

In Chapter 4 the research carried out will be presented. The questionnaires, administered to upper intermediate learners and FL teachers, aim to delve into the students' and teachers' perceptions about the new ways of teaching and learning foreign languages. To begin with, the key points of the research will be presented: the reason behind the choice of carrying out the research, who are the subjects, what are the instruments, and the reason why two questionnaires have been issued. The research aims at highlighting the differences and difficulties in evaluating and assessing and being evaluated and assessed (also considering the different kinds of oral and written tests), concerns and advantages brought to surface by upper secondary school teachers and learners of foreign languages during the Covid-19 times. In addition, the questionnaire investigates the learners' and teachers' feelings and opinions regarding DL compared to in-presence learning.

Chapter 1
The student and the teacher: the main characters of education

This first chapter deals with some principles of education, aiming at contextualising and comparing the principles of distance learning in Chapter 2 and the principles of evaluation and assessment of Chapter 3. The characteristics of the student of foreign languages, of mixed ability classes, and the essential features of the teacher will be discussed. As the learner and the teacher are the two main subjects of education, and to profoundly understand who these subjects are is the key to a successful language course, their characteristics will be analysed thoroughly.

1.1. The learner

The learner is the main subject of education. To design a successful language course or module and achieve long-term meaningful learning, teachers should always consider a multitude of factors related to the student's personal characteristics, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. The identification of the key characteristics of a student is crucial for teachers in determining the kind of tasks, exercises, and methodologies to adopt in class, as well as to establish meaningful relationships of trust and a relaxed and amicable classroom environment.

1.1.1. Multiple intelligences

One of the pillars of foreign language education is Gardner's theory of *multiple intelligences*. According to Gardner, 1983, in each individual might exist up to nine different kinds of multiple intelligence, with different combinations and dominances, depending on factors such as personality, environment and culture of the subject.

According to Balboni (2015[4]), the intelligences identified by Gardner that converge into the individual's intelligence that influence foreign language learning are:

a. *linguistic*: the ability to choose the right words and profoundly understand meanings, in both speaking and writing. Individuals with a strong linguistic intelligence appreciate literature, poetry, discussions, reading and translating, formal and creative writing and have a wide range of vocabulary. At the same time, linguistic intelligence allows to express and understand feelings and thoughts and to empathize, but does not guide logical and grammatical reasoning;
b. *mathematical-logical*: the ability to elaborate complex and analytic thought, through the use of numbers, mathematics and logic, aiming at individuating patterns. People with mathematical-logical predominance are extremely organised and systematic and enjoy puzzles, grammar games, numbers, formulas, analysis and problem solving. In foreign language learning, this intelligence guides grammatical reasoning. Mistakes, ambiguity and approximation are not tolerated; hence, logical-mathematical subjects have difficulties in starting a conversation, since impreciseness is not accepted and arouses discomfort;
c. *visual-spatial*: the ability to mentally re-construct or modify the position of the objects in a certain space and place. This kind of intelligence is closely related to pictures, shapes, patterns, designs, textures and mental images. Visual-spatial subjects enjoy painting and using a variety of materials, jigsaw puzzles, reading maps and exploring new places. In foreign language education, this kind of intelligence is useful for memorising lexicon related to places and illustrated dictionaries help visual students in the process of learning;
d. *musical-rhythmic*: the ability to understand the world through sounds. Musical subjects easily memorise music patterns and imitate sounds, enjoy listening to

and creating music. This kind of intelligence allows students of foreign languages to reproduce easily and precisely the prosody of a language, therefore teachers might propose activities of memorisation that involve sound, such as songs and nursery rhymes;

e. *intrapersonal*: the ability of self-analysis. This involves awareness of strengths and weaknesses, emotions, beliefs and everything associated with the spiritual sphere. Intrapersonal students usually are intuitive and self-confident, appreciate working alone, and meticulously ponder ideas;
f. *interpersonal*: the ability to empathise with others, help and cooperate. In fact, interpersonal students have a wide range of *social skills*, highly useful in team activities. In foreign language education, interpersonal intelligence is particularly useful in cooperative learning, in conversation and teamwork activities;

Gardner also identifies three other kinds of intelligence, which do not appear to have a specific role in foreign language education. Nevertheless, these intelligences influence all learning processes:

g. *bodily-kinaesthetic*: the ability of learning through the body, through strong awareness of the body and the surrounding environment. Subjects with bodily-kinaesthetic predominance like physical movement (such as dancing, mimicking, role-playing, etc.);
h. *naturalist*: the ability to recognise and classify flora and fauna. Naturalist subjects appreciate spending time outdoors, with natural elements (such as plants, animals, landscapes and environment in general);
i. *existential*: the ability and sensibility to meditate and tackle with questions about uncertain and existential themes of life (such as life and death, faith and

religion), realised through observation of inner personality. This is the intelligence owned by philosophers, psychologists, and physicists.

1.1.2. Cognitive styles and learning styles

According to Balboni (2015[4]), cognitive and learning styles can be grouped into a single category, taking into consideration the difference between multiple intelligences (Cfr. 1.1.1), personality traits (Cfr. 1.1.3) and cognitive and learning styles. In fact, while *multiple intelligences* correspond to how a person perceives and elaborates information and situations and *personality traits* correspond to the individual characteristics of a person, *cognitive* and *learning styles* define how a student approaches a task and the processes carried out to organise and process new information. Messick (1984: 5) defined cognitive styles as "consistent individual differences in preferred ways of organising and processing information and experience", while Sternberg and Grigorenko said that cognitive styles are "a bridge between what might seem to be two fairly distinct areas of psychological investigation: cognition and personality" (Sternberg, Grigorenko, 1997: 701). Hence, we might describe a cognitive style as "how a person processes and elaborates new information, according to personal preferences". The *strategy* a person uses to solve a problem is called *cognitive choice*.

In terms of language learning, summarising as cited in the writings of Caon (2008a) and Balboni (2006; 2018), the most significant antinomies and characteristics in cognitive styles are:

a. *analytic/global*: how a subject classifies, examines and approaches information and problems, according to the subject's hemisphere dominance[4]. *Analytic* subjects are systematic and reflective, while *global* subjects are more intuitive;
b. *systematic/intuitive*: how subjects differ in terms of formulation of hypotheses and individuation of problems. *Systematic* subjects are well organised and enjoy following a specific plan; *intuitive* subjects, on the other hand, are more likely to improvise and enjoy elaborate tasks;
c. *impulsive/reflective* or *executive/ideational*: how subjects make decisions. *Executive* subjects need to learn by doing and from mistakes; *ideational* subjects deeply evaluate theory and mental processes in order to solve a problem;
d. *field-dependent/independent*: the (in)ability to discriminate irrelevant stimuli. A *field-dependent* subject examines the context globally, therefore has difficulties in detecting and isolating details; a *field-independent* subject is able to notice details, analyse and isolate situations and problems;
e. *ambiguity (in)tolerance*: how students feel towards ambiguity, namely if students feel comfortable (or uncomfortable) in presence of ambiguous or imprecise details;
f. *ability to anticipate text contents based on the context*: this ability is related to the *pragmatic expectancy grammar*, which allows a learner to predict what will be said or read according to linguistic and situational redundancy and knowledge of the world. For example, students with more difficulties in predicting contents may find easier to work on separate sentences rather than a whole text;
g. *ability to learn from errors*: this characteristic derives both from personal attitudes (e.g. optimism/pessimism; introversion/extraversion, Cfr. 1.1.3) and

4 The two human hemispheres (left hemisphere and right hemisphere) work in different ways and during a performance, humans tend to prefer one between the two. In fact, hemisphere dominance is innate in human beings. In terms of learning processes, the left hemisphere carries out tasks of analysis, sequentiality and rationality; the right hemisphere, on the other hand, carries out tasks of global, contextual and emotional nature.

previous educational experience (e.g. if the teacher considered mistakes as something to stigmatise);

h. *autonomy/dependency on learning processes*: although schools do not encourage autonomous students (often considered by teachers as distracting), autonomy should always be the final goal of education in general;
i. *auditory/visual*: how subjects perceive and remember information. *Verbal* subjects prefer language; *visual* subjects would instead prefer images, schemes, tables and graphic representations;
j. abstract/concrete and sequential/random: meditation abilities, namely;
k. how subjects perceive information (*abstract/concrete*): abstract learners are more deductive and intuitive; concrete learners are more incline to exploring reality through the five senses;
l. how subjects process information (*sequential/random*): sequential learners elaborate information according to specific parameters and orders, whereas random learners organise information in an apparently more chaotic way, almost like a kaleidoscope (Vettorel, 2006: 99).

As argued by Gregorc (1982), in each learner all of the above four styles are present, but with different dominances, hence creating new categories of *mixed styles*, according to the strongest trait of each of the two differentiations: *concrete-sequential*, *abstract-random*, *abstract-sequential* and *concrete-random*[5].

Teachers can identify students' cognitive styles adopting some techniques and actions in class, such as targeted questionnaires and exercises. The results of the questionnaires and exercises carried out in class should help the teacher in adapting the tasks proposed in class to facilitate the learners' learning processes. Anyway, teachers should always encourage their students to train as many cognitive styles and strategies as possible, expanding their cognitive comfort zone. In order to succeed in this attempt, teachers

[5] For further research see: CAON F. (a cura di) (2006); CAON F. (2008a).

should try to differentiate materials and inputs. In fact, differentiation is one of the keys to ensure success and long-term learning.

1.1.3. Personality traits, relational factors, socio-cultural factors

Although personality traits, relational factors and socio-cultural factors are not directly connected with education, they contribute to create the general personal profile of the learner.

Personality traits can be intended as the whole behavioural and psychological characteristics of a person, those characteristics that Balboni (2015[4]: 76) defined as "behaviour" of a person. Behaviour is important in language learning and education in general because it influences the way students learn. According to Balboni, the most influent personality traits that may interfere with language learning processes are:

a. cooperation/competition;
b. introversion/extraversion;
c. optimism/pessimism.

In addition to the three above, Balboni also mentions traits such as *presumption/modesty* and *empathy/self-centredness*, that may influence learning processes in general.

Relational factors can be defined as relationships established in the class environment that affect education. These factors do not develop directly and spontaneously from the students, but they are largely encouraged by the teacher. In fact, teachers should promote cooperation and aim at establishing meaningful relationships of trust with and among the students. In order to succeed, Caon (2008a: 39-47) suggests that teachers might:

- adopt student-oriented policies (attentive to the students' needs);
- explain what the *educational agreement* is, or the "who, what, when, where, how" of education, including the aims of the course/module. The educational agreement is crucial for the students to be aware of their learning process;
- discuss in class and, eventually, modify the previous two points, in order to meet the students' needs.

Other suggestions that teachers might embrace to establish a cooperative and relaxed classroom environment will be summarised further on this chapter, where the characteristics of the teachers are discussed (Cfr. 1.3).

Finally, other factors that influence learning are the *socio-cultural* factors:

a. *family environment*, such as family, friends and neighbourhood and community where the subject lives and grows up, which contribute to the creation of different skills, such as general knowledge of the world, culture and abilities and influence motivation and interests;
b. *social environment*, which differentiates individuals in the society and, in the case of education, students in the school environment. (Caon, 2008a: 32-36)

1.1.4. Biological differences

Oxford (2003: 7) points out that L2 learning styles are also affected by students' biological differences, such as biorhythms, sustenance and location. In her essay, Oxford suggests that *biorhythms* indicate "the times of the day when students feel good and perform their best" (for example morning, afternoon or evening), *sustenance* refers

to "the need for food or drink while learning" and *location* is related to the characteristics of the environment (such as temperature, lighting, sound, etc.). biorhythms are important because they co-occur to the determination of performance quality. For example, students who are "night owls are forced to attend early morning lectures, they tend to do worse academically" (Schiller, 2018), pointing out how pupils with different biorhythms potentially perform in very different ways.

Another factor that might influence learning is the age of the learner. In fact, to each main age phase of a person (i.e.: childhood, adolescence, adulthood), correspond new needs and learning strategies. As for language learning in particular, age determines speed and ease of learning. Moreover, experts demonstrated that the more the age of a learner increases, the less the language performance is likely to be the same as a native speaker, which, as Balboni (2014: 58) referring to learning Italian as L2/FL said, "non è un dramma: vogliamo studenti che capiscano e producano testi in italiano, non che passino per italiani"[6]. In our case, referring to upper intermediate school students, it is important to pinpoint the fact that adolescents consider of vital importance the approval of the group of peers and mistakes start to be seen differently: adolescents are aware of their personal image and do not want to "lose face" in front of the rest of the class. Moreover, when making mistakes, adolescents (and adults) tend to not appreciate corrections made by the teacher. Finally, adolescent learners consider themselves as *adults*. This implies the fact that activities perceived for children cannot be proposed in class unless the specific aim is explained and discussed in class.

[6] *Cfr.* "(…) is no big deal: we want students who understand and produce texts in Italian language, not students who pass for Italians". Our translation.

1.1.5. Motivation

As Dörnyei stated in 1998, motivation "has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language (L2) learning" and it also "provides the primary impetus to initiate learning in L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process" (1998: 117). Hence, motivation is the key to success in language learning and education in general, giving direction to human behaviour and determining how a person performs that behaviour. Caon (2020: 439) defines a motivated learner as "a subject who activates themselves for an internal or external cause and follows a specific path to reach a goal". However, according to Caon, how much effort the student dedicates to attain the goal and the ability to maintain motivation over time depend on the variables of intensity and persistence[7].

Motivation is also influenced by a high number of variables, related to socio-cultural contexts and types of relations, as well as previous experiences. Hence, the distinction between intrinsic (or self-directed) and extrinsic (or other-directed) motivation and instrumental and integrative motivation is important in language teaching.

Extrinsically motivated students perform to receive external positive rewards (such as good grades, praise, or monetary payments) or to avoid punishment; on the contrary, *intrinsically* motivated students are moved by internal, personal rewards (such as satisfying one's curiosity or the feeling of excitement or accomplishment). According to Deci and Ryan intrinsic motivation is vital for learning processes, functioning as a sort of engine that generates long-term learning. Teachers should therefore foster and develop everyone's talents, in the light of all individual characteristics discussed in the previous paragraphs to reach intrinsic motivation.

[7] Intensity: generated by factors not related to school and by the type of language (e.g.: English, if compared to other foreign languages, motivates in a different way, offering students more opportunities to use the language; the time and money invested in language learning are determined significantly by the *future projections* of the student).
Persistence: methodologies and activities that teachers can carry out to influence the *natural* motivational trends of their students (Caon, 2020).

Integrative motivation in foreign and second language education means a positive disposition toward and a desire to interact and become part of the community of the language studied; *instrumental* motivation is driven by pragmatic gains connected to the language proficiency developed (such as getting a better job, a higher salary or moving to another country).

Moreover, Dörnyei (1994) gives an overview of the main motivational areas of L2 learning. Dörnyei starts by differentiating intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, adding that, if sufficiently *self-determined* and *internalized*, extrinsic motivation can evolve into intrinsic motivation, aiming at *self-determination* (i.e. autonomy). The scholar identifies other four motivational areas in L2 learning:

a. *proximal goal-setting*: the students should want to reach a specific goal, hard but achievable, discussed in class and accepted by the students, who should always receive feedback about their progresses. Moreover, Dörnyei highlights how important it is to avoid extrinsic goals, in order not to stifle intrinsic motivation;
b. *cognitive components*: analysed by Weiner, who identified three cognitive conceptual systems: *attribution theory* (i.e. how past experiences affect future goal expectations), *learned helplessness* (i.e. the condition when a person feels helpless towards reaching a goal, which does not seem possible to reach), *self-efficacy* (i.e. how the person judges their abilities to perform a specific action or to reach a specific goal);
c. *self-confidence*: the dimension of self-concept and the conviction that a result can be produced, which develops into *language use anxiety* and *self-evaluation of L2 proficiency*;
d. *need for achievement*: individuals with high need for achievement are more incline to develop excellent results, and tend to persist in pursuing an aim even after failing (275-277).

In his article, Dörnyei identifies three motivational components specific to the learning situation, namely: course-specific, teacher-specific, group-specific motivational components, which represent the *learning situation level* of the three-level framework that the researcher calls *Framework of L2 motivation*. *Course-specific motivational components* refer to syllabus, teaching materials and methods and tasks; *teacher-specific motivational components* refer to the teachers and their personality, teaching style and relationship with the students; finally, *group-specific motivational components* refer to the dynamics of the learning group[8]. The other two levels of the framework of L2 motivation are the *language level* (i.e. the motives related to the L2 learning either driven by integrative or extrinsic motivation) and the *learner level* (affects and cognitions that generate personality traits and that are governed by *need for achievement* and *self-confidence* of the learner).

Hayes suggests that motivation is "manifest, not only in relatively short-term responses to immediate goals but also in long-term predispositions to engage in certain types of activities" (1996:9). Hence, Venetian researcher Balboni, in his studies from 1994, elaborated the *tripartite theory* of motivation, according to which motivation seems to be boosted essentially by three main factors: duty, need and pleasure. Specifically referring his research to foreign language education, Caon (2008a) integrated Balboni's studies, stating that:

[8] 1) *Course-specific motivational components* are also linked to: *interest* (individual's intrinsic motivation, desire to know and curiosity), *relevance* (instrumentality to reach a goal), *expectancy* (student's perceived likelihood of success, self-confidence and self-efficacy), *satisfaction* (outcomes of an activity, also linked to intrinsic and extrinsic rewards;
2) *teacher-specific motivational components* refer to *affiliative drive* (i.e. how students behave and perform in order to praise the teacher), *authority type* (i.e. the teacher's way of managing a class, which can adopt autocratic, democratic or *laissez-faire* ways of authority) and *socialization of student motivation* (i.e., in order to stimulate motivation, teacher adopt three channels for socialization: modelling, task presentation and informational or controlling feedback);
3) *group-specific motivational components* concern *goal-orientedness* (i.e. the goal of the group), *norm and reward system* (i.e. the behaviours to adopt in order to generate efficient learning), *group cohesion* (i.e. the strength of the relationships in the group), *classroom goal structures* (i.e. whether the structures are competitive, cooperative or individualistic).
For further research see: Dörnyei Z. (1994, 1998); Clément R., Dörnyei Z., Noels K. A. (1994); Keller J. M. (1983); Crookes G., Schmidt R. W. (1991).

a. *duty*, unless linked to intrinsic motives (such as personal pleasure and engagement) can either come from:
   - external factors, such as an autocratic teacher type of authority, that do not generate meaningful learning, because of the extrinsic nature of motivation;
   - internal factors, such as the need to avoid *losing face* or to get a bad mark or punishment, that do not generate long-term learning, due to the contingence of the events.

   Duty-driven motivation raises the affective filter[9] and does not evolve into long-term acquisition, due to the fact that it only produces short-term learning;
b. *need*: although the need to learn a language to pursue a specific aim can help in generating long-lasting motivation, according to Balboni (2006) the need must be profoundly understood and wanted by the pupils and might stop as soon as the goal is reached and the need satisfied;
c. *pleasure*: it is the kind of motivation that allows meaningful and durable acquisition because it derives from the student's intrinsic motivation. Schumann's theory of *stimulus appraisal* states that the human brain selects what to learn according to the input's: *novelty* (stimulus must avoid boredom: as Balboni puts it, materials, course, exercises, methodologies and everything concerning learning must vary often); *attractiveness* of the materials; *functionality* (Schumann's *need significance*) perceived by the student; *feasibility* of the task; *social and psychological security* (connected to the *self-efficacy* concept, as well as the classroom environment).

[9] Krashen believes that the so-called *affective filter* affects acquisition according to: motivation, anxiety, self-confidence and personality traits. Low motivation, low self-esteem, anxiety, and personality traits such as introversion can raise the affective filter and prevent acquisition. Research therefore showed that when the filter is *up* language acquisition does not happen.
For further research see: KRASHEN D. (1981, 1983, 1987, 1988).

As Cucinotta (2019) puts it, "within an educational context, the importance of motivation is often undervalued until teachers start noticing that students lack for it – which usually happens long after it has gone", therefore it is vital that teachers recognise the crucial role of motivation in education and promote intrinsic motivation through:

a. *contents*, if the contents meet the students' needs and interests;
b. *methodologies*, which induce different cognitive processes;
c. *relationships* between teacher-students and students-students, that should be based on transparency, trust, frankness, effectiveness of communication. (Caon, 2008a: 18)

Hence, we conclude by saying that the student is the *actor* of the learning process and that students are different from one another, according to cognitive and learning styles, multiple intelligences, personal and socio-cultural factors. This implies that each learner learns in different ways and modalities, that are facilitated or not by the teacher, according to methods and methodologies and that should involve a great variety of materials, contents and tasks in order to satisfy the highest number of students possible (Cfr. 1.3).

1.2. Mixed ability classes

In this excursus, the main characteristics of mixed ability classes (MAC) will be discussed, alongside with the characteristics of pluricultural and plurilingual MAC, with a particular reference to the teaching of foreign and second languages. Keeping in mind that learning a multitude of languages is indispensable in the everyday life,

and that multilingualism is one of the objectives of the EU Commission[10], we can understand how important it is to detect in which ways language education can be assisted, starting from MAC.

In the previous section of this chapter, the characteristics of the students have been discussed; therefore, the MAC can be described under the conception that each student is unique and irreplaceable.

1.2.1. What is a mixed ability class

In the light of the differentiation that occurs between each student, discussed in the previous paragraphs, we can infer that every class could be considered as a MAC, for example according to linguistic and cultural characteristics. MAC are characterised by the presence of a multitude of:

a. *personalities*, that approach and carry out assignments and activities differently;
b. *multiple intelligences*, that have to be helped through the adoption of operative models suitable for the students' *formae mentis* and varied and integrated activities that enhance strengths and reduce weaknesses of the students, developing multiple intelligences;
c. *aptitude to language learning*, i.e. a non-teachable talent that is related to learning languages and that, according to Skehan, is connected with different abilities, such as the ability of linguistic analysis or phonetic codification. A

[10] According to the European Commission website, "languages unite people, render other countries and their cultures accessible, and strengthen intercultural understanding. Foreign language skills play a vital role in enhancing employability and mobility. Multilingualism also improves the competitiveness of the EU economy". Hence, the European Commission is promoting the goal for all European citizens "to learn at least two foreign languages and to begin learning foreign languages at an early age". For further reading see: https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/multilingualism/about-multilingualism-policy_en, last accessed March 29, 2021.

teacher should always remember that attitudes vary from student to student and that in one student may co-exist different attitude levels;

d. *motivation*: teachers have to be careful when selecting the activities to present in class, so that the tasks do not result in being too easy or too difficult for the student and in order to develop and boost intrinsic motivation, especially through contents, methodologies and relationships established in class;
e. *cognitive factors*, that need to be recognised, in order to measure competences and potential development and then to monitor progresses and evaluate and assess impartially;
f. *cognitive* and *learning styles*;
g. *socio-cultural learning context*.

For a teacher to successfully teach in MAC, it is essential to spot each of the abovementioned characteristics of the students and adapt the teaching methods and methodologies to the pupils. In order to adapt the teaching methods, in turn, teachers have to be aware of the teaching strategies used in class and turn disadvantage into an asset (Cfr. 1.2.4). Success in teaching could be achieved through differentiation and stratification of the materials and tasks to embrace the highest number of students' characteristics possible. To conclude, a very brief yet effective definition of MAC could be: a group of students with different abilities and levels of language skills.

1.2.2. Pluricultural and plurilingual mixed ability classes

In addition to the characteristics common to all mixed ability classes or groups, pluricultural and plurilingual MAC are carriers of some additional peculiarities that influence learning processes. Since nowadays the presence of students that have a different L1 or culture than the one of the teaching or the country where the course is happening are increasingly becoming a numerous part of the classroom environment,

teachers have to be aware that there are some more aspects to consider when analysing a MAC. In particular, the reality of mixed ability plurilingual and pluricultural classrooms is becoming more and more varied and widespread. With reference to Italian as a L2 in Italy and in the Italian school system, Caon (2006) pinpoints characteristics such as:

a. *distance from L1 and Italian (L2)*: the L1 of the students may be more or less distant from Italian for example in terms of grammar or phonetics. Hence, the necessity to first develop Cummins' *BICS* (language for everyday communication, in Italian: ItalBase) and *CALP* (language used for academic or study purposes, in Italian: ItalStudio), that requires different timing for each student (especially according to psychological and cognitive factors and for the distance between L1 and L2). Then, the following phase is characterised by the learning of the surface structures of the L2, that do not happen in the same way for each student. Finally, especially for advanced learners, the individual learning pace of L2 learning;
b. *cultural background*: culture makes each student interpret a society's norms, ways of living, values, and habits in a different way, according to personal and subjective experiences and knowledge. In the case of immigrant students, it is vital to make explicit categorisations and conceptualisations L2 related, since culture determines linguistic identity and immigrants learn the L2 especially through the establishment of relationships with members of the community, in order to avoid misunderstandings that might impair communication;
c. *resources* available to the student, namely *intersubjective resources* (e.g.: family, friends, recreational contexts) and *objective resources* (e.g.: books, dictionaries, libraries), that cannot be influenced directly by the teacher;
d. *motivation*, principally influenced by the idea of future self, i.e. the future plans;

e. *what* knowledge *means in the origin country*, namely the educational models and collective imagination, the strategic-metacognitive approaches and the conception of what "linguistic ability" means;
f. *learning styles*, influenced by the previous experiences;
g. *what* educational relationship *means in the L2 environment*, comparing the country of origin and the *new* one;
h. *psychological conflicts of the condition of being an immigrant*, triggered by numerous and abrupt changes and by vulnerable psychology that needs to be identified and respected by teachers and other students.

The abovementioned list concerns in particular students with previous schooling experience. What teachers can do in order to facilitate the learning processes in a pluricultural and plurilingual mixed ability classroom is (beside vary, differentiate and stratify materials and methods as it normally happens in MAC) to explain and clarify everything that might be cause of linguistic and extralinguistic misunderstandings, explaining and highlighting differences between the educational system of the place of provenance and the (in our case) Italian educational system. Moreover, teachers should always try to negotiate meanings and knowledge, so as to create a more relaxed and amical classroom environment. To make everything explicit for the student can be reached only with an approach of interest towards the other and their diversity, achieved through processes of cultural relativism and decentralisation, where individuals question and analyse their positions in the society and personal beliefs.
Other aspects that can influence a plurilingual and pluricultural MAC are implied by relational factors:

a. *how many male and female and male and female non-Italian-speaking pupils are part of the class*: the ratio between the classes of subjects can prevent teachers from using some typologies of tasks or methods, and might need

teachers to have a deeper intercultural reflection upon what will be presented in class and how;

b. *educational socio-cultural conditioning*;
c. *age differences* between Italian-speaking and non-Italian speaking students.

Another factor that can influence immigrant students is the teacher's teaching style: teachers, in order to overcome any possible issue related to the teaching style, have to raise their awareness by decentralising and analysing who and which learning styles and ways of being, techniques and student roles are being favoured (Caon, 2006:11-25).

1.2.3. Problems in mixed ability classes

Some typical problems that can be found in MAC concern the so-called *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety*, namely a state of anxiety caused by some situations that might happen during language classes and that retain the pupils from expressing freely and perform at their best. These situations could be identified in three main areas of language production, especially when producing oral texts: communication apprehension (i.e. anxiety or fear cause by communicating with people), test anxiety (i.e. the fear associated to the fear of failure, especially when being tested), fear of negative evaluation (i.e. the fear of others' evaluation, not only the teacher's, but also the peers'). Hence, these situations regard the fear of making mistakes, the fear towards new exercises and the fear of being evaluated negatively by the teacher or by the peers. The solution to these FL classroom anxiety problems lies in *differentiation* of assignment complexity and *stratification* of the tasks (Cfr. 1.3.2), so as the learners perform a task according to their personal specific abilities: all the students, from the students in difficulty, to the average, to the excellences, will feel comfortable with the assignment, therefore not triggering Krashen's affective filter. Another strategy to

avoid demotivation and boredom on the one hand and inability to keep up on the other hand, is to respect the students' *pace of learning*. Finally, by setting an amicable classroom environment, where stressful factors are minimised, the teacher might also adopt cooperative learning strategies and peer tutoring[11], where the individual characteristics of the students are encouraged and vital in order to generate meaningful learning.

1.2.4. Using mixed ability classes to teacher's advance

Teachers should see MAC in the light of an opportunity: a high variety of students could mean a greater variety of methods, methodologies, approaches and styles towards the assignment given. In fact, by establishing a cooperative learning environment and adopting strategies such as peer tutoring, students can learn from each other and might autonomously open a deeper reflection upon their role in the society and their personal beliefs. Moreover, the MAC is *par excellance* the environment where diversity is acknowledged, thus the teacher, by diversification and stratification of the task, can foster personal skills and talent development, valorising each and every learner in the class and their personal characteristics, turning the apparent disadvantage that mixed ability groups carry into an asset.

[11] Hordiienko and Lomakina (2015) remind teachers that, when adopting peer tutoring and cooperative learning strategies, teachers should always be careful about the class dynamics: students should never develop feelings of inferiority or superiority complexes. Hence, the activities need to be profoundly analysed and projected before being proposed in the MAC.

1.3. The teacher

The teacher is the other main character of the learning process. The teacher guides the learning processes of the students, chooses and proposes the materials and methodologies that will be used in class and has the vital job to facilitate meaningful learning. In the light of the previous sections of this chapter (i.e. the characteristics of the students and the MAC), teachers of foreign languages have to design the course and the modules, functioning as a guide to learning. Since "teacher quality can shape how a student's peers learns and behave in a classroom" and "high-quality teachers are an important component in raising the quality of instruction" (Bhai, Horoi, 2019: 4783), teacher quality improvement should be one of the main goals of education, hence in this section the ideal FL teacher and its role in language acquisition will be described, so as to underline the importance of being aware of the classroom environment as a whole (i.e. students, teachers, classroom, materials, methodologies) when designing a language course or module.

1.4. The teacher as a facilitator

In the foreign language learning environment, like in all the other fields of education, the teacher has the vital role of developing meaningful learning. Empirical studies demonstrated that teachers influence the students' performances[12], tying together the students' achievement and the teachers themselves. Thus, not only the teacher's content knowledge and pedagogical skills seem to be relevant in determining the students' performances, but also their personal characteristics, such as cognitive, emotional, personal, professional and psychological factors. Teachers function as guides for their pupils, both in an educational perspective and a spiritual perspective.

[12] For further research see: HILL, CHARALAMBOUS, CHIN (2019); HANUSHEK (2011); WAYNE, YOUNGS (2003).

In fact, starting from the 1970s, the teacher has been considered as *advisor*, *maieuta*, *director*, *facilitator*. In Balboni's view, the ideal role of the teacher is the facilitator: a person who creates the conditions that induce and facilitate learning processes, especially for what concerns foreign language learning. In other words, the teacher does not just provide the students with the input, he or she facilitates the work and reflections on that input as well.

In order to facilitate learning, Balboni suggests that teachers should take into consideration the so-called *Teacher's Talking Time* (from now on, TTT), that is the percentage of the lesson where the teacher is talking. Especially in FL/L2, the higher the amount of TTT, the lower the *Student's Talking Time* (from now on, STT). This implies that "(…) più un docente parla, meno parlano gli studenti; più un docente parla, meno gli studenti acquisiscono; più un docente parla, più risulta evidente allo studente che il vero protagonista della lezione è il *prof.*, non lui" (Balboni, 2015:106)[13]. A too high amount of TTT does not produce meaningful learning, because of the passive role that the students assume. Another issue brought by Balboni, concerns the language to use in class: when teaching a language, the teacher must take into consideration the proficiency level of the students and the aims of the class (i.e.: the higher the proficiency level, the lesser TTT and STT in L1 should be involved). Moreover, the scholar suggests that (unless the pupils have an advanced level of proficiency) corrections and discussion upon the language should be carried out in the native language, to facilitate comprehension and reflexion.

But a teacher is not only a facilitator: the teacher is also a guide, a parent, a friend and, sometimes, a philosopher, too.

[13] *Cfr.*: "the more the teacher talks, the less the students talk; the more the teacher talks, the less the students learn; the more the teacher talk, the more evident results to the student that the real protagonist of the class is the professor, and not him". Our translation.

1.4.1. The teacher as a guide: planning a language course

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the teacher is a guide both in an educational and in a personal perspective. As for what concerns education, the teacher has to know how to manage *excellent students*, *students in difficulty* and *students with special educational needs*[14] at the same time and has to be aware of all the students' characteristics mentioned in sections 1.1 and according to them, implement stratification and differentiation of the task and input. *Stratification* refers to the proposal of material and techniques organised in layers of increasing difficulty, to enable each student to reach their best performance level. *Differentiation*, on the other hand, means to create varied inputs, both linguistically and in modality. Differentiation helps students to choose the input they are more comfortable with, resulting in more chances to succeed in the task in the best possible way. Differentiation and stratification of the task and input allow each student to reach their potential: for example, excellent students do not get bored or demotivated and students suffering external hardship do not feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the task (Caon, 2008a). Multi-level teaching techniques also help students gaining at the same time subject and total knowledge, allowing them to learn how to compete in the competitive world. In these terms, a crucial part of the educational process is the choice, planning and designing of the materials, methodologies, and methods. Keeping in mind the student's characteristics, and the existence of MAC, teachers should always opt for varied materials, methodologies, and methods, that are selected according to:

[14] *Excellent student*: a motivated, autonomous student, attentive, well-mannered, methodic (under a linguistic, motivational, cognitive point of view); *student in difficulty*: a student who has little aptitude for spontaneous acquisition in languages, derived from an unsuited learning situation or from personality, learning or cognitive styles, kind of intelligence, or from inadequate mastery of learning abilities, scarce drive for personal development and L2/FL learning or because the idea that the teacher has of who the *good student* is differs from the student's characteristics (Caon, 2008a); *Special Educational Needs (SEN) student*: a student who has a greater difficulty in learning than the other same-age students or who has a disability that prevents them from accessing facilities (Eurydice, 2019).
For further research see: CAON (2008a), EURYDICE (2019), available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/special-education-needs-provision-within-mainstream-education-80_ro, last accessed March 29, 2021.

- *the program* (defined by the Ministry, the students' personal needs and objectives) and the *nature of the curse* (e.g.: L2 course, university course, course for adult learners, etc.);
- *the available resources*;
- *the teacher's glottodidactics, personal linguistic, educational and cultural goals*.

When planning a language course, the teacher should always try to divide the lesson and the module into three parts: globality, analysis, synthesis, embracing an inductive way of presenting the input. In this context, the teacher guides the pupils in the discovery of the rules, encouraging them in taking an active role during the lesson. The final goal of the teacher is to generate *intake*: the interiorization of the rule that will be verified in the final communicative *output*, part of the STT. Not only do inductive processes origin meaningful learning, they also induce students' observation and ability to formulate hypotheses, important strategies useful in foreign language learning.

Concerning FL/L2 courses and the abovementioned processes of globality, analysis and synthesis, teachers should always operate in the light of the so-called *learning units* and, in a broader way, in the light of the *teaching unit*. The *teaching unit*, which usually lasts around 8-10 hours and concerns a cultural or situational context, consists of several one- or two-hour *learning units* that involve the following steps:

1) Globality: to understand the event or the text in a general, broad way, through strategies such as:
   a. *redundancy*, *analogies*, *metaphors*: in order to facilitate processes of globality, the aim should be to recall what the students already know and can associate and predict;

   b. *linguistic and socio-pragmatic hypotheses*: according to the student's previous grammatical and contextual information, encourage the pupils to formulate linguistic and socio-pragmatic hypotheses, as a part of the stage of globality;
   c. *global and approximate verification of the hypotheses*: according to specific elements or the overall text/context, to verify the hypotheses made.

2) Analysis: the phase where the learner reflects upon the language, necessary to generate acquisition and fostered through the analysis of:
   a. communicative acts;
   b. linguistic aspects (phonological, morpho-syntactical, lexical, textual);
   c. cultural topics;
   d. non-verbal languages (in occurrence of visual contents).
3) Synthesis: achieved thanks to the phases of globality and analysis, allows enduring learning and acquisition, through reflexion upon and verification of rules and mental schemes.

As a guide to learning, the teacher should always boost motivation, since motivated students are successful students. Therefore, to motivate pupils by fostering emotions, curiosity or wishes, teachers should always plan motivational activities at the beginning of both learning and teaching unit, such as:

- audio-visive contents that involve useful vocabulary for the following activities;
- activities that aim at framing what the students already know or can imagine according to a given context or topic, either as single students or as a whole class, and activities that aim at activating the *expectancy grammar*;
- teacher's personal anecdotes, that give a practical example of how the activity might be useful in the *real* world.

The step of motivation helps the students finding the learning process significative and encourages them to keep an active role throughout the educational process.

Another way in which teachers appear to guide the learners is when they evaluate and assess, as well as when they promote self-evaluation or give feedback on the activities carried out. Anyway, the topic of evaluation and assessment, the key topic of this research, as well as the materials and teaching tools available to the teachers, will be dealt with in depth in the next chapters.
All the aforementioned steps help improving the quality of the course and of the teaching/learning processes, thanks to specifically-designed, easily-usable, varied, differentiated and stratified materials.

1.4.2. The teacher as a parent

Especially when kids are implied, not only do teachers teach a subject, but they also teach how to behave socially, to a huge variety of students, who come from very different backgrounds. In fact, Libby (2007) said that "character education, antibullying campaigns, roots of empathy, snack programs and daily physical activity are worthwhile projects designed to reach beyond the student's intellect into those places that help us all to understand what it means to be a good citizen of a healthy community". Libby also states that teachers and parents should work like an *enterprise*, where teachers teach students how to become "healthy, productive, knowledgeable and compassionate citizens", as teachers at school try to meet the pupils' physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual needs, as parents do in the home environment. Moreover, sometimes teachers are also required to "fill in the gaps for students who aren't getting the full-meal deal at home", to use the words of Libby. This happens also because these days more and more families are composed only by one parent, or by two working parents who have lesser time to dedicate to their children, meaning that teachers must provide more support and ensure that significant learning happens in school, to allow families to have more available time to spend together. Particularly for what concerns public education, Libby states that education is for all,

adding that teachers teach to students "from reach and poor families, healthy and dysfunctional ones, and temporary families (foster care)", hence emphasising once again the key role of the teacher as a parent who deals at the same time with different subjects that need to be educated all at the same time to get to a final common goal; in that same sentence, it is evident the ideal *enterprise* relationship that schools and parents have in the education and development of the students, who, when entering the school building, stop being *only* learners certain subjects, but start also learning how to behave socially.

1.4.3. The teacher as a friend

The role of the teacher as a friend lies in the relationship where the teacher is always encouraging and appreciating the pupils, promoting positivity, and avoiding the rise of Krashen's affective filter. The activities proposed in class should always be multi-level and differentiated, try to engage the highest number of multiple intelligences possible and aim at creating a cooperative classroom environment. To establish a cooperative environment, Caon (2008a) suggests that teacher could: adopt a democratic kind of leadership and a verbal student-oriented behaviour, respect towards the students, encourage freedom of expression, carry out activities of cooperation.

The teacher should also embody some characteristics that students find reassuring and encouraging, such as a "smiling face and work with sincerity and dedication and love the profession chosen by them" (Parasuraman, 2017) and, according to Jamei (2016:3), teachers of languages should carry qualities such as "being understanding, having a certain personality, being a motivator and a supporter, mastering the English language well, and listening to students wishes". Hence, we can infer that a good teacher is a caring, supportive teacher, whose aim is the students' wellbeing and success (both social and educational) and who has a deep knowledge of the subject matter and genuinely loves his or her job. If a teacher embodies all these characteristics, students

would be more likely to learn easier and more effectively and would be more incline on keeping their efforts throughout the whole duration of learning. On the contrary, "stressed-out teachers tend to have stressed-out students" (Schonert-Reichl, 2017: 13), meaning that evidence showed that the teacher's temper deeply influences the classroom environment. Moreover, the classroom environment itself has an influence on the learners' learning outcome, since a "safe, caring, supportive, participatory, and well-managed environment" helps generating effective learning, together with a "[c]lassroom with warm teacher-child relationships", that seems to "promote deep learning among students: children who feel comfortable with their teachers and peers are more willing to grapple with challenging material and persist at difficult learning tasks" (Schonert-Reichl, 2017: 138-139).

According to Caon (2008a), in order for teachers and students to establish meaningful relationships, the teacher has also to pay attention to the pupils' need, future-life plans and, in the case of language learning, to the role of the language studied as well (e.g.: in the case of adult learners of Italian L2, the teacher has to consider the fact that the adult learner needs to learn Italian in order to survive in the new community, get a job, fill in forms, etc.). Other significative relationships that need to be encouraged in class to improve the quality of the classroom environment are the ones that involve the interactions among the students themselves: the students should be taught to respect the other, to negotiate ideas and to work cooperatively. To do so, the teacher might want to choose strategies that involve cooperative learning and peer tutoring.

Finally, concerning tasks and activities, it is important for the students to know what they are doing, why they are doing that specific task in that specific way, and what will be evaluated and assessed and the goal of the task. The knowledge of all these aspects should lead to a relationship of complete trust towards the teacher, whose job is also to explain the reasons behind the adoption of certain methods and methodologies, as well as to negotiate the educational choices, trying to meet the students' requests, when possible (Caon, 2008a: 42-47).

To sum up, the role of the teacher as a friend is to create a cooperative, encouraging, not-stressed, supportive classroom environment, where students are not afraid to make mistakes or anxious, and feel free to share opinions and feelings with the teachers, making learning enjoyable and meaningful.

1.4.4. The teacher as a philosopher

Thinking of a teacher as a philosopher might not be immediate, but it is important to define this role to help develop some useful characteristics in the students. The term "philosopher" has Greek roots, from the word *philosophos*, namely "lover of wisdom" (*philein* "to love" and *sophos* "wise"). But *philosopher* also means "worldview", in this case the worldview of the teacher and the worldview of the others. Philosophers tend to question everything and everyone, asking themselves (and to others) questions to find an answer, meaning that philosophers discuss their questions and ideas and listen to other's ideas to find a shared answer. In the light of learning, teachers are the ones who keep alive the interest that students have towards the world around them and encourage their pupils asking them questions. Teachers need to foster deep thinking and understanding, underlining how what is being learnt in school is part of the real world and has a deeper meaning or function than the apparent one. In the language learning environment, students might find challenging, for example, to think beyond the storyline of a text or beyond the context or compare actions, behaviours, and reactions. In order to do so, the teachers can ask their students questions that are suitable to the real world and not only to the *mere* subject, questions such as "Why did this character behave in this way?" or "What would you have done if you were in their shoes?" or "Why did this character not like doing that?" and then discuss the ideas in class, listen and compare those ideas and opinions, somehow like Greek philosopher Socrates did in Athens. In order to facilitate and encourage freedom and security of expression in class, teachers have to build a relaxed and friendly environment, by

satisfying the methods and qualities described in the previous paragraphs. A close relationship with students is needed because the sense of freedom is needed.

To conclude, Glass (2014) said that "as teachers, we are in a position to build a solid philosophical foundation for our children – or rather, to assist them in laying that foundation for themselves". The role of the teacher as philosopher is to keep alive the students' curiosity and to foster deeper reasoning, meditation, and knowledge on the other and the other's perception of the world, trying to decentralise themselves so as to reach a sort of external, impartial, point of view where everything and everyone is questioned in order to find a deeper, common, point of view.

Chapter 2
From in-presence to distance learning: education in the time of Covid-19

This chapter deals with the changes in education caused by the new human coronavirus disease. To begin with, the Covid-19 situation will be described, aiming at giving the reader a general idea of the context where *distance learning* was activated in Italy. The main differences between in-presence learning and distance learning will be discussed, as well as the change from distance learning to *blended learning*. The main subjects of learning (the students and the teacher) will be analysed in the light of the changes resulting from distance learning, comparing the characteristics to Chapter 1. The main principles of the so-called in Italian *Smart Teaching* will be outlined, together with the *Five-step planning procedure* and the teaching platforms, materials, and tools available to the teachers in occurrence of distance learning and blended learning. Finally, a timeline of the guidelines given by the MIUR will be summarised.

2.1 The state of emergency and the necessity of adopting new teaching methods

The new human coronavirus (Covid-19) has spread all over the world starting from late December 2019. The first confirmed cases of Coronavirus in Italy happened on January 30, when two Chinese tourists tested positive for Covid-19 in Rome. On January 31, the Prime Minister of Italy, Giuseppe Conte declared the *State of Emergency*. Later, on February 21, the first Italian patient with Covid-19 was diagnosed in Codogno, Lodi province, marking the real beginning of the Covid-19 emergency in Italy. In fact, from Codogno, a small *comune* located in northern Italy, the virus spread all over the country extremely rapidly. By February 23, all schools and universities were closed in Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont, Liguria, Emilia Romagna, and Friuli Venezia Giulia and by March 5, the closure was extended to the whole

country. The closure, which was initially supposed to last until March 15, was after prolonged to April 3 and then was declared as definitive for the whole school year 2019/2020. It is evident that the educational system was required to rapidly adopt new teaching methods, due to the fact that schools would not have been physically accessible for a long period of time.

The new teaching methods would involve the use of technology more than had ever happened before: from online exercises to writings submitted via e-mail, from videos to watch on YouTube to live classes streamed via online meeting apps and platforms (such as Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype or Jitsi) and much more. The characteristics of online learning appear to differ greatly from traditional in-presence learning, not only for what concerns teaching methods, but also for what concerns evaluation and assessment of the students' knowledge. The summarisation of a nine-month period into a single mark has always been a tough job for the teachers, and the summarisation of an online educational path seems to be even more challenging. However, the topic of evaluation and assessment will be dealt with in Chapter 3.

2.2 From in presence to distance learning

In this section, the changes from in-presence to distance learning will be discussed. Distance Learning (from now on: DL; in Italian: *Didattica a Distanza* - *DAD*), as stated in the previous paragraph, was adopted as a solution to the situation caused by the Covid-19 situation and was supposed to last only for two weeks. Due to the uncertainty of the disease development and the increasing number of Covid-19 cases in Italy, the closure was prolonged for months, until the end of the school year 2019/2020 and implemented for the new school year 2020/2021, with new regulation and resources. In the next few paragraphs, the characteristics of DL will be discussed: what DL is, the assumptions of DL, and the elements that characterise DL, as well as the main differences from in presence learning, and the advantages and disadvantages that DL

carries. When discussing the elements that constitute DL, a definition of *Smart teaching* will be provided.

2.2.1 What is Distance Learning: third-generation of distance education

The Covid-19 health emergency obliged the Italian Government to enact new norms and regulations (Cfr. 2.7) that allowed schools to deliver long distance education, in order not to fail the students' right of education. Hence, DL is the way of teaching that was used during the second part of the 2019/2020 school year as a solution to the closure of the schools due to the Covid-19 outbreak in Italy. But DL is not a novelty in the educational system. DL first appeared during the IT revolution of the 1950s and digitalisation contexts that has been offering, during the past decades, ever new tools, methodologies and, more generally, horizons. So, DL is an *opportunity* of renewal in teaching and learning. Before the new human coronavirus pandemic, DL had always been seen as a support or alternative to in-presence learning. But due to the pandemic, the opportunity represented by DL turned into a *necessity* that allowed both to practice social distancing and the continuation of educational activities, with a never-used-before modality. The *new* way of online teaching refers to the *third generation of distance education*[15], that implies latest-gen IT devices and software combined with social learning (Trentin, 2001), highlighting the importance of the *communicative*

[15] According to Trentin (2001), distance education (from now on DE; in Italian: Formazione a Distanza – FAD) could be divided into three generations: 1) first-gen DE: developed starting from the second half of XIX century, especially in the most industrialised countries (such as England and Sweden). It implied the utilisation of the transportation networks and postal services to provide students who could not reach any school with materials that allowed them to be educated. First-gen DE is called DE by correspondence; 2) second-gen DE: starting from the beginning of XX century, delivered via radio and particularly thanks to the BBC to the middle class. Starting from the 1950s the telephone contributed to DE, as well as television, VHS and telecommunications in general. In this phase the interactions between single students and between student and teacher still have a marginal role. Second-gen DE is called plurimedia DE; 3) third-gen DE: starting from the 1980s, up to the present day, thanks to personal computers, that allow DE to be both offline (with floppy disks, videodisks and cd-roms) and online (especially thanks to the Internet). This phase involves cooperation and collaboration in learning, as well as interaction between students and students and teachers. Third-gen DE is called online DE (Pantaleo, 2010). For further research see: TRENTIN (2001).

approach[16] in the choice of materials, that allow students to generate meaningful learning with cooperation and collaboration online through group works and community activities. Moreover, DL offers educational processes that can be personalised to satisfy individual needs and necessities.

Teachers and students should always consider that DL is *not* just a transposition of materials and methodologies used in presence. DL is a completely different way of teaching and learning, where different variables have to be taken under consideration, such as materials, modalities and changes in relationships in the new classroom environment.

A definition given by the ASNOR website (2020a), that gives the idea of what DL is, is: "insieme delle attività formative che è possibile svolgere senza la presenza fisica di docente e alunni nello stesso luogo"[17]. The idea is that online learning could contribute to *lifelong learning*[18] and personalisation of educational processes, thanks to the facility of access of the materials. Moreover, if well organised, online learning can also simplify the jobs of both students and teachers.

So, DL implies an innovative approach, that aims for the creation of educational contexts where students autonomously grow personal knowledge and competencies without losing the relationship between student and teacher (ASNOR, 2020a).

[16] The *communicative approach*, an approach developed starting from the second half of the XX century and vital for language learning, states the importance of interaction between learners and of the role of the teacher as a guide, that plans learning according to the students, who are the key of learning. Hence, Balboni, starting from the 1990s, developed a model where the language competency (linguistic, extralinguistic and socio-pragmatic and (inter)cultural competencies) is translated into a communicative action, according to the ability of communicating socially (according to social, cultural and pragmatic rules) (Balboni, 2015).

[17] *Cfr.*: "educational activities that can be carried out without the physical presence of the teacher and the students in the same place". Our translation.

[18] *Lifelong learning* is fundamental in the life of every individual, because it entails the idea of involuntariness, linked with the concept of globalization, where learning a language is not a voluntary action, but rather an external reality that requires further learning in order to be able to reach self-determination (Balboni, 2015: 100).

2.2.2 Bases, expectations, main instruments of distance learning

When teaching DL classes, teachers have to consider the fact that the message delivered or the lesson taught reaches the students mediated by a personal computer, a tablet or, sometimes, even a smartphone. Consequently, teachers should consider that DL has a significative impact on teaching and that it is necessary to reckon three key characteristics, namely bases, expectations and main instruments of DL:

a. *bases*: biological and cultural factors, methodologies of distance teaching and technology available need to be considered when planning a course[19];
b. *expectations*: in order for DL to be successful, teachers cannot just transpose in-presence lessons or courses into online versions. Teachers must adapt and modify methods, methodologies and instruments according to a new framework, specifically designed according to students, contexts and future goals. As Saladino puts it, in-presence education "non potrà mai essere sostituita in modo totale da quella a distanza poiché (…) vi è l'elemento relazionale che concorre in modo significativo a determinare l'apprendimento positive"[20] and the teachers' effort to adapt to the new, unexpected context of emergency should always be considered;
c. *instruments*: ideally, DL could be performed well in a context where all the users have a personal computer or tablet, a stable, high-speed Internet connection, and a printer. In reality, especially in the Italian context, many families still do not have a computer, tablet or an Internet connection. Moreover, many applications and programs are not for free and require a monthly or yearly subscription. Hence, teachers should aim at the highest results with the lowest number of tools and instruments possible. Consequently, the switch to new technological instruments

[19] The *bases* considered by Saladino refer to a class of average abilities and competencies. For further reading concerning *Special Educational Needs* students see: SALADINO (2020).
[20] *Cfr.*: "can never be totally substituted by distance education because (…) there is the relational element that significantly contributes in determining positive learning". Our translation.

should not be too fast but rather a gradual integration, to allow students (and teachers) to get accustomed and accept more easily to the new kind of education (Saladino, 2020).

The philosophy adopted by Saladino ("maximum results with minimum number of instruments") finds practical application in the *Five-step planning procedure*, described in 2.4.2, where the planning of a DL course is explained.

2.2.2.1 Smart teaching

Smart teaching is a simple, dynamic, and engaging way of teaching that involves IT in order to pursue learning objectives (Saladino, 2020), connected with the concept of *Smart school*[21]. As Saladino argues, Smart teaching is based on eight main elements that co-occur to the learning objectives of distance learning:

a. *mission*: the teacher has to cover the role of the guide, since in DL contexts the students' need for a guide is even greater. Hence, the teacher has to deal with new technologies and modalities, re-define learning objectives and re-plan the educational action (i.e. methods, methodologies, instruments). When planning, teachers should also consider the crucial role of motivation, that needs constant boost, especially in cases where pupils do not perceive the importance of learning. Finally, teachers should try not to be too demanding toward their students and towards themselves;
b. *space and time*: in order to help the brain recognising a place as the place designed for learning or teaching, hence helping to create a space of calmness and tranquillity, students and teachers should choose a specific part of the house,

[21] In Smart school contexts, education makes use of and promotes digital contents, platforms and media educational libraries, e-learning platforms, applications of virtual and augmented reality as instruments for immersive learning (i.e. a method where learners are immersed into a virtual dialogue and multisensoriality. (Carraro, 2019).

where it is possible to concentrate and study. Moreover, the chosen place should be consonant with the educational context, since every part of the camera frame will be seen by other people during the lessons (e.g. consider what is happening in the background: if necessary, some applications allow the users to use virtual backgrounds or to blur the background) and it should be free from unpleasant noise;

c. *interaction*: although the relationship in most cases is based on a pre-existing relationship, thanks to a period when students and teachers could meet in presence, the interactions between the teacher and the students change and adapt to new modalities. Body language assumes a different meaning, with gestures and facial expressions that result more evident than tone of voice and pauses in the spoken language. Moreover, the higher the number of students following the class, the lesser the eye contact, necessary to get feedback and to understand the students' feelings;
d. *senses*: senses should always be considered as great influencers of all learning processes, but in DL they become vital. In fact, a great variety of senses involved in the educational processes means a higher number of cognitive styles and intelligences advantaged. In DL, hearing and sight should be preferred, proposing activities that involve high imaginary and exaggeration, so as to keep the students engaged also in cases of latency;
e. *attention*: the duration of the lesson should be adapted to distance education, where the time of each class should be reduced to 40/45 minutes and divided into smaller units, with high levels of engagement and interaction. By motivating and enhancing students' focus on the learning objects, teachers should be able to boost attentive energy, which influences learning processes. Teachers may want to plan interactive lessons, that spontaneously and naturally capture attention with strategies and activities such as: group discussions (balancing the talking time of each student); informing that the lesson will be interactive; small tests at the end or the beginning of the lesson; adoption of powerful images and linguistic

paradoxes; planning short breaks between the teacher's explanations and the students' contributions;

f. *materials*: even though self-produced material is usually the most effective (because it is planned according to specific contexts, contents, and pupils), teachers could adapt, add, remove or modify pre-existing material. A strategy useful for encouraging students to self-produce material is to ask them to create summaries, schemes and graphics in small groups, to be presented, in turns, to the class;
g. *comprehension*: the teacher should always be aware of the students' educational processes. To verify comprehension, teachers should over-communicate, ask questions, let the students know that they are there for them and that they understand their difficulties. Moreover, comprehension should be verified in specific moments. For example, contents might be tested with techniques such as *open loops* (Cfr. 2.4), *summarizing* and *further explanations*;
h. *consolidation*: teachers should select, according to DL objectives and syllabus, few topics that cover roles of importance and priority in the students' learning paths. Consolidation of knowledge should be planned for each and every class, with reprises of old topics in order to introduce the new and, for example, through new kinds of activities and tests carried out in small groups, strengthen the students' autonomy and sense of belonging.

By considering all of the above elements, teachers may proceed in the planning of an effective DL course, that considers changes in educational processes and contexts and the central role of the students. As Saladino says in her work, citing Roosevelt, teachers and pupils and the whole educational system have to "far quello che si può, con quello che si ha, dove ci si trova"[22]. This means that the subjects involved in distance education should always consider that the contexts change, and that these changes do

[22] *Cfr.*: "do what you can, with what you have, where you are". Our translation.

not always adapt perfectly to the previous, known context. What teachers and students can do is to take the new contexts as opportunities and make the best of it.

2.2.3 Differences from in-presence learning to distance learning

When distance education is being considered, teachers should always acknowledge that every level of education has different needs. As Saladino (2020) explains, Education aimed at Upper Secondary School (USS) students should "favorire l'apprendimento mediante la collaborazione e il lavoro di gruppo privilegiando la varietà relazione"[23]. With this premise, we should continue by saying that in-presence learning is largely different from online learning, due to different social dynamics informing relationships between students, their peers, and teachers. There are four main aspects that contribute to the differences should be considered when USS DL is implied: place, motivation, attention, and context.

a. *Place*: the environment where the student learns affects learning processes. The classroom at school is focussed on learning, with specific purposes and no distractions coming from the environment (i.e. every classroom is specifically addressed to an educational context); very often, in DL the space used for following videoconferences and lessons is not a personal studio or room: the vast majority of students study in shared parts of the house, which function was not originally intended for studying, such as a shared bedrooms, living rooms and kitchens. Learning processes can be facilitated through brain recognition of a chosen place as the place where learning happens. In order to do so, experts suggest that the learner has to elect a place suitable for learning and always use that same place

[23] *Cfr.*: "promote learning through cooperation and group work, favouring relationships". Our translation.

when studying. By doing so, the brain converts that specific house space into a sort of classroom and learning results facilitated;

b. *motivation*: as previously discussed (Cfr. 1.1.5), motivation is crucial for meaningful learning in every stage of education and subject: from young children to adult learners, from traditional teaching to autodidacts, and from in-presence learning to distance learning. Motivation is connected to social relations, support received from the environment and general context. What motivates students might differ greatly: in children, for example, motivation might come from game-related activities, while teenagers and adults could be motivated by personal expectations. Especially for young children and teenagers, it might be useful to involve in the educational process also the parents, who can support and help their children. What teachers can do to boost motivation in a DL context is to stimulate the students' imagination towards future instead of thinking of the present, which might be influenced by negative factors, such as the condition of isolation;
c. *attention*: studies demonstrate that attention drops drastically after 20 minutes and after 40 minutes the level of attention has almost entirely disappeared. Thus, in order to keep the students' attention span higher, online classes should last around 40-45 minutes, and the lesson should be segmented into shorter chunks of 10, 15 or 20 minutes with a high level of interaction. For example, according to Middendorf and Kalish (1996), a lecture could be more interactive when rendered in "a series of mini-lectures with active engagement components, all scheduled in 15- to 20-minute segments" because it can "keep students and faculty more alert, engaged, and productive for an entire 50 or 75 minutes of class time". Moreover, attention in distance learning is more liable to disturbing elements and distractions. Hence, it is important to draw attention by frequently changing activity or topic and engage the students more. Other suggestions for maintaining high levels of attention throughout the lesson given by Saladino (2020) include: informing the students that there will be a test at the end of the lesson or asking the students to take notes on paper;

d. *context*: in *traditional* learning, the context is specifically created for learning and education. Consequently, it is vital to recreate a *learning context*, so as to facilitate attention and learning. Saladino suggests that it might be useful to divide the class into small groups of 2 or 3 students, give students easy and well-defined tasks, which aims should be clearly explained in advance and valued in class. Another suggestion is to ask the students to summarise the lesson with maps, schemes or to carry out further research and readings about a specific topic related to the lesson. The material created, such as maps and schemes, favours a collaborative context, values enthusiasm for learning and can be useful for revision.

Other factors that highlight a difference in DL when compared to in-presence learning are:

e. *time*: in in-presence learning the "school time", where pupils learn, and the "home time", where pupils can amuse themselves, are two distinct moments. In DL, the environment might not be of help in understanding the change in purpose of technology: from moments of amusement and pastime to education;
f. *communication*: in in-presence learning, the teacher's explanations or messages and gestures are not mediated by any kind of device or barrier; in DL the messages reach the students after some seconds (i.e. latency), mediated by a screen, where gestures and proxemics have almost no influence on learning processes. Hence, the feedback given by the students is completely different: in in-presence learning the feedback is immediate (e.g. the students' expressions, gestures and questions) and the teacher is able to modify and correct his or her way of teaching immediately; in DL the message, specifically planned for the students, does not produce an immediate feedback, or rather, it produces effects after latency. This implies that teachers cannot modify and correct their actions or way of teaching right after the delivery. Anyhow, the feedback could be studied with surveys and questionnaires that the learners might fill in after studying a learning object;

g. *relationships*: the change in relationships is also evident, since students and teacher do not share the same physical space, but a virtual classroom instead. The two directions of the relationships are *vertical* and *horizontal*. In in-presence learning the two kinds of relationships are well-defined, with the vertical axis where students give a direct feedback from which the teacher can adjust the educational processes and the horizontal axis where students interact with each other. In DL the roles are different, with blurry boundaries:
   - *vertical*: every educational process should be student-oriented, according to the contexts and the instruments resources available, determining a sort of double-verticality kind of relationship;
   - *horizontal*: this kind of relationship can be encouraged and preserved by proposing cooperative activities and fostering collaboration, with techniques such as open debates, message exchange and group problem solving, therefore employing strategies such as cooperative learning and peer tutoring.

2.2.4 Advantages and disadvantages of distance learning

Distance learning implies a high number of changes, including teaching methods, perceptions, attention to detail, relationships, space, and time. Changes may also be advantageous or disadvantageous to both learners and teachers.

The *advantages* include the possibility to have materials to study available to the users at any chosen time and space, hence contributing to the concept of lifelong learning. Another advantage is the opportunity of dialoguing and creating collaborative environments easily, through bidirectional interactive communication that can be carried out one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-many. In the Orizzonte Scuola website (April 5, 2020) an important strength of DL is highlighted: the fact that methods and learning styles become more flexible, adaptable to the educational path of every

student, according to individual competencies and objectives, even for those students who might be in a situation of disadvantage.

Unfortunately, DL also implies some *disadvantages*. The most influential disadvantage, responsible to a large extent of the possible failure of the whole DL system, is technology. In fact, feedback about DL in Italy, especially for the period from March to June 2020[24], highlighted issues such as: no access to high-speed, stable Internet connection, insufficient IT knowledge and competencies (e.g., how to use applications, how to use create files, etc.) or insufficient IT training. Moreover, according to the ISTAT, one third of the Italian families does not own a computer or a tablet[25] and 300.000 families with students do not have access to the Internet[26], hence worsening digital divide and social exclusion, as well as contributing to developing feelings of alienation. Another disadvantage concerns the inability of some subjects to manage their time. Being flexible and organised, meeting deadlines and completing analogous tasks may be challenging for some students. Furthermore, asynchronous modalities (Cfr. 2.4) of DL can be perceived as cold and detached, resulting in reservations about DL from both teachers and students. Students and teachers have to be able to adapt to new ways of interacting, explaining and cooperating (Orizzonte Scuola, March 14; April 5 2020). Finally, an alarming report coming from a research conducted by IPSOS for Save the Children reported how distance learning caused a high number of Italian Upper Secondary School students to drop out of school. 28% of the interviewed students affirmed that at least one classmate dropped out from school since the Covid-19 emergency started, and one in four believes that the number of dropouts in their class amounts to more than 3. Alarmingly, 34,000 further students are at risk

[24] For further reading see: https://scuola.net/uploads/media/attachments/0001/02/da7fa32965d42c25023500f02fcb44c8e7db3f99.pdf, last accessed March 29.2021.

[25] According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (in Italian Istituto Nazionale di Statistica; ISTAT), period: 2018/2019. For further reading see: https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/240949 and https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/236920, last accessed March 29.2021.

[26] According to the third *AUDITEL-CENSIS* report concerning the post-lockdown Italy (October 2020). Available at: https://www.auditel.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Auditel-Censis-2020.pdf, last accessed March 29.2021.

of dropping out. The cause of absence in DL appears to lie mainly with Internet connectivity and difficulties in concentrating in following lessons for hours behind a screen. The same causes appear to have an impact also on education itself (35% of students stated to feel less prepared than when classes were delivered in presence, 35% had to recoup more subjects than the previous year) and on students' morale (i.e.: students declared to feel tired, uncertain, worried, irritable, anxious, disoriented, nervous, apathetic, discouraged)[27].

2.3 The main characters of distance learning

As with in-presence learning, the main characters of education are the students and the teacher. When a DL course or lesson is being planned, teachers should consider different aspects of their learners and teachers have to assume new roles and functions. In this section, the changes from the roles and characteristics of students and teachers from in-presence to distance learning will be discussed, as well as the relational context in DL and the importance of considering mixed ability classes in a DL context.

2.3.1 The student

As it happens in in-presence learning, the student is the main subject of all educational processes. In DL, the role of centrality of the students as single subjects and as a group becomes the basis for an efficient DL planning. The characteristics of the students vary according to the factors discussed in Chapter 1 (Cfr. 1.1), and in DL contexts some more aspects should be considered. Hence, not only multiple intelligences, learning

[27] For further research see: https://s3.savethechildren.it/public/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/i-giovani-ai-tempi-del-coronavirus.pdf, last accessed on March 29, 2021.

and cognitive styles, personality types, socio-cultural, relational, and biological factors and motivation co-occur to a successful online learning, but also other factors, that will be briefly discussed in this section.

2.3.1.1 IT resources, competencies and IT impact

Access to and success in DL classes is determined also by the resources of the family (e.g.: owning a computer or tablet and a printer, space available to study and quality of the Internet connection), that can determine the quality of learning processes. Moreover, IT abilities and competencies become in DL one of the characteristics of the student: the more a student is familiar with technology and different kinds of applications and programs, the more the teacher can vary the materials and inputs. It is paramount to consider the impact that technology has on students. Younger students are likely to be more heavily impacted. In fact, technology could cause "problemi emotivi, sociali e comportamentali, riducendo in modo significativo le loro [degli studenti] capacità empatiche che sono alla base della comunicazione e del dialogo con gli altri"[28] (Sarsini, 2020: 10). Especially for USS students, DL implies "maggior affaticamento cognitivo e una diminuzione delle capacità ricettive per quanto riguarda i contenuti disciplinari ma provoca anche un senso di isolamento, passività, dipendenza in quanto la comunicazione mediata dal computer limita le capacità di collaborazione e di partecipazione attiva alla vita sociale e collettiva"[29] (Sarsini, 2020: 10).

[28] *Cfr.*: "emotional, social and behavioural issues, significantly reducing their [the students'] empathetic abilities, which are on the basis of dialogue and communication with others". Our translation.

[29] *Cfr.*: "greater cognitive fatigue and a decrease in receptive abilities, when disciplinary contents are involved, but it also provokes a sense of isolation, passiveness, dependence, since communication mediated by computers reduces abilities of collaboration and active participation to social and collective life". Our translation.

2.3.1.2 Motivation, attention and participation

Motivation still profoundly determines the extent to which students are willing to learn and participate to the classes. In the case of DL motivation covers an even more important role. When DL is concerned, as already stated in 2.2.3, students' attention tends to drop sooner than in presence. Since "a motivated student is a motivated learner" (Merchan, Carrasco, 2017). It is important to consider student-oriented methods and methodologies such as *bite-size learning*, *open loops*, repetition, and variety, as well as *flipped classroom*, *cooperative learning*, *peer tutoring*, *debates* and *simulation-based learning*. The attention deficit among students may be improved by fragmenting lessons into 15–20-minute segments. Curious, happy, active students are more likely to generate meaningful learning.

Finally, participation contributes to learning processes. In fact, it is desirable to "beneficiare di una partecipazione attiva e dinamica a distanza"[30], that is important for students during DL because "non solo è importante "stare al passo" con gli apprendimenti disciplinari, ma anche non sentirsi isolati socialmente"[31] (Trentin, Benigno, Caruso *et al.*, 2020:1).

2.3.1.3 Social interaction

As already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, social interaction is one of the most important aspects of DL. In this regard, students should always be encouraged to work in groups to reinforce and produce meaningful learning and a sense of belonging to the group. Students should be encouraged to take active roles not only during the lessons, but also in DL processes in general, "sia perché hanno notevole dimestichezza con l'uso delle tecnologie sia perché vanno particolarmente responsabilizzati"[32] (Trentin, Benigno, Caruso *et al.*, 2020: 4). Students can contribute to the development and

[30] *Cfr.*: "benefit from active and dynamic distance participation". Our translation.
[31] *Cfr.*: "not only is it important to "keep up" with learning processes, but also to not feel socially isolated". Our translation.
[32] *Cfr.*: "both because they are greatly familiar with technology and because they need to become aware of their responsibilities". Our translation.

amelioration of DL, by suggesting resources and applications they are familiar with that the teacher might not know.

To conclude, students with their role of principal characters in education, are important in determining the methods, methodologies, and instruments of DL. The first step of projecting a course should always be the individuation of the various kinds of students that compose a class. Students are important to determine the kind of activities, levels of stratification, differentiation, and multiple intelligences to be fostered, as well as cognitive and learning styles, as already highlighted in Chapter 1.

2.3.2 The teacher

The teacher is the other important agent in the educational process. In DL, the role of the teacher is vital as they plan courses and lessons to meet the differing needs of students, whose characteristics must be considered during the planning process. But the role of the teacher in DL is much more than *only* the planning of the course. The characteristics seen in 1.3 assume an even stronger role in the DL educational process, with some changes, outlined in the next paragraphs.

2.3.2.1 The teacher as a guide and a tutor

It is important for teachers to remember that they are guiding the course, not only in terms of learning objects, but also in terms of virtual environment and technology, which students might not be able to use (Pozzi, 2020: 3). The teacher chooses the materials, methodologies and actions that allow students in difficulty to recoup knowledge, potentiate learning and that boost motivation and student's autonomy. The ASNOR website (2020a) emphasises how careful planning of virtual activities is the key to positive and meaningful classroom relationships and interaction. Teachers should

constantly monitor the students' progresses and give feedback on the progress, as well as encouraging self-evaluation and self-regulation of learning processes.
Moreover, teachers have to constantly boost motivation, by planning differentiated and stratified activities, that engage the students and their multiple intelligences, cognitive and learning styles. What teachers may do to motivate their students is also to:

- *propose varied instruments and materials*: the instruments and materials that could be involved in DL are almost infinite. From blogs to videos, from e-mails to books, from audios to virtual classrooms: teachers can opt for materials and instruments suitable to their students' needs;
- *establish a positive classroom environment*, by listening, connecting with the students, promoting and fostering curiosity and without overloading cognitive processes.

Finally, teachers should consider also that evaluation and assessment (Cfr. Chapter 3) need to be adjusted to the new modalities and learning objectives of DL.

2.3.2.2 The teacher as a friend and philosopher

The teacher's role *friend* discussed in 1.3.4 becomes the key to successful DL courses. A sympathetic teacher, who shows understanding for difficult situations is highly appreciated by the learners, who are keener to keep high levels of motivation thanks to the trust in the teacher. Pupils need to feel support and comprehension from the teacher. On the other hand, the teacher's presence should not be metaphorically suffocating, it should be constant but not omnipresent (ASNOR, 2020a). Hence, according to Sacchi (2020), teachers should be "equilibrati e capaci di leggere le emozioni altrui e arginare gli eccessi delle stesse"[33]. Finally, the teacher's role of philosopher is useful for making

[33] Cfr.: "balanced and able to read others' emotions and to stem excess of those emotions". Our translation.

the pupils reflect upon the future, the bigger picture and to help them project their plans beyond the condition of isolation they are experiencing.

2.3.2.3 IT competencies

When DL is concerned, teachers should have specific IT competencies, such as knowing how programs and applications work and what these programs and applications could be useful for. The aforementioned IT competencies allow teaching to be more incisive. Accordingly, teachers should give themselves time to adapt to the new modalities and time to learn and get used to the new context of learning.

2.3.2.4 Interaction and relationships with students, other teachers and families

Even though it has a different nature (i.e. online), the interaction with the students and the relationships between students and teachers are very important for the success of DL courses. Teachers have to be able to manage TTT and STT in new ways, that encourage active participation and responsibility. Furthermore, in order for communication to be successful, teachers should emphasise metaphors and repetition, including different ways of explaining concepts. At the same time, teachers should remember that gestures and facial expressions become in DL more evident and influent than tone of voice and speech pauses due to latency and the fact that proxemics appears to have few or no influence on online relationships. Also, teachers should want to have feedback on the students' feelings and impressions on teaching and learning processes. Hence, questionnaires, questions, polls and discussions could be a solution. Anyway, teachers should also invite their pupils to follow some school rules. Trentin, Benigno, Caruso *et al.* stated that "i docenti devono invitare gli studenti ad osservare le stesse regole scolastiche"[34] (2020:4), such as: punctuality, asking for permission when they need to leave the virtual classroom, not using other devices unless the teacher gives permission and respecting deadlines, as well as some *extra* DL rules, such as correct

[34] Cfr.: "teachers have to invite the students to observe the same school norms". Our translation.

use of microphones during videoconferences (Trentin, Benigno, Caruso *et al*., 2020: 4).

The relationships and interactions with other teachers are important for the learning program organicity principle: teachers should coordinate their educational actions to avoid excess of cognitive load. Another aspect that should be aimed to is socialisation between teachers, that should communicate and share methodologies used and problem-solving strategies. Moreover, schools' headmasters and class committees should decide on common sets of instruments to be used in DL, to avoid disorientation (Trentin, Benigno, Caruso *et al.*, 2020:3).

Families assume a new, more active role in DL. For example, parents should be encouraged to participate in educational presentations and discussions with the school and to support their children by helping them finding the right setting in the house to study and developing autonomy. Parents should also try not to be in the same room as their children when they are following a class, as to give them the idea that they are at school, without their parents observing them. Family members should also try not to use the Internet for streaming or amusement purposes, so as not to interfere with the connection and try not to make loud, disturbing noises when the lessons are taking place. Finally, parents are invited to always inform teachers if their child is experiencing difficulties, in order to take action rapidly (Trentin, Benigno, Caruso *et al.*, 2020:3-4).

To conclude, we want to emphasise how successful DL courses cannot exist without a good teacher, who plans activities (e.g.: recoup or strengthening activities), supports the students and interacts with other teachers and families, covering the role of the teacher as a guide, as a friend and as a philosopher described in Chapter 1.

2.3.3 Mixed ability classes

In this brief section, the MAC will be described in the online context. In addition to all the individual characteristics of the students (Cfr. 1.1), to the students with SEN[35] and SLI[36], excellent students and students in difficulty and non-Italian-speaking students, other aspects co-occur in determining MAC. As already described in paragraph 1.2, in it is important to detect all the different typologies of students that compose a MAC to opt for teaching methodologies that allow all the student types to perform at their best. In DL contexts, there are other differences that may facilitate the access to educational resources and information, determined by:

a. the IT resources available to the family, such as: personal computer, tablet, smartphone, printer and scanner, Internet connection and the speed of the connection;
b. changes connected with:
   - materials used by the teacher;
   - teachers', students' and families' IT competencies and abilities;
   - students' pace of learning and attention span;
   - interactions and relationships;
   - possibility to carry out activities individually, in couples, in groups and in plenary;
   - possibility to employ and adapt methods (such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring and flipped classroom);
   - parent support, which might depend also on parents' education, abilities, competencies and language level (Brichese, Caon, Melero Rodríguez, 2020).

[35] SEN – Special Educational Needs.
[36] SLI– Specific Language Impairment.

MAC and the individuation of different kinds of students in the classroom allow teachers to adapt and plan education according to the students' needs and necessities, allowing better performances and personalised learning, hence transforming the difficulties that MAC carry into opportunities to ameliorate the teachers' and the students' learning experience and helping in the achievement of one of the main goals of education: *inclusion*.

2.4 Planning a DL course

The success of a DL course is profoundly determined by the planning. Starting from the premise that no course can be effective without accurate planning, we should say that planning covers a major role in DL. In fact, DL courses cannot be just mere transpositions of in-presence courses.

Firstly, the teacher should define the *context* and the *students* and then, according to these two elements, start designing the course. In particular, the students' characteristics give the teacher a starting point in terms of *methods* and *methodologies* to adopt in class, since every educational choice should always be student-oriented. Moreover, by identifying the students in the light of the MAC, teachers should be able to determine the degree and the variety of differentiation and stratification of activities and the sensory channels that could result in being more effective, according to all the characteristics of the students described in 1.1, 1.2, 2.3.1 and 2.3.3.

After the identification of the learners and the context and the methodologies and methods that best fit the educational aims, teacher should consider that *attention span* in DL is significantly reduced. For this reason, it might result helpful planning lessons divided into *chunks* of 15/20 minutes maximum, divided into three parts:

1. globality: the teacher guides the students to the discovery of the topic. The students start activating their expectancy grammar through, for example, brainstorms or

activities that involve the activation of the brain; in this phase, students are given tools and indications useful for the other phases of the lesson;

2. analysis and synthesis: the students find the rule and carry out exercises to consolidate and expand the rule;
3. verification: teacher and students check the hypotheses, correct possible mistakes. Self-correction is encouraged.

According to Saladino (2020), DL "si associa molto bene con sessioni di *Micro-learning* o *Bite-size learning*"[37], a methodology used in e-learning courses that involves brief learning sessions (usually from 3 to 7 minutes) and that "punta a massimizzare la concentrazione dello studente in una situazione di autoapprendimento"[38]. When possible, teachers should opt for two shorter sessions, instead of one longer session. The lesson should also be planned according to Saladino's *five-step planning* scheme (Cfr. 2.4.2), that could help the DL lesson to be effective and inclusive at the same time. In fact, planning should ensure *inclusion* for all the MAC students, especially for the *special need* students[39], who need particular attention in the act of designing a course[40].

The following step involves the decision of the level of interaction aimed at during the lesson. Teachers might aim to different *levels of interaction*:

- *low* interaction, in situations such as pre-registered video lessons (best if it is possible to monitor the students' work through fruition tracking) and delivery of material useful for autonomous study and tests;

[37] *Cfr.*: "can easily be associated with *Micro-learning* or *Bite-size learning* sessions". Our translation.
[38] *Cfr.*: "aims at maximising the student's focus in a self-learning situation". Our translation.
[39] Special needs students with a certificate of disability, according to DM 66/2017, can have a further personalisation of their learning process, thanks to the IEP (INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN; in Italian: PEI – PIANO EDUCATIVO INDIVIDUALIZZATO). The IEP is indispensable for the definition of personal educational objectives, instruments, activities and criteria of evaluation and assessment. Each PEI is individual, flexible and adaptable to the single students and their development throughout the school year (L'Orientamento, 2019).
[40] For further reading on how to design an inclusive DL course for SEN students see: SALADINO (2020).

- *high* interaction, in situations such as live video lessons and videoconferences, delivery of materials useful for studying or tests followed by discussion forums, chats.

Finally, after the choice of the interaction level, the instruments need to be selected. The instruments (see 2.6) need to be varied, and if possible, easy to understand and use. Teachers should aim at using online resources and platforms and materials that can be modified and adapted according to: context, students, methods and methodologies, lesson fragmentation, level of interaction (Gervasio, April 5, 2020). Although it may require some time to get used to the new digital materials, it is desirable that teachers resort to varied kinds of multimedia materials.

DL course planning should be meticulous, due to the absence of direct feedback from the students and teachers should always make clear what the *educational agreement* consists of, namely the "who, what, when, where, how" of education, including the aims of the course. Online educational approaches should be considered in light of any intrinsic difficulties before implementation. Every course should aim at developing students' autonomy in learning and in life. Autonomy can be achieved in a DL course due to the multimedia nature of digital resources available and a constant verification of learning processes, through feedback and formal and informal tests (ASNOR, 2020a).

Finally, distance learning can be delivered in two ways: *synchronously* (real-time students-teacher interaction) and *asynchronously* (with no real-time interaction). *Synchronous* DL also includes moments of real-time testing and work sessions and it has "a great deal of similarity to teaching and learning in campus-based classrooms"[41] (Anderson, 2008); *asynchronous* activities, on the other hand, include a variety of tasks that are performed by the students autonomously and later verified by the teacher, in separate moments. Asynchronous DL includes pre-registered video lessons and

[41] In Anderson's study, the results apply to university students. In our study, a more accurate quotation would say: "a great deal of similarity to teaching and learning in *presence*-based classrooms".

forums. Anyway, as Anderson states, "it is possible to combine synchronous, asynchronous, and independent study activities in a single course", especially in the case of blended learning, which will be explained in the following sections.

2.4.1 Other techniques

Other techniques that favour durable and meaningful learning involve:

- *repetition*, that should include varied modalities and instruments, links between subjects and previous knowledge and that should take place in different moments of the educational process, involving all the senses possible and inspire a global vision, according to the different learning styles;
- *open loops*, where each open loop is an activity that the brain has not completed[42] yet and, thanks to this incompleteness, open loops constitute a remarkable resource for learning. In fact, leaving a topic *open* from a lesson to another, for example by giving a test at the end of a lesson and correcting the answers the following lesson, can help fostering curiosity and reasoning. Moreover, the fact that each topic is *voluntarily* interrupted at the end of each class lowers the irritation generally derived from any kind of interruption (Saladino, 2020);
- *flipped classroom*, methodology where the structure of the class is *flipped*, according to the principles of *flipped learning*, which is "a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter" (Flipped Learning Network, 2014). In the flipped classroom methodology, students are the main agents, who,

[42] An activity can be classified as *completed* when knowledge is assessed positively when tested. For example, in order to test knowledge, a self-evaluation test can be useful, because it opens a loop that will be closed thanks to lessons, schemes and summaries (Saladino, 2020).

with the direction of the teacher, carry out tasks and activities autonomously, contributing to the development of personal competencies. The first step of the process happens in class (or during a live lesson), where curiosity is fostered through challenging tasks where the pupils are protagonists and that allow to understand the topic. Then, learners are invited to autonomously prepare a lesson to present in class (this phase, where students reflect upon the topic and create the lesson, is called phase of *assimilation*), through group discussions and collaboration and autonomous study after the lesson. The last step is to present the conclusions in class (this exposition is called the phase of *diffusion* of information); in this step self-evaluation and peer-evaluation are encouraged and improved, and the teacher's role of tutor consists in giving formative feedback. This technique allows students to learn according to their own pace of learning (especially important for inclusion of students in need and students in difficulty or excellences), develop autonomy, become more responsible of their learning process and develop social skills through interactive cooperative learning (Gallo, 2016). In this context, consequently, the teacher "instead of being the *sage on the stage*, functions as a *guide on the side*, facilitating learning in less directive ways" (King, 1993: 30);

- *cooperative learning* and *peer tutoring* are methodologies that allow collaboration between students. In peer tutoring students usually work in pairs: one student in the role of the *tutor*, the other one in the role of *tutee*; in cooperative learning, students work in small heterogeneous groups, with roles assigned by the teachers, so as that each member of the group can emerge for their talents;
- *active learning*, where teachers alternate questions and problems to solve and brief explanations, in order to engage the students more, for example through brainstorming, Socratic dialogue and guided research (Trentin, Benigno, Caruso *et al.*, 2020: 15);
- *debates*, where students are invited to express and compare their ideas and thoughts on a specific topic. By adding the *competition* element in the activity, debates

> "stimulate critical thinking and can be a highly effective way to actively engage students in research in the online classroom" (Cheese, 2015).

The aforementioned techniques allow students' active participation, especially in cases of *blended learning*, where education happens both in presence and online (Cfr. 2.5). Teachers should plan frequent breaks and activating questions during the lesson, as well as formative evaluation. The teacher should provide constant feedback to promote self-evaluation and autonomy. Autonomy and self-evaluation may be achieved through questionnaires, self-evaluation assignments and meetings (Ranieri, 2020). Hence, "the challenge for teachers designing and organizing the online learning context is to create a mix of learning activities that are appropriate to student needs, teacher skills and style, learning objectives of the program of study, and institutional technical capacity" (Anderson, 2008).

2.4.2 The five-step planning procedure

Saladino (2020), proposes a *five-step planning* procedure for DL. Starting from the assumptions that each student possesses a stable Internet connection, all the working digital devices necessary for the activities, and supportive parents, the author designed a scheme suitable for an efficient planning of DL lessons, which we want to once again emphasize, cannot be a mere digital transposition of in-presence lesson and materials. Saladino's procedure is based on the *natural acquisition process* (that involves, in order, the phases of globality, analysis and synthesis) that guides both in-presence and distance learning.

The first step is carried out before the actual lesson takes place. In this preliminary phase, it is important to foster attention and motivation to keep students engaged throughout the learning process. This first step should adopt *bite-sized* learning methods, according to the principle that "less is more" (i.e.: less topics, in a short study

session of 3 to 7 minutes produce more meaningful learning). Thus, teachers might choose videos, reading materials or sets of questions[43] in order to recall pre-existing knowledge on the topic of the upcoming lesson, accompanied by true or false or multiple-choice tests. Testing may be delivered to students for via Google Forms, SurveyMonkey or pdf, and later corrected in class, as part of a self-evaluation process. Textbooks might also be used in this first step, recalling in-presence practices and being more familiar to both students and teachers.

The second step consists of live video lessons, that might help recreating the interaction of in-presence learning, since it "è il momento che più si avvicina alla dimensione di *presenza* che si ha nell'aula virtuale"[44] (Saladino, 2020). During live video lessons teachers have the chance to foster reflection, links between topics and subjects and favour participation. Nevertheless, the lesson should not last more than 45 minutes, but it should be highly interactive, as to recreate the environment of in-presence interactive education.

The third step involves the verification of learning, through questions and activities that aim at favouring the students' awareness of learning processes. Teachers might want to communicate in advance to their students that a test will verify the new knowledge, to help the students (and consequently, the teacher as well) understand the progress made. Saladino suggests that by adding a simple test (e.g.: essential questions or multiple choices based on the most salient concepts of a text) students are more engaged and their attention span lengthens, facilitating comprehension.

The third step is followed by group work, that allows socialisation between students and, by discussing and exchanging ideas on how to carry out simple activities (such as mapping, scheming, or summarising a specific topic), covers the phase of synthesis.

[43] For a list of available online resources, see the MIUR website at: https://www.istruzione.it/coronavirus/didattica-a-distanza.html, last accessed on March 29, 2021.

[44] *Cfr.*: "it is the moment that most recalls the dimension of "presence" that could be experienced in virtual classrooms". Our translation.

The groups should be constituted by two or three people with specific tasks assigned by the teacher.

The last step involves consolidation and the creation of a *repository*. The repository functions as an archive for materials concerning older lessons, and allows for revision of material and topics. In the repository, teachers might choose to upload the recordings of the live classes, helping students with weak Internet connection.

In the scenario of the five-step planning procedure, the teacher guides learning, through accurate planning and by giving direction to the educational processes. In fact, we want to remind that

> "attività di didattica a distanza se ben progettate possono promuovere la costruzione di ambienti di apprendimento reali o virtuali dove gli studenti sono i principali protagonisti del loro processo di apprendimento partecipando attivamente alla costruzione sociale della conoscenza, attraverso una molteplicità di strumenti e risorse tecnologiche"[45] (Trentin, Benigno, Caruso *et al.*, 2020: 15).

The five-step planning procedure, based on the natural globality-analysis-synthesis acquisition process and on the principles of dynamicity and interactivity should show effective results, especially when combined to the *flipped classroom approach* (Cfr. 2.4.1).

2.5 From distance learning to blended learning

DL was adopted by schools in order to compensate for the Covid-19 emergency that caused schools to close and adopt alternative online solutions to practice social distancing. Anyhow, a decree issued by the Minister of Education on June 26, 2020

[45] *Cfr.*: "DL activities, if meticulously planned, can promote the construction of real or virtual learning environments where the students are the main characters of their own educational process, by actively participating on the social construction of knowledge, through varied instruments and technological resources". Our translation.

specified a framework to adopt starting from the new school year 2020/2021 that required schools to be equipped with a *Framework for blended learning*[46]. *Blended learning*[47] (BL) involves both distance learning through digital platforms and in-presence learning, in class or other school spaces, hence combining and integrating in presence and distance learning. In this section, the main concepts of BL will be described, as well as the benefits that BL gives to education. To conclude, instruments and materials that might be used both in DL and BL will be discussed.

2.5.1 What is blended learning?

Blended learning, first appeared in the MIUR regulations on June 26, 2020, involves the combination of distance learning and in presence learning, of virtual and physical classroom. In contrast to DL, the solution chosen for education during the first period of full lockdown due to Covid-19 where education is entirely delivered online, BL *integrates* the physical environment with the virtual environment, which functions as a *support* for everyday in-presence education. BL appears to be significantly useful in situations such as quarantine or for students undergoing a study abroad period, because it guarantees the *right to education* of each student (Pearson, 2020). Consequently, the reason why BL and DL should not be confused lies in the key difference between the two modalities: DL is entirely delivered online, whereas BL integrates the strengths of DL in an in-presence environment. Hence, DL can be considered as component of BL. According to Innovation for Education's website (2020), BL is a mix of activities that take place at school online synchronous activities and online asynchronous activities. BL is the kind of school that the Italian Ministry of Education aimed at for the new school year 2020/2021, in order to contain and manage the Covid-19 emergency, by

[46] In Italian: Piano scolastico per la didattica digitale integrata
[47] Blended learning is also called *hybrid learning*.

allowing students to integrate in presence and distance learning in different measures, according to the virus's epidemic curve.

2.5.2 The benefits of blended learning

When compared to in-presence learning, BL shows benefits in terms of variety of materials and instruments that can be adopted by the teacher when learning (Cfr. 2.6) and, on the other hand, significantly reduces the issue of interaction in online relationships. In fact, if well balanced and planned, BL might result in being particularly effective especially in cases such as:

- inter-disciplinary studies;
- personalisation of education, goals and recoup activities;
- development of subject and personal competencies;
- improvement of efficacy thanks to the adaptation to the students' learning styles;
- in the case of SN students, ease of personalisation and flexibility of tools and techniques (Pearson website, 2020).

Hence, during the Covid-19 emergency, BL resulted in being especially useful for those schools that required on-field practices and laboratories, that could not be taught online.
Moreover, in the case of students experiencing situations of isolation, BL can help maintaining the relationships with the class and, at the same time, keep following the classes and participating in different activities. By adopting BL as a *normal* practice in class especially through peer discussions and communication, cooperation, participation, and belongingness will be enhanced.
The role of teachers in BL is to orient and guide their pupils, dedicating some moments to listen to the pupils' needs and feelings, because "a volte è sufficiente un ascolto

silenzioso, un sorriso di fronte a una difficoltà, e dall'altra parte si apre la disponibilità ad apprendere, anche in condizioni faticose"[48] (Pearson, 2020).

2.6 Choice of materials and instruments

When planning a DL course, a significant step that determines the success of the course itself is the choice of digital materials. In this section, a variety of materials available to the teachers is summarised, in order provide the reader with some suggestions useful when planning a DL course. We want to emphasise that the choice of materials and instruments to use needs accurate planning and, sometimes, creativity, in order to engage the learners and keep their attention span for longer, as well as invite them to participate more and share opinions and thoughts. Finally, we want to underline that technology is in constant change, hence the resources described in forthcoming paragraphs should be considered as updated as for January 2021.

2.6.1 Materials and instruments useful in DL

Some instruments and materials useful in any course delivered online, can make use of varied tools, according to the nature of the online course (i.e. synchronous or asynchronous). Some useful materials can be:

a. *chat*: informal live messaging (synchronous) that can happen in groups and that allows exchange of multimedia and files. The most used applications for instant messaging are WhatsApp, Telegram and Messenger;

[48] *Cfr*.: "sometimes quiet listening or a smile in front of difficulties is enough to encourage, on the other side, the willingness to learn even in tedious conditions". Our translation.

b. *e-mail*: informal or formal messaging (asynchronous) that allows the exchange of multimedia and files. In this case, a more precise structure of the text is required, as well as a more scrupulous planning of the writing;
c. *social networks*: informal environment where people share posts and multimedia files, either publicly or in private messages or groups. The most famous and used by are:
   - *Facebook*: social network that allows to share posts and multimedia. On Facebook, any user can create private groups that, in a learning context might result helpful to share contents and connect with students;
   - *Twitter*: social network that allows to share posts (the so-called *tweets*) of a maximum of 280 characters, and multimedia. In the light of education, teachers might ask their students, for example, to try to summarise in a tweet the main concepts of a text;
   - *Instagram*: this social network allows its users to share photos and videos. Nowadays, more and more profiles on Instagram aim at informing or educating other users. In an educational context, teachers might ask their students to create captivating contents to post on a profile shared by the whole class or to simulate a newspaper page or a language course page;
   - *YouTube*: this social network is the most important and famous video streaming platform on the Internet. YouTube allows its users to upload and watch almost infinite hours of videos of any kind. On YouTube, official channels offer, for example, college and university lessons, TV programs and news (Beccaro, 2012), as well as webinar and courses. Furthermore, the platform allows to upload videos accessible only with the direct link to the video, allowing teachers to upload videos only for their students in a private channel;
   - *TikTok*: TikTok is a social media where users can upload short videos of maximum 1 minute. The concept behind TikTok is to create captivating contents that capture other users' attention. On TikTok, not only can users find entertaining videos, but also a high number of educational channels, that, for

example, explain *in pills* some history events or teach how to pronounce words. According to Mishra (2020) this social network provides "realistic experiences, motivational influence, ability to control and review, and engage students as creators" and, due to the short length of the videos, "it forces the user to focus on only one key idea and the multimedia principles are easily taken care of". Hence, the platform "looks like it was designed for learning". Mishra also states that

> "this kind of educational video will be sharp-focused to help memorisation and understanding of key learning on any topic. It could be a very creative way to keep learners engaged. It will provide video skills to the learners and help them develop communication skills that are critical in the workplace. Some ways to use 15-second videos are: as a talking head for passing on information or asking a question, demonstrating a step for skills development, showing practice on the field for behavioural change, two-person interaction to share perspectives, comparing situations to emphasise a key learning point, etc.".

d. *blogs*: blogs are a sort of digital diary, where users share personal experiences. For example, teachers might want their students to keep a travel blog (also known as *travelog*), a book blog, a cuisine blog, or an art or music blog;
e. *virtual classrooms*: virtual platforms (such as *Moodle*, *EdModo*, *Fidenia*, *EdPuzzle*) where students and teachers can share materials, images, videos and audios and where also tests and evaluation can take place. The teacher manages the classroom;
f. *videoconferences*: platforms that allow live streaming (such as *Google Meet*, *Zoom*, *Skype*, *Microsoft Teams*, *Jitsi*). In order to work and re-create the in-presence classroom environment, these applications require a working webcam and microphone;

g. *online e-book contents*: textbooks produced after 2009 are usually provided with an online expansion, i.e. an e-book, where the students can find additional multimedia material;
h. *online contents*: on the Internet, the available resources, websites and materials are almost infinite. Teachers and students might find useful some resources made available by public or private institutions (such as publishers) (Gonella, 2020).

As for foreign language education in upper secondary schools in particular, some materials described in different contributions in Caon and Serragiotto's work (2012) might be especially useful in the DL and BL environment, for example:

- multimedia files (such as videos and audios) that help memory and activate expectancy grammar and boost motivation and attention. In fact, multimedia

> "riflette l'apprendimento immersivo caratteristico delle nuove generazioni, le quali vivono in un ambiente sonoro, dove i media ricoprono un ruolo importante nella vita delle persone, e che quindi apprendono molto spesso anche inconsapevolmente attraverso la partecipazione e condivisione di contenuti audio/video"[49] (Ballarin, 2012: 145).

  For example, video clips from films or TV shows or from news or from songs and commercial can be particularly useful in FL learning due to the different registry of language and varieties used and available online;
- audio editing programs (such as *Audacity*) that, through the creation of exercises such as matching, cloze and comics (with audios) and subtitling of videos or songs, allow task-based language exercises to be revised and implemented thanks to technology (Torresan, Mazzotta, 2012);

[49] *Cfr.*: "reflects immersive learning, which is characteristic of new generations, who live in a sound environment, where media cover an important role in people's lives, and who hence very often learn unconsciously through participation and sharing audio/video contents". Our translation.

- in blended and in-presence FL learning, the so-called IWB – interactive whiteboard (in Italian: LIM – lavagna interattiva multimediale) allows easy and fast integration of traditional and digital practices, thanks to multimedia materials that result more motivating and that engage the students more. The IWB allows access to the Internet and to a multitude of resources that traditional whiteboards do not involve, such as the possibility to show a presentation, watch video clips or show pictures. The IWB trasforms traditional, often boring materials into activities that are "formative, collaborative, comunicative, interattive e ampiamente task-oriented"[50], where the student can benefit from "hands-on" (Oddone, 2012: 176) activities thanks to a high variety of tactile, visual and auditory inputs;
- e-tandem platforms are online platforms where "due persone di lingua madre diversa comunicano per imparare l'una dall'altra"[51] (Brammers 2003: 14 in Guglielmi, 2012: 200). E-tandem sessions can happen both synchronously (e.g. live chats and videocalls) and asynchronously (e.g. e-mails) and the kinds of tasks that teachers might want students to perform are extremely varied: from interviews to diaries, from songs to newspapers articles, from poems to letters, etc. (Guglielmi, 2012);
- video streaming platforms are also very useful for FL learning: from YouTube to TikTok, short videos might help students to understand pronunciation and culture, as well as to learn gestures and expressions. Moreover, Google Chrome extensions such as *Language Learning with Netflix*[52] allow students to watch films on Netflix with subtitles in 17 languages, comparing the original language of the film or TV series with the language chosen;
- apps like *Quizlet* (available also in the website version), that involve exercises of varied kind (such as flashcards, listening and writing exercises and tests) could

[50] *Cfr.*: "formative, collaborative, communicative, interactive and largely task-oriented". Our translation.
[51] *Cfr.*: "two individuals of different mother tongue communicate in order to learn from one another". Our translation.
[52] Available at: https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/language-learning-with-ne/hoombieeljmmljlkjmnheibnpciblicm?hl=it, last accessed March 29, 2021.

result helpful especially when students are required to learn lists of vocabulary or definitions.

To conclude this section, we want to remind that

> "oggi lo studente può leggere il giornale online, ascoltare la radio o vedere la TV, ha la possibilità di accedere in modo passivo alla cultura e alla lingua che studia, ma può anche interagire attraverso blog, commenti nelle pagine web, reti sociali tipo facebook ecc., come anche comunicare in modo istantaneo attraverso chat e video-chat con persone di lingue e culture studiate o altre (usando una LS come lingua franca)"[53] (Melero, 2012: 180).

Hence, the instruments used must be varied and offer meaningful opportunities of development to the student and, at the same time integrate three key factors: autonomy (of battery, of connection and of devices), multi-functionality and multi-disciplinarity (i.e., an instrument needs to be usable for different subjects and purposes).

2.6.2 Official Platforms

During the Covid-19 pandemic especially, the MIUR made available some platforms that teachers might use to deliver their online classes, such as:

a. *G-suite for Education*, which includes:
   - platforms to collaborate, "co-editing documents, spreadsheets and presentations, in real time" (i.e.: *Docs*, *Slides*, *Sheets*, *Drive*, *Jamboard*);

[53] *Cfr.*: "nowadays, students can read online newspapers, listen to the radio or watch television, access passively to the culture and language studied, but they can also interact through blogs, comments on webpages, social networks such as Facebook, etc., and at the same time communicate synchronously through chats and video chats with people of different languages and cultures studied or other (using a FL as *lingua franca*)". Our translation.

- platforms to communicate asynchronously (*Gmail*) and synchronously (*Chat* and *Meet*, that allows videoconferencing);
- platforms to manage the classroom (*Classroom*, *Assignments*, *Forms*);
- platforms to organise tasks (*Keep*, *Calendar*);
- platforms to administer and scale, where teachers can "manage students, devices, and security so data stays safe and you can scale as needed" (Google's Official website);

b. *Office 365 Education A1*, which includes:
   - *Microsoft TEAMS*, that allows to share materials, chat and where video lessons can be carried out;
   - *Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote*: where documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and digital notebooks can be shared and edited;
   - *Outlook*: e-mail platform with a 50 GB mailbox;
   - *Forms*: platform that allows testing;
   - OneDrive: 1024 GB cloud storage available for each student and teacher;
   - Other services included: *Exchange*, *SharePoint*; *Sway* (useful for storytelling), *Stream*, *Flow*, *Power Apps*, *School Data Sync*, *Yammer*;

c. *WeSchool* (powered by Tim), where teachers can easily transform in-presence classes into online classes, thanks to platforms that allow teachers to "portare in modo semplice la propria classe online, invitare gli studenti, creare lezioni, condividere materiali, discutere, gestire lavori di gruppo, verifiche e test"[54]. By creating a classroom group, teachers can make use of:
   - *Wall*: where messages and official notices are given to the class;
   - *Board*: the folder where teachers can upload materials and links to websites;

[54] *Cfr.*: "easily create a personal online classroom, invite the students, create lessons, share materials, discuss, manage group works and tests". Our translation.

- *Test*: 10 different kinds of tests can be uploaded (8 typologies correct automatically), in order to facilitate verification of learning and testing as well as to allow revision of contents;
- *class register*: allows teachers to monitor the students' activities on the platform;
- *virtual classroom*: where live virtual classroom takes place;
- *chat*: where one-on-one communication happens (MIUR website).

Other sections available in the MIUR website include:

- links to other platforms, multimedia resources and studies;
- Questions and Answers, with sections about Covid-19 and school norms and regulations;
- norms and regulations;
- links to other public resources (e.g.: Ministry of Health);
- news.

2.7 Covid-19 and Distance Learning: a timeline of the MIUR regulations

In this paragraph, the regulations given by the MIUR during the Covid-19 emergency will be summarised, in order to provide the reader with a timeline of the events and to highlight the main changes in the Italian educational system:

March 8, 2020: prime ministerial decree
that states the suspension of in-presence learning for the whole Lombardy region and for the provinces of Modena, Parma, Piacenza, Reggio nell'Emilia, Rimini, Pesaro

and Urbino, Alessandria, Asti, Novara, Verbano-Cusio-Ossola, Vercelli, Padua, Treviso, Venice[55].

March 9, 2020: the suspension of in-presence learning is extended to the whole country[56].

March 17, 2020: departmental note, n. 388, that provides the schools with an educational operative framework:

> "attivare per tutta la durata della sospensione delle attività didattiche nelle scuole, modalità di didattica a distanza avuto anche riguardo alle specifiche esigenze degli studenti con disabilità"[57],

even though the adoption of DL is not considered compulsory yet:

> "non si tratta, voglio sottolinearlo, di un adempimento formale, perché nulla di meramente formale può essere richiesto in un frangente come questo. Occorre ritornare, al di fuori della logica dell'adempimento e della quantificazione, alle coordinate essenziali dell'azione del sistema scolastico"[58][59] (MIUR, 2020:1).

March 25, 2020: decree that states the possibility to carry out educational activities "remotely"[60].

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[55] See: Prime Ministerial Decree March 8, 2020, n. 59, Art. 1, paragraph 1, letter h. Available at: https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/08/20A01522/sg, last accessed March 29, 2021.

[56] See: Prime Ministerial Decree March 9, 2020, n. 6 Art. 1, paragraph 1. Available at: https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/09/20A01558/sg, last accessed March 29, 2021.

[57] *Cfr.*: "activate, for the whole duration of the suspension of the educational activities at school, modalities of distance learning, also considering specific needs of the students with disabilities". Our translation.

[58] *Cfr.*: "it is not, I want to underline it, of a formal obligation, because nothing merely formal can be asked in such a difficult situation". Our translation.

[59] See: Ministry of Education, Note Prot. 388, March 17, 2020. Available at: https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/0/Nota+prot.+388+del+17+marzo+2020.pdf/d6acc6a2-1505-9439-a9b4-735942369994?version=1.0, last accessed March 29, 2021.

[60] See: Decree March 25, 2020, n. 19, Art. 1, paragraph 2, letter p. Available at: https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/25/20G00035/sg, last accessed March 29, 2021.

April 8, 2020: decree n. 22[61], converted with some modifications to Law on June 6, 2020, n. 41[62], that states that the teaching personnel guarantees education through online instruments and platforms. The decree states that headmasters must activate DL and decide on the times, technological instruments, and mechanisms to help both families in difficult situations or who lack access to a stable internet connection.

May 19, 2020: decree that states further aids with the aim of developing education and distance education, as well as provide the students with the instruments necessary for distance learning and that can favour scholastic inclusion[63].

June 26, 2020: Decree of the Minister of Education that provides a framework to adopt for the resumption of educational activities during the month of September, with reference to the necessity of draw up a Framework for blended learning[64] (MIUR, 2020a: 1).

August 7, 2020: ministerial order that states the *Guidelines for blended learning*[65].

September 3, 2020: further indications on how to protect privacy and sensitive data in the case of blended learning[66].

October 24, 2020: prime ministerial decree that states the adoption of distance learning for at least the 75% of the educational activities of upper secondary schools[67].

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[61] See: Decree April 8, 2020, n. 22. Available at: https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/04/08/20G00042/sg, last accessed March 29, 2021.

[62] See: Law June 6, 2020, n. 41. Available at: https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/06/06/20G00059/sg, last accessed March 29, 2021.

[63] See: Decree May 19, 2020, n. 34. Available at: https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/05/19/20G00052/sg, last accessed March 29, 2021.

[64] See: Ministerial Order June 26, 2020, n. 39. Available at: https://www.istruzioneer.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/DM-ADOZIONE-PAINO-SCUOLA-2020-2021.pdf.pdf, last accessed March 29, 2021.

[65] See: Ministerial Order August 7, 2020, n. 89. Available at: https://www.istruzioneer.gov.it/2020/08/07/linee-guida-sulla-didattica-digitale-integrata/, last accessed March 29, 2021.

[66] See: Ministry of Education, Note Prot. n. 11600, September 3, 2020. Available at: https://www.edscuola.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/AOOGABMI.REGISTRO-UFFICIALE.2020.0011600-1.pdf, last accessed March 29, 2021.

[67] See: Prime Ministerial Decree October 24, 2020, Art. 1, paragraph 9, letter s. Available at: https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/10/25/20A05861/sg, last accessed March 29, 2021.
Ministry of Education, Note Prot. n. 1934 October 26, 2020. Available at: https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/0/m_pi.AOODPIT.REGISTRO+UFFICIALE%28U%29.0001934.26-10-2020.pdf/42f95694-4731-4f81-fd7f-ffa028cb5210?version=1.0&t=1603829435618, last accessed March 29, 2021.

November 3, 2020: prime ministerial decree that states the adoption of distance learning for the 100% of the educational activities, with the exception of laboratories and practice and of students with disabilities and SEN[68].

[68] See: Prime Ministerial Decree November 3, 2020, art. 1, paragraph 9, letter s. Available at: https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/11/04/20A06109/sg, last accessed March 29, 2021.
Ministry of Education, Note Prot. n. 1190, November 5, 2020. Available at: http://3.flcgil.stgy.it/files/pdf/20201105/nota-1990-del-5-novembre-2020-dpcm-3-novembre-2020.pdf, last accessed March, 2021.

Chapter 3
Evaluation and assessment of foreign language acquisition in DL contexts

This chapter deals with the issue of evaluation and assessment in DL contexts: the focus of this research, that ends with the analysis of the results obtained from a questionnaire issued to upper secondary school students (see Chapter 4 and 5). The first part of the chapter aims at giving indications about the different kinds of assessment, evaluation, and test, in order to be able to compare in-presence evaluation and assessment with DL evaluation and assessment. Hence, the second part of the chapter contains indications on the different kinds of tests and how on to carry out evaluation and assessment in DL contexts, together with some useful tools and platforms that a teacher might use. Finally, the MIUR regulations on evaluation and assessment will be summarised at the end of the chapter.

3.1 Evaluation and assessment

Evaluation and assessment are a crucial part of the learning process of every student. For teachers evaluating and assessing in the DL context (Cfr. 3.4) has proven to be additionally demanding, adding to the educational scene more difficulties and aspects to be considered. To reach the highest accuracy and objectivity, teachers should consider the existence of different kinds of tests, that could be carried out with different online and offline tools and instruments and that can be assessed with grids and other tools that allow teachers to be more accurate and impartial.

The process of assessing and evaluating should be carried out with transparency, embracing a global prospective, considering the learner's entire process throughout the school year. Moreover, about testing, Serragiotto (2016: 11) states that it is important to "assegnare alla verifica obiettivi e mete pedagogiche in grado di essere verificate

mediante metodologie e strumenti adeguati"[69]. Hence, teachers should accurately plan not only the contents to present in class, but also how evaluation and assessment will be carried out. In FL environments, evaluation should consider a multitude of aspects, which should all be tested: language learning, progresses on language performance and progresses on specific activities. Anyway, it is important to evaluate and assess according to competencies, which allow students to perform in situation-based tasks, re-elaborating the knowledge according to situations and contexts.

The main differentiation between the terms *assessment* and *evaluation* can be identified in the orientation: evaluation is *product-oriented*, whereas assessment is *process-oriented*. To assess, according to Cinganotto (2020) means to measure "knowledge, skills and attitudes by collecting and documenting empirical data", in formal or informal ways. As both are part of every educational process, evaluation and assessment should be carried out one in the light of the other and focus on the entire educational process of the student. Furthermore, assessment and evaluation, especially in DL contexts, should be considered as an indivisible part of the educational process and reflect the so-called *21st century abilities*[70]. In fact, assessment should be oriented to language education (it should consider the student's needs and should aim at self-promotion) and should be continuous, since it allows students to monitor their learning processes, realising what their strengths and weaknesses are, and, on the other hand, allows teachers to consider the efficiency of the teaching methods adopted and modify them accordingly to the results (Serragiotto, 2016: 13).

[69] *Cfr.*: "assign to the test objectives and pedagogical goals that could be verified according to appropriate methodologies and instruments". Our translation.

[70] The twelve 21st century abilities involve: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, social skills. Each skill is essential in the Internet era and helps the students keeping the pace with a fast-changing world.

3.1.1 The student and the teacher

Serragiotto describes the student as the main focus of assessment and evaluation. In fact, when planning assessment and evaluation, the student's motivations, expectations, and personal objectives should be considered, according to the *humanistic approach*. Learners should always know what they are expected to learn, how the knowledge has to be performed and how it will be assessed, in order to establish a relaxed classroom environment based reciprocal trust. Moreover, students should be aware of the objectives and aims of each test, in order to motivate and develop competencies, especially in the FL environment. It is important for students to avoid the raise of Krashen's affective filter, which might prevent them from performing at their best. One of the possible solutions to the affective filter issue is to accustom learners to *cyclical* assessment, that should include tasks and exercises that the students are *familiar* with. By carrying out frequent tests that involve exercises that the pupils know how to perform, assessment and evaluation function as a monitor that allows to plan remedial work (if necessary) or to modify the teacher's actions. Moreover, teachers should take into careful consideration the educational context when planning an assessment test, to motivate and develop competencies, in particular:

a) *focus on the learner*: teachers should consider all the characteristics of the student (cfr. 1.1; 1.2; 2.3.1; 2.3.3), that translate into the teachers' ability of selecting the right instruments, tools, and platforms to assess the students and analyse data. By sharing how and what will be assessed and evaluated and the objectives of the test with the students, teachers foster collaboration and empathy and students become responsible for their results. Both students and teacher become aware of the progress made and teachers can verify how the chosen instruments and tools work;
b) *monitor progress, modify and adapt methodologies*: according to the students' needs and cognitive styles, teachers should adapt their teaching methods, plan

remedial work and specific tests that are coherent with the student's educational process;

c) *planning and administering the test*: the planning of the test should be meticulous. In fact, it is important to determine objectives, time available for the test and the administration time and place, as well as the exercises and the assessment and evaluation methods, that should be considered according to specific grids, shared and discussed with the students. The correction of the test should be clear and feedback should be given to the students, who should be encouraged to share difficulties.

In the FL environment especially, students must perceive assessment as useful for generating and reinforcing competencies, showing how the language studied can be used in a social context. In addition, students have to be familiar with the tasks and activities of the test, as well as with the instruments that the test involves (i.e. the test techniques have to match the techniques used during the previous lessons). The familiarity with instruments and assessment parameters allow to reduce the students' stress while performing the activities. According to Serragiotto (2016: 23), "la valutazione è sinonimo di mobilità, di movimento, di ricerca per un'opportunità di aver riconosciuto ciò che si è in grado di fare"[71], thus the teacher should be able to manage at the same time:

a) *people*: teachers should motivate their students and boost their learning;
b) *study organization modalities*: teachers should organise classroom educational methods according to *cooperative learning* principles, in order to foster collaboration;

[71] *Cfr.*: "assessment is synonym of mobility, movement, research for an opportunity to recognise what one is able to do". Our translation.

c) *instruments and materials*: teachers should plan and chose instruments and materials according to educational context and learning objectives.

As in every other educational context, the teacher is a guide, who has to *value* the students' progresses, abilities and competences, rather than *devalue* them (Serragiotto, 2016: 27). This means that students should be given precise and *positive* indicators, that measure what they can do and to what extent they are able to do it. Taken this under consideration, since "i docenti sanno che la valutazione costituisce uno strumento fondamentale nel rapporto con lo student"[72], teachers should share and negotiate educational objectives, to allow students to efficiently self-evaluate and monitor their progresses. As for the FL testing environment, reflection upon language and inductive method that aims at understanding globality should be encouraged. Ideal teachers are well-prepared, keep themselves up-to-date and are ready to select and adopt different tools, instruments, techniques, and tasks. In other words, each teacher needs to own the *assessment competence* that allows to assess and evaluate students, as well as to choose instruments and tools, to design tests, plan remedial work and the steps that the students need to complete for their educational process.

Finally, we want to emphasise some benefits that an objective and transparent assessment process, shared and negotiated with the students has. To begin with, students will result in being more motivated towards the FL, focussing more on the development of communicative competence rather than on the mere final evaluation. Moreover, assessment will be perceived as a way of monitoring personal abilities and competencies, allowing both students and teachers to modify methods of learning and teaching. Serragiotto adds that a planned, clear, transparent and familiar test, coherent with the students' needs and educational processes might result in being perceived as beneficial to and accepted by the students, resulting in less anxiety, more confidence

[72] *Cfr*.: "teachers are aware that assessment constitutes a fundamental tool in the relationship with the student". Our translation.

(i.e. the affective filter is not raised) and more autonomy. Hence, it is important to teach students how evaluation and assessment are naturally part of every educational process and how testing occurs periodically, based on methods and instruments and tasks used in class.

3.2 Different kinds of assessment and evaluation

This section aims at explaining the different kinds of assessment and evaluation. The focus will be on formative, summative, continuous, and authentic assessment and on self-evaluation and feedback.

3.2.1 Formative assessment, summative assessment and continuous assessment

Formative assessment, also called *assessment for learning*, is related to the continuous analysis of data concerning the educational process of the student. It is the kind of assessment that values what students know and can do, dynamically guiding them towards the learning outcomes. Formative assessment is useful both to students and teachers. The diagnostic nature allows students to be aware of their progresses, knowledge and the competencies developed. Teachers are also able to recognise and modify the teaching actions, according to the results of the test. In these terms, formative assessment functions as a feedback concerning learning goals and outcomes, contents, methods, materials and to the whole teaching-learning context in general. Formative assessment, which is usually given after short, dynamic tests, engages the students, who become aware of their educational process (Serragiotto, 2016: 36). Also, according to Cinganotto (2020) assessment for learning engages the students' emotions and boosts motivation, generating feelings of responsibility towards the task. Formative assessment should hence be frequent and planned and provide informal and

continuous feedback. The feedback is, to use Cinganotto's words, "reactive and reciprocal", thanks to the fact that this kind of assessment evaluates the student's reactions (both in terms of emotions and in terms of educational processes) and the teacher's actions, allowing corrections for future courses and modules. To carry out formative assessment, teachers can opt for inter-subjective instruments (used both by teachers and by students for self-assessment), such as rubrics and checklists, that highlight competencies. As for the students' processes, it would be better if, instead of a single mark or a score, formative assessment generated a description of the different profiles of the students, that describes the single competencies and characteristics of learning outcomes.

Summative assessment, or *assessment of learning*, is the assessment that takes place at the end of a course or module, or more specifically, at the end of a teaching unit. The kind of assessment given is final and classifying and gives a score or a mark, that needs to be compared to the norm. Summative assessment concerns results and final products and is not useful as feedback, since summative tests are usually carried out to evaluate learning. Hence, it checks progression at the *end* of the module or course (Cinganotto, 2020) and, for this reason, summative tests are usually longer and more structured than formative tests.

Anyway, summative and formative assessment should be *complementary*, in order to ensure *continuous assessment*, that considers the subject's cognitive aspects and the person as a whole,

> "attraverso la raccolta periodica e sistematica di informazioni relative ai progressi non solo nell'ambito cognitivo, ma anche in quello affettivo relazionale o psicomotorio. Prestando attenzione non solo sviluppo del pensiero ma anche a quello dei comportamenti o atteggiamenti, dei tratti della personalità, della motivazione e degli interessi degli studenti e alle loro capacità pratiche e produttive"[73] (Maknouz, 2021).

[73] *Cfr*.: "by means of a periodic and systematic collection of information about progresses concerning not only the cognitive sphere, but also the emotional, relational and psychomotor sphere. Paying attention not only on the

According to the UNESCO (2020: 9),

> "in its summative guise, continuous assessment can be central to determinations about a child's school progress. As a formative tool, it informs feedback, remediation, and/or enrichment targeted to a student, a group of students, or a whole class. It may also help to identify the need for specific professional development objectives for a teacher or group of teachers and inspire related steps".

Thus, continuous assessment involves frequent, short tests that aim at monitoring the students' progresses, as well as to accustom the students to being tested and assessed. Continuous assessments diminish the feeling of anxiety during final tests and allow focussing on learning instead of focussing on the test and, at the same time, it involves also longer, final summative tests at the end of the course or module. Moreover, Maknouz believes that continuous assessment might help personal development and promotion, thanks to the focus on the students and on their personality. Continuous assessment, therefore, allows students to perform better during final summative tests and to perceive testing as normal, as a part of their personal development.

3.2.2 Authentic assessment

Authentic assessment involves

> "engaging and worthy problems or questions of importance, in which students must use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively. The tasks are either replicas of or analogous to the kinds of problems faced by adult citizens and consumers or professionals in the field" (Wiggins, 1993: 229).

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development of the thought, but also to the development of behaviour and attitudes, personality traits, motivation and students' interests and their practical and productive abilities". Our translation.

Thus, authentic assessment focusses on the student, who is asked to perform real-world tasks, applying knowledge to reality, building a *bridge* that connects learning processes with the real world. By simulating or recreating real-like situations, students have to re-elaborate and re-organise their knowledge, using competences and abilities to solve elaborate tasks. Authentic assessment has the advantage of helping students realise how assessment and language studied could be applied to the real world, resulting in more motivation. Moreover, this kind of assessment co-occurs to lifelong learning, offering chances of continuous assessment, thanks to the links between old knowledge and new knowledge. Hence, authentic tasks are complex real-world tasks that ask students to perform and show their abilities, knowledge, and competencies, unlike a simple, structured *test*.

3.2.3 Self-assessment

Self-assessment involves the awareness and the self-analysis of personal progresses and the consequent development of learning strategies, that allow deeper, meaningful knowledge and cognitive processes. Self-assessment procedures should be carried out by both students and teachers, so as to aim at ameliorating the quality of the whole educational process.

For teachers, self-assessment could help improving the quality of teaching and, at the same time, redefining learning objectives according to the needs of the students. This also involves possible changes in methodology, so as to focalize on the students, in order to choose more valid and efficient methodologies. Self-assessment for teachers empowers the teachers' role as a guide and mentor since it allows to pinpoint students' interests and difficulties.

For students, self-assessment is an opportunity to develop metacognitive processes and raise awareness on the foreign language learning process, which becomes concrete and

authentic, through critical and autonomous reflection on what the student has learnt until a precise moment and how the processes have been conducted. Self-assessment engages the students in their learning processes, makes them perform an active role, raises self-efficacy and self-esteem, develops autonomy, reinforces the relationship between students and teacher and co-occurs through the promotion of a relaxed classroom environment; also, it helps focusing on learning outcomes. By self-assessing, motivation, attitudes, behaviours, and strategies can be identified and explained, raising awareness on the progresses and on the undertaken changes.

Self-assessment can be carried out with journals, rubrics, portfolios and autobiographies (Cfr. 3.5.2), where students (and teachers) can reflect upon the strategies implemented and where progresses can be analysed. Moreover, with these kinds of instruments (always previously explained and discussed in class), assessment, evaluation and learning objects are linked, considering also emotional and affective factors of the subject who is self-assessing. Self-analysis results in more efficacy for the teachers and their teaching methods and in more efficient and effective learning for learners (Serragiotto, 2016: 51-63). Learning becomes effective especially due to the boosting of critical thinking and (self-)observation, interest towards the studied matters and the correct understanding of the carried out activities and tasks (Con la Scuola website, 2020).

In the light of self-assessment, pupils can also be encouraged to carry out *peer assessment*, which encourages them to share personal experiences, ideas, and thoughts, allowing pupils to learn from one another.

3.2.4 Feedback

Feedback is fundamental in every learning process, especially when assessment for learning (formative assessment) is involved. According to Hattie (1999, cited in Cinganotto, 2020)

> "the most powerful single moderator that enhances achievement is feedback. This does not mean using many tests and providing over-prescriptive directions. It means providing information about how and why the student understand and misunderstands and what direction the student must take to improve".

By receiving a feedback, students can understand what is being studied, how learning can be improved and how to improve "confidence, self-awareness and enthusiasm for learning" (University of Reading website). According to Race (2001) feedback should be:

a. *timely*: the feedback should be given as soon as possible, ideally "within a day or two";
b. *intimate and individual*: the feedback should consider all the student's characteristics discussed in the previous chapters, understanding that each student is different, hence requiring a personalised and individualised kind of feedback;
c. *empowering*: the feedback should aim at reinforcing and strengthening learning. The subject giving the feedback should consider the *power* of feedback, especially when negative feedback is involved;
d. *feedback should open doors, not close them*: to explain this concept, Race's words seem to be particularly significative: "words with such *final language* implications as *weak* or *poor* cause irretrievable breakdowns in the communication between assessor and student", as well as "positive words such as *excellent* can cause problems when feedback on the next piece of work is only *very good*". Race says that the use of adjectives should be limited and substituted by explanations of what was *weak*, *poor*, or *excellent*, in order to help the students understanding their strengths and weaknesses;
e. *manageable*: feedback should be manageable by both students and teachers, in terms of time and quantity. In fact, too much feedback could result in dispersion of

energies from the point of view of the teacher and of information from the point of view of the students.

Hence, feedback co-occurs to the development of competence, especially when the feedback considers the student as the central subject. Feedback justifies evaluation and assessment, guides students and teachers on defining strengths and weaknesses and motivates students, allowing to monitor the learning process.
Another important kind of feedback is the one that students give to the teacher after the test has been carried out. By asking pupils to express their opinions concerning the test, students get more engaged and motivated, taking a *proactive* role in the educational process. In fact, teachers can adjust assessment and tests according to the students' feelings and thoughts (Serragiotto, 2016: 63-65).

3.3 The tests

The test is the "momento della *raccolta dei dati* relativi al raggiungimento o meno di un preciso obiettivo didattico"[74] (Serragiotto, 2016: 35). Tests should not only verify knowledge, but also competencies and abilities. The final grading and evaluation method should be known, understood and accepted by the students. Even though the action of evaluating is subjective (i.e. it varies according to each student and his or her personal characteristics and needs), the test should be processed in an objective way. To put it differently, the teacher should, with the help of evaluation grids and specific sets of parameters, interpret the abovementioned objective *collected data* given by the test and subjectify those data according to each student.
Also, tests can be administered according to continuous and authentic assessment (see 3.2.1; 3.2.2) or according to the moment of the school year, namely:

[74] *Cfr.*: "moment of the *data collection* concerning the achievement or not of a precise learning outcome". Our translation.

- *placement test*: this kind of test is useful at the beginning of the school year, in order to identify the starting level of the class and of the single students, functioning as a tool of *diagnosis*, allowing the teacher to plan remedial work and activities in general;
- *in itinere test*: *formative* tests carried out during the course or module that aim at identifying and, eventually, modifying the strategies to teach and learn, as well as planning remedial work;
- *final test*: *summative* test carried out at the end of the course or module. This kind of test gives a final evaluation, useful only for the following course.

Anyhow, Serragiotto (2016: 43) emphasises how important it is that tests ensure the "accertamento puntuale e sicuro delle conoscenze, abilità, competenze presenti nel soggetto valutato"[75], confronting the "comportamenti osservati negli studenti con le mete educative e gli obiettivi didattici"[76], through different kinds of tests, that will be discussed in the following sections.

3.3.1 Different kinds of tests

Tests can be divided into different typologies, according to the following aspects:

a. the moment of the administration of the test: *placement* tests (that verify pre-requisites), *in itinere* tests (that compare the carried-out program with what the students acquired), *final* tests (that verify the whole program, course or module objectives) (cfr. 3.3);

[75] *Cfr.*: "accurate and reliable verification of knowledge, abilities, competencies owned by the subject evaluated". Our translation.
[76] *Cfr.*: "behaviours observed in the students with the educational goals and the learning objectives". Our translation.

b. the test modality;
c. the correction and the score attribution modalities: *objective* tests (with objective, standard answers and scores), *subjective* tests (that need to be evaluated subjectively), *semi-structured* tests (that test abilities on specific tasks, such as summing up a text) (cfr. 3.3.2);
d. aims and functions: *achievement* tests (that verify the attainment of the goals of the course), *proficiency* tests (that verify linguistic competencies and the proficiency level owned), *general competency* tests (that verify socio-pragmatic competencies owned by the subject in relation to the context in which the language is used; this kind of tests is part of *communicative* and *pragmatic testing*), for what concerns the aims. On the other hand, for what concerns the functions of the test: *diagnostic* tests (that identify difficulties, problems and gaps in order to plan remedial work), *prognostic* tests (that predict the extent to which students are likely to succeed in a FL course), *ability* tests (that identify the student's abilities and competencies) (Porcelli, 2013: 62-65);
e. abilities and knowledge tested (Serragiotto, 2016: 43-44).

3.3.2 Objective and subjective tests

Objective and subjective tests differ for the kind of answers provided, namely if they give a single, fixed, correct answer, or if the possible answers are complex, qualitative and need to consider different possible solution and for the way of correction.
Objective tests allow the teacher to correct the test according to specific, fixed parameters. Since the possible answers are pre-determined, this kind of tests ensures maximum levels of objectivity and gives the same results to anyone who is in charge of correcting, thanks to the fact that objective tests do not need to be interpreted and are not influenced by the teacher's personal judgement. Objective tests include

"objective items which require students to select the correct response from several alternatives or to supply a word or short phrase to answer a question or complete a statement" (CITL website, 2009), such as true/false and yes/no questions, multiple choice, transformation, gap-filling, rearrangement, matching or error correction exercises, hence all exercises with perfectly pre-determined correct answer.
Objective tests, according to Serragiotto (2016: 46) need to satisfy the following aspects:

a. *validity*: the tests need to verify only what has been exercised and covered in class;
b. *adequateness*: the tests need to verify exactly what the teacher wants to investigate and the chosen items test the right abilities;
c. *reliability*: the tests are not ambiguous and the correctors are precise and fixed;
d. *functionality*: tasks are clear, easy and comprehensible;
e. *corrigibility*: objective tests are faster to correct and need to recur to the least number of instruments and tools, satisfying also the requirement of *practicality*;
f. *relevance*: the tests verifies the learners' communicative needs and gives information about adjustments that need to be considered;
g. *acceptability*: the test needs to be perceived as valid by the receivers, in terms of contents and format;
h. *comparability*: the test results have to be comparable, even the tests were performed in different moments and by different learners.

Anyway, it seems to be important that the test is administered in adequate environmental conditions and moment, since these factors could negatively influence the performance (e.g.: a test administered at the end of a day or in a noisy classroom can distract the pupils or not allow them to perform at their best). It is also important to consider the graphic design and the ways the tasks are given to the students to facilitate comprehensibility and to make the test more enjoyable.

On the other hand, subjective tests refer to "subjective or essay items which permit the student to organize and present an original answer" (CITL website, 2009), such as short-answer essay, extended-response essay, definitions, scenario questions, opinion questions, problem solving and performance test items. Subjective tasks test oral or written abilities, such as the ability to interact and to conversate. When evaluating, the teacher needs to be aware of personal and emotional factors that might influence the objectivity of the assessment and correction, highlighted by Corsini (2020: 21) as:

a. *halo effect*: evaluation is influenced by irrelevant elements;
b. *Pygmalion effect*: or "self-fulfilling prophecy", when evaluation is influenced by the teacher's expectations;
c. *succession/contrast effect*: over- or under-estimate the performance due to personal standards of perfection or due to the comparison to other performances;
d. *stereotypy effect*: or "assessment fixity", when evaluation is influenced by previous judgements;
e. *contagion effect*: evaluation is influenced by the judgement of others;
f. *rebound effect*: when the educational process is modified according to the test or the way of assessing;
g. *forced distribution effect*: when individual differences are forced into a pre-fixed scheme.

However, teachers should try to avoid subjectivity when evaluating, also thanks to the consideration of:

- contents, goals and aims of the assessment, that need to be shared and discussed in the educational context;
- the receivers (i.e. who the students are);
- accurate selection of the texts proposed during the test;
- length of the text (e.g.: the number of words to write needs to be specified);

- scores assigned through multiple or collective assessment;
- assessment discussed with other evaluators and correctors: when possible, adopt the correction method of *triangulation*;
- defined assessment grids;
- analysis of the obtained data (Serragiotto, 2016: 48).

The abovementioned aspects that teachers should consider when assessing, should help fair and correct evaluation, that aims at reducing the possibility of committing errors while correcting and at improving the objectivity of evaluation and correction.

3.4 Evaluation and Assessment in DL contexts

As already discussed in the previous chapter, the Covid-19 pandemic forced schools across Italy to transform and adapt education according to the new needs of distance learning. Not only did the tools and modalities change, but the methods and techniques had to be reconsidered in the light of IT complexities. In these terms, assessment and evaluation needed an in-depth analysis of objectives and aims, modalities and techniques, tools, and instruments, and, at the same time decide what needed to be evaluated and assessed, according to new variables introduced by DL and IT. In this section, evaluation and assessment in DL contexts will be discussed, together with the instruments, tools, and techniques useful for evaluation and assessment in DL and BL contexts.

3.4.1 What to evaluate in DL contexts

In a DL context, as emphasised in the Nota Prot. 388 (March 17, 2020: 7), it is important to inform the students about their progresses, because

> "se l'alunno non è subito informato che ha sbagliato, cosa ha sbagliato e perché ha sbagliato, la valutazione si trasforma in un rito sanzionatorio, che nulla ha a che fare con la didattica, qualsiasi sia la forma nella quale è esercitata. Ma la valutazione ha sempre anche un ruolo di valorizzazione, di indicazione di procedere con approfondimenti, con recuperi, consolidamenti, ricerche, in un'ottica di personalizzazione che responsabilizza gli allievi (…)"[77].

Hence, considering all the challenges that both students and teachers experience in the DL context, the testing moment needs to happen frequently, to be short (i.e., with fast, accurately structured tasks) and formative. It also needs to value (rather than de-value, as previously seen) and to be considered as a moment of personal growth for the students. Tests should focus on competencies more than only knowledge and should result in motivation, due to the increase in the students' self-awareness and enjoyment of the activities. According to the Nota Prot. 388, tests have to be "costanti", and respecting the principles of "tempestività e trasparenza" and "buon senso didattico"[78]. Students have a central and active role, that needs to raise awareness towards the processes and strategies adopted and towards self-evaluation of efficacy, allowing them to make the necessary changes. Thus, the learners should be asked to formulate thoughts and opinions based on basic knowledge, that need to be argued with personal reasoning and opinions. This also means that teachers need to see their pupils as individuals that can change and implement their methods actively, rather than subjects that passively receive a grade. As the Con la Scuola website (2020) puts it, "la valutazione dovrà affermarsi da un lato, come dovere del docente, e, dall'altro, come

[77] *Cfr.*: "if the learner is not immediately informed about the fact that he or she did something wrong, about what he or she did wrong and why it was wrong, assessment turns into a punishing ritual, that has nothing to do with education, whatever the exerted form is. But assessment has always a role of enhancement, of indication to proceed with analysis, remedial work, reinforcement, researches, in a perspective of personalisation that invests students with a responsibility (…)". Our translation.

[78] *Cfr.*: "constant"; "promptness and transparency"; "educational common sense". Our translation.

diritto dello studente"[79]. Formative assessment is hence important for the student and the teacher must consider "le forme, le metodologie e gli strumenti per procedere alla valutazione in itinere degli apprendimenti, propedeutica alla valutazione finale"[80] as these "rientrano nella competenza di ciascun insegnante e hanno a riferimento i criteri approvati dal Collegio dei Docenti"[81] (Nota Prot. 388: 7-8). Teachers need, therefore, to own the assessment competence mentioned in 3.1.1.

In DL, it is important to consider the context in which both the testing session and, more generally, the educational context take place: remotely. DL contexts might cause "frammentarietà e disomogeneità"[82] (Con la Scuola, 2020) (cfr. 2.2.4), therefore it is important to consider other aspects together with the final learning outcomes, such as:

- *participation*: punctuality, constancy, collaborative attitude, feedback;
- *interaction*: the ability to interact with peers and with the teacher;
- *processes*: the processes adopted to carry out the assignments, especially concerning autonomy.

The personal context of learning should also be taken into consideration by the teachers when assessing: each student is part of a different *habitat*, that might differ greatly from the other pupils. Teachers should consequently always try to engage students' attention by asking "brevi e frequenti domande"[83] (Con la Scuola, 2020), by changing the ways of carrying out the tests and by starting each lesson correcting homework (Con la Scuola, 2020), to assure that the previous topics have been acquired.

[79] *Cfr.*: "assessment needs to be established, on the one hand, as a duty for the teacher, and, on the other hand, as a right for the student". Our translation.
[80] *Cfr.*: "the forms, the methodologies and the instruments to proceed to in itinere assessment for learning, propaedeutical to final assessment". Our translation.
[81] *Cfr.*: "are part of the competency of every teacher and have as a reverence the criteria approved by the Teaching Body". Our translation.
[82] *Cfr.*: "fragmentation and inhomogeneity". Our translation.
[83] *Cfr.*: "quick and frequent questions". Our translation.

Especially in DL contexts, continuous assessment is vital for the educational processes. More specifically, as Maknouz (in Zanichelli, 2020a: 5-8) highlighted, formative and summative assessment co-occur to the determination of continuous assessment, by tracking progresses concerning:

a. *knowledge*: the *traditional* way of conceiving evaluation, namely the verification and grading of what the student knows, that usually happens in *one shot*. It is summative evaluation;
b. *processes and attitudes*: usually assessed together with the knowledge, this way of assessing is frequent and carried out with short tests that give information about the educational path of the student. It is formative assessment. In DL contexts especially, attitudes are a significant part of assessment (e.g.: Is the student active? Does the student ask questions, respect deadlines, …?);
c. *competencies*: the ability to perform in the real world according to knowledge and attitudes.

Fundarò (2020) believes that teachers should work together in order to adopt a common line for evaluation and assessment that:

- is careful of overlapping: the testing calendar is discussed in the teacher class committee;
- allows the drawing up of a profile that indicates the student's strengths and weaknesses, and that highlights the competency threshold possessed (i.e.: basic, intermediate, advanced) and that encourages metacognition;
- has an encouraging perspective for everyone (teachers and students, in the light of *being in the same boat*);
- is considered as a feedback on learning, essential for self-awareness and self-assessment;

- is transparent, highlighting to students (and parents) what changes from in-presence modalities;
- is aware of the multitude of difficulties that students face every day, such as problems related to digital devices or the Internet connection, to the new channels involved in learning and to the new materials proposed in class;
- consider teachers as guides and tutors at the same time, and the students as responsible for their personal learning processes.

Continuous assessment is especially important because it serves as feedback and for the development of personal skills and for boosting motivation. Anyhow, when DL is concerned, teachers might want to consider competency-based education (and hence to adopt a competency-based way of assessing) or mastery learning, that allow to test and evaluate students in a more reliable, fair, and inclusive way, thanks to the grading of activities and tasks according to the degree of complexity and depth of thought and knowledge.

3.4.1.1 Competency-based assessment and mastery learning

Competency-based assessment involves real-world tasks that ask the learner to produce and personalise an assignment autonomously. Competency-based learning involves, according to Maknouz (in Zanichelli, 2020b), the creation of a personal product of the student, through three possible kinds of activity:

1) activities of *synthesis* and *production*, such as presentations, tests, graphs;
2) activities of *research* and *selection* of content, such as research from texts or online;
3) activities of development of a *model*, through the production of models that can be applied in different situations and that allow making previsions.

Maknouz emphasises how the abovementioned activities, carried out in digital situations that are new for the students, contribute to the development of the *Digital Citizenship*, defined by the Council of Europe Portal as

> "the ability to engage positively, critically and competently in the digital environment, drawing on the skills of effective communication and creation, to practice forms of social participation that are respectful of human rights and dignity through the responsible use of technology".

Anyway, competency-based learning evaluates and assesses both the *products* and the *processes* implemented, with a focus on self-assessment, asking the student to reflect on the achievement (or non-achievement) of the learning objectives, in the light of *proactive assessment and evaluation* (Trinchero 2006, in Celentano, 2009: 68). According to the DM 139/2007, competencies are identified as "la comprovata capacità di usare conoscenze, abilità e capacità personali, sociali e/o metodologiche, in situazioni di lavoro o di studio e nello sviluppo professionale e/o personale; le competenze sono descritte in termine di responsabilità e autonomia"[84]. As Trinchero (2006) cited in Celentano (2009: 68) affirms, the problem with evaluation is to verify that the learners have learnt what they were supposed to, reaching the right learning outcomes and that learning "sia significativo e non mero apprendimento meccanico"[85]. Moreover, Trinchero (2010: 11) states that competencies should be evaluated and assessed according to:

> "a) alle risorse possedute, in termini di conoscenze, abilità e capacità personali, sociali e/o metodologiche;
> b) ai modelli con cui il soggetto interpreta determinate situazioni problematiche (strutture di interpretazione);

[84] *Cfr.*: "the proven ability to use knowledge, abilities and personal, social and/or methodological skills, in environments of work of study and for personal and/or professional development; competencies are described in terms of responsibility and autonomy". Our translation.
[85] *Cfr.*: "is meaningful and not mere mechanical learning". Our translation.

c) alle strategie con cui le affronta (strutture di azione);

d) ai modi con cui riflette sulle proprie interpretazioni e strategie (strutture di autoregolazione)"[86]

Hence, to assess competencies, teachers need to define the so-called *competency profiles*, that describe the students' levels of proficiency, from novice to expert, with intermediate profiles, according to the skills and competencies developed. Skills and knowledge need to be evaluated in the light of ability and know how to act on specific situations. A useful method to assess competencies in DL is to ask the student to *do*, to *re-elaborate* and to express *opinions* and *thoughts*.

In DL contexts, *mastery learning* constitutes another way of teaching and assessing, connected with Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* (DOK) model[87] and competency-based learning. Mastery learning (and mastery assessment consequently) is based on the mastery threshold that each student needs to reach in order to consider a certain topic as *mastered*, that usually corresponds to the 80% of right answers. This way of assessing results in being particularly effective in DL, in inclusive contexts and in the MAC, because mastery assessment and learning are self-paced (i.e.: they respect the pace of learning of each student), adjusted to each student's personal progress and ensure the real mastery of the competencies and topics before proceeding with the next topic. The teacher's role as *guide* to help solving problems, results in students being empowered by this method, as students get personal mentoring and have the chance to solve problems directly. Thanks to the fact that students also work autonomously at home, according to their own pace of learning (as opposed to traditional education,

[86] *Cfr.*: "a) the possessed resources, in terms of knowledge, abilities and personal, social and/or methodological skills; b) the models with which the subject interprets specific problematic situations (structures of interpretation); c) the strategies with which those situations are dealt with (strategies of action); d) the ways in which the subject reflects upon their own interpretations and strategies (structures of self-regulation)". Our translation.

[87] The DOK model refers to the degree of depth and complexity of knowledge of a subject, according to four possible levels: *Level 1*: recall and reproduce; *Level 2*: skills and concepts (to be able to compare, describe, explain, …); *Level 3*: strategic thinking (to be able to analyse and evaluate and to make reasoning explicit); *Level 4*: extended thinking (to be able to synthesise, reflect, evaluate, adapt, …).

where all the students learn and get tested to one common pace). In his studies, Bloom determined how mastery learning should be performed by the teachers:

1) determination of essential knowledge that each student needs to master;
2) arrangement of (digital) contents and tests that can be carried out multiple times and that are varied;
3) determination of the mastery threshold (usually around the 70/80% of correct answers of a test);
4) track the progresses made.

The advantage of mastery teaching is that time and contents are varied and adjusted to every student and every student's preferences, the materials are varied and multi-leveled and in the fact that the teacher is the guide that tracks the progresses made, as opposed to traditional learning, where materials are not differentiated (i.e.: materials are the same for the whole class) and where the teacher only explains and tests students. In mastery assessment, tests aim at verifying the achievement of the mastery threshold. If the threshold is not achieved, the students reiterate exercises that allow them to reach mastery, as not to *leave anyone behind* (as opposed to traditional assessment, where once the students have been tested, they have no chance of being tested again until the following topic gets tested).

3.4.2 IT benefits to assessment and evaluation

Serragiotto (2016) emphasises how learning can benefit from IT, especially when evaluation and assessment processes are involved. If adopted and used in the right manner, IT can result in motivation, in more comprehensibility of the input (especially in reference to the multitude of sensory channels that can be involved). Faster and easier access to online resources and texts and more activities (especially ludic

activities) that help self-assessment, remedial and extra work are part of the benefits implied. Moreover, technology enables the delivery of the correction right after the test, allowing students to immediately understand the nature of the mistakes and teachers to save time. This is especially true for objective tests, that do not need assessment grids or scales. When choosing the tools to be adopted in class, teachers must focus their attention especially on the kind of instrument that best suits the aims of the test, the educational process and path and the retrievability (e.g.: a test carried out with Moodle is easy for the students to retrieve). IT is adjusted to the student's needs, especially in the case of BL and DL, where students are asked to be more autonomous and since IT allows to adapt more easily to the personal pace of learning of each student. In BL contexts, the *continuum* real-virtual world allows to lower the affective filter, thanks to the use of IT in a social context (Serragiotto, 2016: 21).

Anyhow, a common "misconception is that comparing a face-to-face course with an online version of the course constitutes a useful evaluation" (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, Bond, 2020). Thus, it is important to remember that, as DL lessons cannot be just in-presence lessons with IT tools, also DL tests cannot be in-presence tests translated into IT tools. In this section, the instruments and the different kinds of tests that can be adopted in DL and BL contexts will be dealt with, to give the reader an outline of some useful tools and techniques for testing and assessing students' competencies and knowledge. Again, we emphasise the importance of formative assessment and feedback in the light of continuous assessment, that involves the highest number of real-world tasks possible. In fact, by asking the students questions that want them, for example, to think, express opinions and re-elaborate concept, teachers might overcome the problem of cheating during the test. The key is to establish a relaxed and trustful classroom environment, also considering that in DL contexts diversity is even greater than in a traditional, in-presence context (cfr. 2.3.3).

3.4.3 Oral and written tests in DL

Oral and written tests can be adapted to a DL context, adopting some changes that, on the one hand, allow teachers to be sure of the reliability of the test outcomes and, on the other, avoid the raise of Krashen's affective filter. We want to emphasise how it is important to ask the students questions that involve reasoning, re-elaborations, critical thought, opinions, imaginary, and all those actions that need personal processing and deep knowledge of a certain topic to be performed. We also want to highlight that, as in in-presence situations, students can cheat. Anyway, there are several ways to control the reliability of a product (e.g. there are many software tools that check plagiarism or others that control that students do not surf the internet during a test), but the most effective methods appear to involve the abovementioned creation of personal products through tasks of *competence*. Moreover, tests should take place in a relaxed environment, that considers the student's emotions and fears and the difficulties that DL carries, especially those related to digital devices and to the Internet connection. Finally, in order to help the students feel more comfortable with the tests and evaluation and assessment in general, we want to stress the importance of scheduling in advance the tests, trying not to overlap with other tests of other subjects, hence coordinating between teachers.

As for *written tests*, teachers may want to change the modalities adopted in in-presence learning, adapting to the new online situation. In these terms, for example, a structured test becomes a problem-solving activity, a report/assignment becomes a concept map and flipped classroom methods become part of the everyday DL life. Always taking into consideration active, competency-based learning, in written tests, students should be asked to *do something* according to *what* they *know*, since in DL memorisation and repetition of concepts appears to lose value. Together with the adoption of tasks that do not ask only mere knowledge but that foster active participation in the virtual class instead, we suggest teachers to:

- set a maximum time of 30/40 minutes for the test;
- randomise the order of the questions (unless the questions are interlinked);
- randomise the order of the answers;
- remove letters and numbers (i.e. the identificatory elements);
- adopt a variety of exercises that involve both open and close questions.

By considering the aforementioned techniques, students have less opportunities to cheat or check the answers online. However, concerning open questions, teachers might want to check plagiarism. There are several kinds of written tests that can be performed in DL contexts, such as:

- live tests (synchronous);
- assignments to hand in (asynchronous, with a certain deadline to meet);
- projects and presentations (either carried out individually or in small groups or pairs);
- writings and assignments performed live, to hand in within 2/3 hours.

The typology of written test can also vary according to the kind of task involved, for example: writing, analysis or synthesis based on other material.
For what concerns *oral tests*, on the other hand, it is undoubtable that the test modality undergoes less changes than the written one. In fact, both students and teachers are accustomed and familiar with the modalities of an oral test. Besides, provided that the users are equipped with a working microphone, oral tests are more reliable than written tests, thanks to the fact that they are carried out synchronously and with a direct interaction between student and teacher. Anyhow, latency and the speed of the internet connection always need to be considered and we suggest structuring oral tests to be shorter and more dialogical, as if carrying out a *conversation* on a specific topic. There are different kinds of oral tests that can be adopted in DL contexts, such as:

- *traditional* verification of knowledge (we suggest to combine this technique with the abovementioned DOK model, asking student to produce an answer through re-elaborations, imaginary, personal opinions, etc.);
- tasks given live, developed within a certain time and then verified by live, oral questions;
- reading, analysis and interpretation of a written text;
- debates (structured, on a topic given by the professor; they involve a written preparation and a debate divided into teams, see 3.5.1);
- description of concept maps (previously created by the student and handed in before the oral test);
- description of images, videos and other schemes.

In order to facilitate the oral test and the assessment of the performance, schemes and assessment grids might want to be adopted by the teachers. These tools also provide students with a written document that describe how the test was, according to specific, well-described competency parameters. Moreover, especially in difficult situations (i.e., those situations where latency or bad/unstable Internet connection are involved), teachers could want to structure the test step by step. This can also help teachers that want to test different competencies that need to be assessed and evaluated (thanks to specific indicators, descriptors, and evaluation methods).

Finally, group work can also be performed in DL contexts. Like in in-presence learning, teachers are invited to choose the members of the groups and to give specific roles to each student. There are several applications and online software tools that help in carrying out group works, even though it is desirable for the students to meet in presence to discuss details and to boost socialization (hence, in contexts of BL). Anyway, more aspects need to be added to the evaluation process of a group work, such as:

- ability to interact and to communicate efficiently with the rest of the group;

- collaboration and cooperation skills;
- creativity;
- digital competences;
- further research added to the work.

Students should be asked to carry out self- and group-assessment, that will be discussed in class together with the teacher's assessment to be fully understood (Con la Scuola, 2020).

3.5 Instruments and tools to assess and evaluate

In this section, some useful instruments, software, and tools that might result helpful for teachers in DL and BL contexts will be discussed. To begin with, instruments and tools for written and oral FL tests will be described, considering the changes highlighted in the previous section. Then, instruments and tools for self-assessment, final evaluation and feedback will be proposed, in order to give some examples of useful methods that can be adopted in DL context to encourage and facilitate the abovementioned ways of assessment, vital for students learning online.

3.5.1 Instruments and tools for testing

This first paragraph aims at giving some ideas of tools and instruments useful for testing oral and written abilities, group works, as well as to test digital competencies and creativity. We want to pinpoint that the IT world is fast-moving and in constant development, therefore what will be discussed within the next paragraphs could be considered obsolete within few months, especially during this period, where digitalisation is happening extremely rapidly.

Google Forms and Microsoft Forms

Google Forms (part of *G Suite for Education*) and Microsoft Forms (part of *Office 365 Education* A1) allow to easily create online tests that involve open and close questions (such as multiple choice, cloze, ranking, open questions), that test according to subjective but mostly objective exercises. Teachers can choose to give a score to the exercises and the answers can be easily grouped in a downloadable Excel file that displays all the answers of the class. Even though the software can show the final score to the students immediately after the quiz is completed, we suggest revising all the tests before giving the feedback with the results. As already mentioned in the previous section, we suggest removing all the signposts (i.e. numbers, letters, signs), randomise the order of questions and answers and divide the test into different sections, so as to hamper students from cheating. One of the advantages of Google and Microsoft Forms is that it is possible to insert images and videos, as well as external links to other websites and to the Drive (where it is possible to upload audios as well).

Kahoot, Quizlet, Quizizz and Socrative

Kahoot is an online platform that allows the creation of multiple choice and true/false exercises. In the question section, external links and images can be inserted. Questions usually have a time limit to be answered and students can see their progress right after the time available for the question ends. This platform is particularly interesting because it is perceived as a ludic and fun activity that challenges the students, since after every question the podium is displayed. Students can either play as individuals or in groups. Quizizz is similar to Kahoot, but it has an important advantage: it engages more the students during a *lesson*, thanks to the fact that the test can either be performed independently or together with some theory explanation, after watching a video or a picture, hence this platform retains the student's attention longer. Finally, Socrative is another platform that allows synchronous quizzes with true or false, multiple choice, short answer exercises. Quizlet works in a similar way, but it allows to work with

longer definitions and translation of words. Students can play in teams or individually (in this case, as a form of self-assessment).

Kahoot, Quizizz and Socrative appear to be particularly suitable for quick and informal testing during DL lessons, but in order to play (with Kahoot and Quizziz), students need to have two devices: one to see the question and one to answer the question. Moreover, Quizlet seems to be particularly suitable in in-presence contexts, thanks to the fact that teams are asked to conversate and collaborate to find the right answer. Anyway, these platforms allow teachers to assign tests and to create online classrooms where students can revise materials and self-test and where teachers can verify the progresses made by each student and to give homework, setting deadlines, very useful for asynchronous learning. Finally, all platforms, after the test, involve a summary of the answers given by the students. Other similar platforms are *Mentimeter* and *PollEverywhere*, that will be presented in 3.5.3, when feedback is discussed.

E-tandem

E-tandem (see 2.6) is particularly useful in FL learning and assessment thanks to the fact that students are asked to perform in real-like tasks, interacting with a native speaker either synchronously or asynchronously. E-tandem assessment could be carried out with the help of video calling platforms, such as *Skype*, *Zoom*, *Google Meet*, *Microsoft Teams,* and many others, that allow live interaction between two students and, at the same time, allow the teacher to be present during the meeting. E-tandem can also be performed in a written way, either synchronously or asynchronously. If carried out synchronously, e-tandem can happen via instant messaging apps such as *Messenger*, *Telegram* and *WhatsApp*. If the chat happens asynchronously, e-mails and forum can be used. The advantages of e-tandem include the interaction with native speakers, the increase of motivation (thanks to the kind of the task) and the ease of integration of different abilities and competencies. In order to perform in an e-tandem situation, students have to integrate different abilities and competencies, that involve deep levels of the DOK model: strategic thinking and extended thinking.

Creation and editing of audio and video clips

Students' production skills can be evaluated with the help of some software tools that might compensate for the issues brought by an unstable Internet connection. In fact, by recording an audio clip, students are assessed asynchronously: the audio is recorded with software such as *Audacity* or *Garageband* or simply with a smartphone and submitted to the teacher. In some cases, teachers might allow the editing of the audio clips, so as that the learners can select their best performances. A useful platform for the creation and the editing of audio tracks is *Anchor.* Anchor is especially thought for the recording of podcasts, that students can create in groups, pairs or individually, according to the topic. Another two tools that might help for the assessment of speaking abilities are *Vocaroo* and *VoiceThread*. Vocaroo allows to record audios and submit them directly to the teacher; VoiceThread works as a forum where students conversate orally (hence resembling the classroom environment in terms of spoken interaction). As Serragiotto writes, audio recording of language performances is extremely useful because both teacher and student can analyse some aspects of the FL production, in particular "prosodia, curva melodica, in primis, poi scelte paralinguistiche come intervalli di tempo, interruzione del turno della parola ecc."[88] (2016: 164).

Teachers can also ask their pupils to create a video content to edit. There are many applications and programs to shoot and edit video clips, according to the needs of the user and the requirements of the task. Students can be asked to shoot a video performing a roleplay (in the case of DL, students can perform individually and then edit the video in pairs or groups, to allow one, joint, video) or to shoot more creative videos where the FL is involved. Nowadays, students are familiar with social networks that allow video editing, such as *Instagram Reels* and *TikTok*, that allow to easily create new contents adding music, sound, and video effects. Videos can also be edited with

[88] *Cfr.*: "prosody, intonation, firstly, then paralinguistic choices such as time intervals, speaking time interruption, etc.". Our translation.

default programs installed in PC and Mac computers, such as *Movie Maker* and *iMovie*, or with any other apps for smartphone and tablet. The created contents can either be sent via e-mail to the teacher, uploaded with a private link on *YouTube* or in a private Instagram or TikTok profile. The kind of tasks that can be created is very varied, depending on which skills need to be assessed and evaluated. For example, students might be asked to create a one-minute video where a recipe is summarised, or a kind of vlog where a typical day is explained or to act like in a roleplay and then edit the video with other classmates' videos. Apps such as Instagram and TikTok have video filters that function as a green screen, where any background can be inserted, thus allowing students to be more creative and adding the possibility to appear in a different place than the one where the video was shot (ideal for DL situations, where students cannot leave their houses). Other websites that allow the creation and editing of videos are *Powtoon* and *Stopmotion*, that might also be used to create animation movies, adding audios and combining videos and pictures.

The advantages of audio and video clip creation and editing can be found mainly in an increase of motivation and in a lowering of anxiety levels, as well as in the fact that Krashen's affective filter appears to not be raised. The fact that audios and videos are multimedia that can be shared allows teachers to reuse the created materials with other classes or in future courses. If the students are aware of this possibility, they will be more inclined to participate actively, to be more motivated and to create quality material.

WebQuest

WebQuests are "mini-projects in which a large percentage of the input and material is supplied by the Internet" (Teaching English website). The main advantages of WebQuests are:

- the promotion and encouragement of group work, that leads to "communication and the sharing of knowledge - two principal goals of language teaching itself" (Teaching English website);
- the exposure to authentic forms of language that boost motivation in the FL;
- the consolidation of specific lexicon related to the topic of the research and the development of new lexicon;
- the potential interdisciplinarity with other subjects;
- the development of "critical thinking skills, including: comparing, classifying, inducing, deducing, analysing errors, constructing support, abstraction, analysing perspectives, etc" (Teaching English website) and of the ability of transforming information.

There are several websites that help in the creation of a webquest, such as *Aula21*, *Questgarden*, *Zunal*, *Teacherweb*, *OpenWebQuest* and *bibliolab*. There are different kinds of WebQuest[89], according to the aim of the task, that evaluate different abilities.

[89] 12 different kinds of WebQuest can be identified, according to Dodge, 2002: 1) *Retelling Tasks*: students are asked to write a research report; 2) *Compilation Tasks*: students are asked to "take information from a number of sources and put it into a common format", such as "a cookbook (…), a deck of cards to aid field trips (…), a selection of web resources to build a virtual exhibition (…), a time capsule (…)"; 3) *Mystery Tasks*: students are asked to solve a mystery filling in puzzles, searching for the right and useful information online; 4) *Journalistic Tasks*: students are asked to act like reporters. Journalistic tasks involve "gathering facts and organizing them into an account within the usual genres of news and feature writing", which will be assessed according to accuracy rather than creativity; 5) *Design Tasks*: students are asked to "create a product or plan of action that accomplishes a pre-determined goal and works within specified constraints"; 6) *Creative Product Tasks*: students are asked to create a product (e.g.: a painting, a skit, a poster, a game, etc.) that allows to express creativity, meeting the criteria of the chosen genre; 7) *Consensus Building Tasks*: students are asked to consider and relate with different points of view concerning topics that might be controversial; 8) *Persuasion Tasks*: students are asked to persuade other people that disagree with them; 9) *Self-Knowledge Tasks*: students are asked to develop their self-knowledge, especially according to "long term goals, ethical and moral issues, self-improvement, art appreciation, personal responses to literature"; 10) *Analytical Tasks*: students are asked to find similarities and differences and the consequent implications about one or more situation; 11) *Judgment Tasks*: students are asked to evaluate and rank some items; 12) *Scientific Tasks*: students are asked to carry out a scientific research according to the scientific method.

Social networks

Students can be asked to create contents to share on social networks, according to the aim of the task. For example, learners might be asked to write a 280-character tweet on *Twitter* to summarise a concept or to create a professional profile on *LinkedIn* or to create an account on a social network of the language studied (e.g.: students of Russian language might be asked to create an account on *VKontakte*, the Russian *Facebook*). Different social networks have different aims, but their main advantage can be found in the fact that they expose learners to authentic situations that require the language studied. Teachers might use social networks to evaluate the language used, the register used and also other competencies part of the DOK model, as well as creativity and IT knowledge.

E-mails, chats and forums

Traditional letter writing, nowadays more and more replaced with e-mail writing and chats offer an opportunity to evaluate formal and informal written language, as well as the knowledge of templates and models. E-mails tend to be more formal, longer, with a more specific and strict structure and are an instrument of asynchronous writing. On the other hand, chats are more informal, shorter, with less strict rules for writing and are an instrument that allows almost synchronous communication. The advantage of chats lies in the fact that they allow time to think, correct mistakes and misspellings and they allow (as also happens with e-mails) the save and backup of the conversations, giving students and teachers the opportunity to revise and work on mistakes.

Finally, forums are a specific space created to share information and opinions on a topic. Platforms such as *Moodle* or *Google Classroom* have specific spaces designed for students and teachers to share information. Contribution are usually not very long and the register can be chosen by the teacher: formal or informal according to the kind of discussion opened. The advantages of forums can be found in the fact that they can be carried out in groups, sharing information and thoughts, that the timeline of the contributions is easily retrievable, that forums usually happen in specifically learning-

designed spaces and that teachers can intervene as moderators easily, if needed, and can reply directly to each student.

NowComment

NowComment is a platform that allows to work in groups on a document uploaded online. Teachers can choose to work on a long or short text, on citations, on specific paragraphs, on videos or on pictures: it is sufficient to upload them on the website, notify the students (via e-mail) and invite them to participate commenting the uploaded document. Students can easily add comments, reply to other comments and teachers can read and intervene when necessary. The platform automatically notifies via e-mail every time a new comment is inserted and easily allows to work in groups or in pairs. Teachers might want to recur to this platform when students are asked to analyse texts, to translate, to describe a situation or when students need to work on videos and pictures.

Edublogs

Edublogs is a platform based on WordPress that allows the creation of class blogs, where teachers can manage posts written by the students. The advantage of Edublogs can be seen in the fact that the platform has the possibility to assign specific roles to the subjects involved in the writing of the blog: administrator, editor, author, contributor, subscriber with the addition of student and teacher, where teacher is a sort of superior administrator (n.b.: the teacher role can be assigned to more than one person). The advantage of this platform for FL learning is that students are exposed to authentic language, learning in a collaborative and cooperative environment. Moreover, the fact that learners are asked to work autonomously on a topic, asks them to involve higher levels of reasoning of the DOK model.

Flipgrid

Flipgrid is a social network for learning where teachers create a community (the class) where discussions with videos and comments can take place. The teacher creates the topic, inserts a description (or a text, or an image or video) and the system sends e-mails containing the code to join the discussion to all the members of the community (the students). After reading the topic and the description, students record a response video, that the teacher and the other students can view and comment. Flipgrid (by Microsoft) is particularly useful for FL education and assessment thanks to its characteristics that involve different multimedia and thanks to the fact that students are asked to use creativity, to search for information and then express opinions, rephrasing. Moreover, the video also highlights extralinguistic and linguistic habits, that can be analysed and, if necessary corrected. Finally, Flipgrid constitutes a repository of material commented by the teacher that students can access in any moment.

EdPuzzle

EdPuzzle is an online platform for the creation of video lessons, where the teacher can either upload a new video or to choose an existing one on the web (e.g. from *YouTube*, *TED* or *National Geographics*) and add audio comments or record a new audio instead of the original one. The advantages that this platform involves for assessment lie in the fact that teachers can create private classrooms (accessible with a code) and add video lessons that involve quizzes, with open and closed questions, in any moment of the video, that students have to answer. Moreover, the video lesson can be assigned as a homework and the teacher can view the students who completed the lesson and the results of the quizzes. Students can also create their own video lessons to present in class (according to the flipped classroom method), after the teacher has assigned the topic, the objectives and has given the instructions to carry out the task.

Newsela

Newsela is a platform where teachers can create a classroom and assign real world texts that involve five different reading levels that the student can choose with built-in activities. This online website allows every student to follow their own pace and level of learning. Every text assigned by the teacher can also involve quizzes and annotations can be created to get the students talk about and reflect upon the text. Moreover, teachers can prompt the students' writing skills and critical thinking assigning tasks at the end of the reading. Finally, the teachers can see each student's progress thanks to the platform function that shows tabs with reports concerning the results of each student. Newsela is useful for keeping the students engaged, to use authentic texts, to foster student's attention towards reading tasks and to assess reading comprehention.

Wakelet

Wakelet is a content curation and publishing online platform useful for the creation and the editing of collections and storytelling. The platform is similar to Adobe's *Storify* (inactive since 2018) and allows to work individually or in groups to online collections and archives. Wakelet allows to filter and evaluate online resources, offering a solution to information overload, by gathering together all sorts of online contents with a copy-paste process. In fact, it is possible to assemble articles, videos, blogs, tweets, Facebook pages, images and much more. The contents are then made up by the creators and can be shared with a link. This platform allows the creation of stories and collections about a certain topic or subject that can be produced in a collaborative context, in groups or pairs. Wakelet is a good creative tool, that is useful for the fostering of deep levels of the DOK model.

ScribaEpub

ScribaEpub is a very interesting free online platform that allows to write e-books with the possibility to insert images and personal contents. The advantage of this tool is that it produces a real e-book, that might be proposed as an instrument for the following

course, hence motivating students to produce creative, accurate and thorough material, especially when ESP is involved. Another advantage is that the website helps with the copyright check: the material used must be original or not protected from copyright. This gives a further opportunity to work on the netiquette of the students. ScribaEpub allows to comment and write and to share the material and to create quizzes, such as the so-called *hot potatoes*. ScribaEpub fosters collaboration and interaction (aspects that should be assessed by the teacher) and is a very useful tool to assess writing skills, to foster creativity and active participation, as well as to involve critical thinking and the deeper levels of the DOK model.

Debates

The methodology of debate is one of the methodologies suggested by the *Linee Guida sulla Didattica Digitale Integrata* (Guidelines on Blended learning) by the MIUR. A debate is "an organized argument or contest of ideas in which the participants discuss a topic from two opposing sides" (American Debate League). Debates require students to be divided into small teams that have to defend different topics, proposed by the teacher. In DL, debates are especially useful to foster interest and motivation towards a topic and answer to the need for competency-based activities. Moreover, the discussion between two teams offers the possibility for the students to be the real protagonists of the conversation and, at the same time, to develop critical thinking and personal development. Because students are asked to defend a thesis, theory or statement, the students need to be experts of the defended side, fostering curiosity and need for deeper analysis. By conversating with other students, skills of interaction, problem solving and other useful skills for speaking in public are developed. Another advantage of debates is that they are a precious method to evaluate and assess what students really know and what they can do with what they know, making final assessment accurate and free from cheating (teachers would notice in the case students were reading from a paper, from a screen or if they were accepting suggestions from other people in the room). The teacher's role is the guide who sets rules, who also

covers the role of moderator, following a specific method. The points are scored with specific assessment rubrics or grids or checklists.

Presentations, projects and live tests

Presentations are another way to assess group work and individual work. There are several tools to create presentations, from the traditional *PowerPoint* (nowadays with its online version that allows live collaboration) to the more creative *Prezi*, that allows more dynamic transitions, and which has a greater visuality. Projects can be created asynchronously and then presented to the class live, during a videoconference or submitted via e-mail or on the classroom platform for evaluation. Anyway, the teacher needs to give clear explanations and might give suggestions on what tools could be used and which website to retrieve the information from, as well as checklists that outline a fitness of purpose.

Live tests can either be oral or written. As for written tests, the teacher can either ask the learners during a video lesson to answer to some questions or to develop an essay to submit within a certain time. We want to emphasise that the shorter the test and the more personal the answer needs to be, the surer the teacher will be of the reliability of the answers in terms of cheating. We suggest teachers to choose authentic material for their written tests, asking the students to *do* with what they know, according to the deeper levels of the DOK model, focussing on competencies. In regards to oral testing, our recommendation is for casual conversation as a metric to determine student knowledge. By doing so, students answer questions that involve critical thinking and expression of personal opinions and thoughts. For example, teachers might ask their students to develop a concept map concerning a topic or a situation and to present and explain it during an oral test.

3.5.2 Instruments and tools for self-assessment

As discussed in the previous sections, it is crucial to help the students in the process of developing their self-assessment ability. In this paragraph, we will suggest some useful tools and instruments that might be helpful in situations of DL and BL, especially for what concerns portfolios, journals, and rubrics, with a brief mention to autobiographies. We want to pinpoint the fact that self-assessment is vital in all educational contexts, but that in the DL context it is particularly important, especially for what concerns time management, motivation towards learning, self-management abilities, knowledge of efficient learning strategies, formulation of work plans efficient and coherent with the educational goals and the awareness of the status of being a student (Fundarò, 2020). The consciousness of the cited point is vital to create a relaxed classroom environment, based on reciprocal trust.

Portfolios

Portfolios are tools that allow to "organizzare le valutazioni, compararle e monitorare, in generale, i risultati e i progressi compiuti dallo studente in rapporto alle sue competenze"[90] (Serragiotto, 2016: 156). Portfolios have different purposes and can be used as an instrument for individual progresses or as a sort of repository for the whole class. They are also an extremely useful instrument for teachers when assessment and evaluation need to be carried out, as student portfolios monitor the entire process of learning, providing "evidence of learning and growth", help the teacher in "planning instruction and gauging student understanding" and might be a useful tool for "communicating student progress with families and sparking conversations at home" (Hertz, 2020). On the other hand, portfolios are useful also for the students, thanks to the fact that portfolios help visualising all the progresses made and to reflect on

[90] *Cfr.*: "organise evaluations, compare them and monitor, in general, results and progresses made by the student with reference to his or her competencies". Our translation.

"personal growth over the course of the year" (Hertz, 2020). Digital portfolios are particularly useful in terms of creativity. IT allows students to take pictures, record videos and audios and share comments and knowledge in creative ways. Students can, with online portfolio platforms such as *SeeSaw*, upload their projects that allow personal expression, either singularly or as a class. SeeSaw allows to share the portfolio, to attach multimedia and to comment and give feedback on the activities. Teachers can evaluate and assign tasks from the platform; the tasks can be accessed by the parents (useful option especially for primary and lower secondary schools). Another similar website that allows the constructions of an IT portfolio, similarly to SeeSaw, is *Mahara*, very intuitive and inspiring.

Journals

Journals are "notebooks in which writers keep a record of ideas, opinions, and description of daily life. Journals help writers develop their creativity" (Spaventa, 2000, quoted in Tuan, 2010: 82). Journals are written regularly and they are an active learning technique helpful for both teachers and students for multiple aspects. In their journals, the narrators are the students themselves, who write about what they did, how they felt, the issues and problems they had during the day, either school-related or not. Journals can also be useful for noting down ideas and to write about personal interests, something that, together with writing about feelings and emotions should be encouraged in DL contexts, where learners might want to express how they feel and might need to be boosted to express ideas and thoughts. Thanks to the fact journaling is written in the FL, it journaling appears to be especially beneficial for fluency and accuracy, enhancing writing skills, motivation and self-assessment. In fact, thanks to the metacognition required by the journal, students have to learn how to self-assess, considering what they have done during the day, how and what skills and competencies were involved in the activities carried out, reflecting upon strategies implemented and their positive and negative effects on learning, evaluating the choices made. Thanks to

the fact that it is written, students can see the progresses made and autonomously monitor their learning and their personal life and emotions.

For the teachers, on the other hand, journals are an instrument easy to propose both in in-presence and in DL classroom, thanks to the low level of structurization and to the fact that they are easy to use. Anyway, the students have to be clear why the journal needs to be written and how, in order to avoid making the students feel lost. Journals monitor the student's study activities and the time employed to carry out tasks and assignments, giving to the teacher useful material to consider when planning the course and when deciding which IT resources, devices, and platform to involve, in the case of DL. These instruments appear to be also helpful in DL situations to reducing the distance between student and teacher, who reads and responds to the student, reaching out and counselling when necessary, improving reciprocal trust and favouring a relaxed classroom environment. Journals can be written also by the teachers, as a form of self-analysis and self- assessment and to keep track of the progresses made with the class, as well as to note ideas and emotions.

As Artof (1992) quoted in Tuan (2010: 82) affirmed:

> "It is a powerful tool to find our own untapped creative power, uncover our family history, learn to see the world more clearly, heal unsolved issues, understand our fears, and explore our motivation. Through personal writing, we can develop both writing skills and awareness, can develop greater awareness and interpersonal understanding, increasing the ability to relate to others".

There are several ways to write a journal, either digitally or on paper. We suggest to the teachers to create a template and share it with the students, according to the kind of journal that needs to be carried out[91] and share it with the class with *Google Drive*,

[91] There are several kinds of journals that might be adopted in DL context. In this section, we are discussing the benefits of self-assessment journals; anyway, for example, journals for riding responses or for learning vocabulary can be chosen. Moreover, journals can be useful in cases such as internships, or the so-called *Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro*, or any situation in which the students are required to write a report based on an experience.

OneDrive, *Classroom*, *SeeSaw, Moodle* or any IT tool or platform that allows to share materials.

Rubrics

Rubrics are tools that can be used for multiple purposes. In this section, we will discuss the benefits that rubrics have on self-assessment; in the next paragraph, we will discuss rubrics in the light of feedback and as a useful instrument for teachers to evaluate.

A rubric is "a document that lists criteria and describes varying levels of quality" (Andrade, 2000, cited in Andrade, 2008) that involves indicators, descriptors and criteria clear to and discussed with the students on how to assess competencies. Rubrics are a useful tool that allows informal and formative self-assessment, that provide students with guidelines on how to perform an activity or task. Rubrics can focus on products or processes and can either be:

- *holistic*: consider the competence globally, with descriptions of the key characteristics of every level of competence. They are easy to use and do not require a high amount of time to be filled in;
- *analytic*: consider the competence in its different dimensions, dividing the task into different parts, with different indicators. This kind of rubric requires more time to be filled in, but gives more accurate indications, useful also for giving feedback.

Self-assessment rubrics are also multidimensional, combining three different dimensions of the person who is self-assessing: *how I see myself*, *how others see me* and *what I can do* (Castoldi, 2016 in Rucci, Castoldi, 2020: 5).

Good rubrics are usually created with the students (even though the teacher might choose to give a previously created one and then discuss it with the pupils) and are a useful tool that can "orient learners to the concept of quality as defined by experts in a field, inform self- and peer assessment, and guide revision and improvement" (Andrade, 2008). They also implement self-assessment, self-confidence, efficiency of

learning, boost motivation, active participation, autonomy, responsibility and, through metacognition and by following the guidelines and the fitness of the rubric, success. In fact, especially if the rubric is given to the students *before* the performance, it "dirige l'attenzione degli studenti sugli aspetti specifici del prodotto da elaborare e sul livello di padronanza da dimostrare"[92] (Capobianco, 2020).

There are online tools and applications that can help creating rubrics very easily, for example:

- *RubiStar*: online software that provides the user with a database with generic rubrics that can be customised and then printed or shared. The software offers to create rubrics that involve pre-created descriptors and indicators;
- *Quick Rubric*: useful online software for the creation of rubrics to print out;
- *Rubric Maker*: useful online software that allows to create, save and print rubrics;
- *Teacher Rubric*[93]: extension to Google Documents that facilitates the creation of rubrics;
- *For All Rubrics*: allows the teacher to create online rubrics, checklists and badges for the class, view classroom performances, print the scores and communicate with the students. Students can view their assessment and can carry out *peer assessment* and *self-assessment*. The rubric can be printed and exported on the computer.

Andrade (2008) identifies three basic steps that need to be involved in self-assessment with rubrics:

[92] *Cfr.*: "directs the students' attention towards the specific product aspects to develop and on the mastery level to prove". Our translation.

[93] Available at the link: https://workspace.google.com/marketplace/app/orangeslice_teacher_rubric/852746965799?pann=cwsdp&hl=it, last accessed March 29, 2021.

1) *setting clear expectations*: teachers need to make clear to their students what they are expected to do and how. Parameters, descriptors and indicators have to be discussed and negotiated in class;
2) *conducting self-assessment*: the students self assess, comparing their performance with the rubric, while they are carrying out the task;
3) *revising*: teachers give their feedback based on the student's self-assessment; students, guided by the teacher's feedback, revise the product.

Hence, rubrics can be used to assess (cfr. 3.5.3) and self-assess "achievement criteria across all the components of any kind of student work, from written to oral to visual. (They) can be used for marking assignments, class participation, or overall grades" (Centre for Teaching Excellence). Rubrics facilitate the students' output and they make the students feel more motivated and involved in their own learning and assessing processes.

Autobiographies

Students might also be invited to write an autobiography to encourage self-assessment and self-analysis. Especially in situations of isolation, pupils might feel the need to talk about and reflect upon themselves and the choices made. From an educational point of view, students can be invited to write an autobiography as a sort of balance of the learning outcomes and the educational choices made. Through metacognition, students will therefore write a *cognitive autobiography*, where they can discuss and analyse their past, present and future educational choices. Errors and possible areas of improvement are also highlighted and autobiographies help students self-assess and self-evaluate their processes and products (Capobianco, 2020). Teachers should provide the students with a document to fill, in order to facilitate the self-assessment process by asking questions that foster reasoning. The document can easily be created with any document-creator software.

3.5.3 Instruments and tools for feedback and for evaluation

This last paragraph aims at giving some ideas for formative feedback and to evaluate in DL and BL contexts, as well as in presence. Some tools were already discussed in the previous sections, and in this paragraph, they are adapted to the function of formative feedback.

Formative feedback

Formative feedback from the teacher is particularly important in DL contexts. Teachers should keep in mind that it is not possible to evaluate everything, and that at the same time multiple factors should be involved in the determination of a final evaluation.

Teacher feedback helps the students to be aware of progresses and areas that need improvement; student feedback, on the other hand, is important for the teacher to know how efficient the teaching method and the tools are and, at the same to make the students feel more involved in their learning processes, listening their opinions.

Teachers can listen to their pupils' opinions with platforms such as *Mentimeter* and *Poll Everywhere*. These tools can register the students' reactions and the immediate output, with polls with multiple choice, short answers, and true/false questions. Teachers can see the results of each question live and the results can be used to start a discussion and to foster interaction. These tools also boost participation in feedback, thanks to the fact that the students feel that their voices are heard.

As for teacher feedback, there are multiple online software tools that can be adopted, such as:

- *Kaizena*: useful to give audio feedback. The advantage of giving voice feedback is that it is faster for the teachers and more engaging with the students, that might feel as the teacher was in the same room as them. Also, the comments can be detailed and precise and feel more personal. In FL learning, audio feedback also involves pronunciation and prosody, enhancing the overall accuracy of the feedback itself.

Kaizena allows the creation of rubrics that can be filled in directly in the webpage and also to attach videos (with online links) on the comments, saving time and allowing a more direct connection to the part that the link refers to;

- *SeeSaw* and *Mahara*: as already seen in 3.5.1, these platforms allow personalised feedback on activities;
- *Moodle*: platforms such as Moodle allow to upload assignments and to receive private overall feedback from the teacher.

Serragiotto (2016: 63-64) highlights how feedback, at the same time, give the students a proactive role on their learning process, help the teacher in the modification of the educational actions, adapting them to the addressees, and fulfil the learning objective that is student active participation.

Assessment Rubrics and assessment grids

Rubrics are a tool that helps teachers to evaluate the students with a higher grade of objectivity, thanks to specific, precise, and verifiable indicators, parameters and descriptors that are known, discussed and negotiated with the class. Assessment rubrics describe competencies concerning a task or assignment with a *positive* language (i.e.: assessment rubrics say what students *can* do and *to what extent* the students are able to do something).

Rubrics can be synthetic, with checklists of key words or verbs, to help immediate assessment (especially for oral tests), but they can also appear as assessment grids, which are more detailed and thorough. Assessment grids, thanks to the fact that they are more precise and defined, ensure a higher level of objectivity.

3.6 MIUR guidelines on DL assessment and evaluation

This last section aims at summarising the main changes to assessment and evaluation in upper secondary schools in the Italian DL context due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

March 8, 2020: note that brings to surface the issue of evaluation and assessment in DL contexts. The note says that:

> "al di là dei momenti formalizzati relativi agli scrutini e agli esami di Stato, lascia la dimensione docimologica ai docenti, senza istruire particolari protocolli (…)"[94][95]

The memorandum states that the teacher can decide how to carry out evaluation and assessment, according to the teaching platforms chosen.

March 17, 2020: indications on how to carry out evaluation and assessment, with emphasis on the importance of continuous formative assessment that values the students and provides them with suggestions, remedial work, further readings, under the light of making the students responsible for their learning (cfr. 3.4.1). Moreover, in this document, the importance of the teacher's evaluation competency is stressed out, as well as the "diritto alla valutazione dello student"[96]. The document discusses the methodologies and instruments that can be used in DL assessment and evaluation processes, stating that they "rientrano nella competenza di ciascun insegnante e hanno a riferimento i criteri approvati dal Collegio dei Docenti"[97][98].

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[94] *Cfr.*: "besides the formalized moments concerning the assignation of the term's marks and the State exams, gives the docimological dimension to the teachers, without instructing specific protocols (…)". Our translation.

[95] See: Ministry of Education, Note Prot. 279, March 8, 2020. Available at: https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/0/Nota+prot.+279+dell%278+marzo+2020.pdf/b6728b73-bee3-a869-0e65-4ee6520b1be6?version=1.0&t=1583701429877, last accessed March 29, 2021.

[96] *Cfr.*: "student's right to be assessed". Our translation.

[97] *Cfr.*: "are included in each teacher's competency and refer to the criteria approved by the Teaching Body". Our translation.

[98] See: Ministry of Education, Note Prot. 388, March 17, 2020. Available at: https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/0/Nota+prot.+388+del+17+marzo+2020.pdf/d6acc6a2-1505-9439-a9b4-735942369994?version=1.0, last accessed March 29, 2021.

April 8, 2020: Decree, converted to Law with modifications on June 6, 2020, n. 41, that explains how State Exams, admission to the following year and remedial exams have to be carried out, with two plans (one that involves in-presence and one that involves DL performances. In particular, it is stated the possibility to modify the number of the tests and the assessment methods, as well as the possibility to have an oral examination in the case of distance exams. Moreover, the decree states that all the members of the examining board will be internal[99].

May 16, 2020: ministerial order that implements the dispositions described in the Decree n. 22/2020, and gives indications on how to carry out assignation of the end of the term's marks for the school year 2019/2020 and arrangement on how to carry out remedial exams[100].

June 6, 2020: Law 41/2020, that converts to law the Decree n. 22/2020 with some modifications. According to the decree, examinations at upper secondary schools will consist of an oral test conducted by an internal examining board [101].

[99] See: Decree April 8, 2020, n. 22. Available at: https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/04/08/20G00042/sg, last accessed March 29, 2021.

[100] See: Ministerial Order May 16, 2020, n. 11. Available at: https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/2432359/OM+VALUTAZIONE+FINALE+ALUNNI+A.S.+19-20+RECUPERO+APPRENDIMENTI+.0000011.16-05-2020.pdf/c665ee9e-1752-c808-ce67-9f3e3c02ef7e?version=1.0&t=1589784478152, last accessed FebrMarch 29, 2021.

[101] See: Law June 6, 2020, n. 41. Available at: https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2020/06/06/143/sg/pdf, last accessed March 29, 2021.

Chapter 4
The research

In this chapter, the research carried out as focus of the thesis and the results will be discussed. This research deals with the so-called in Italian *Didattica a Distanza*, aiming at highlighting the main advantages and disadvantages that the situation triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic generated in the Upper Secondary School panorama in Italy. In the sections of the chapter, the objectives, the method of data analysis and the results of the questionnaires will be presented. A copy of both surveys adopted in this study is available in Appendix A (Questionnaire A) and Appendix B (Questionnaire B).

4.1. Introduction

For students and teachers, DL has represented a new challenge. Both groups were required to familarise themselves with new methods of learning and teaching intrinsic to profound changes in schooling and social life. Some research focusing on DL has been conducted previously. In particular, *AlmaDiploma* (2020) in collaboration with the *Consorzio Interuniversitario AlmaLaurea*, carried out research that demonstrated school populations adapted to the situation generated by the pandemic, as well as the learning and social limitations that the DL context involves and the concern for the future[102]. Research conducted for *Indire* (2020) discussed strategies, perceived quality, organisation, and socialisation, with a section that analysed assessment and evaluation, concerning self-assessment and peer-assessment before, during and after the lockdown that Italy underwent during the period March-May 2020[103]. A third research consulted

[102] Available at: https://www.edscuola.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RAPPORTO_AD_2020_sulla_DaD_DEFINITIVO.pdf, last accessed: March 29, 2021.
[103] Available at: https://www.indire.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Report-integrativo-Novembre-2020_con-grafici-1.pdf, last accessed March 29, 2021.

was the survey by *La Fabbrica* (2020) communicative agency, that gathered opinions from teachers across the country and spanning all levels of schooling about DL[104].
From here, the need to hear students' and teachers' opinions in regard to evaluation and assessment of foreign languages (and Italian as L2) in upper secondary schools. Hence, this research aims at investigating the Italian distance learning situation (in Italian: *Didattica a Distanza*), due to the Covid-19 outbreak. The research wants to highlight especially those aspects that involve assessment and evaluation of foreign languages in Venetian Upper Secondary Schools, from the point of view of both students and teachers. Moreover, a comparison between teachers from the Veneto region and teachers from the rest of the country will always be proposed, in order to give the reader a broader view of the Italian panorama in terms of both distance teaching and different resources accessed by the teachers when FL or Italian L2 assessment and evaluation processes need to take place.

4.1.1. Research problem

The present research aims, as anticipated in the previous paragraph, at investigating distance assessment and evaluation (from now on: DAE). In particular, the questionnaires deal with the modalities and the instruments used for assessment, evaluation, self-assessment, and feedback. The research demonstrates how often these instruments have been used or experimented and the reasons behind these choices. At the same time, the study deals with the perception that students and teachers have of DAE, connected with the test (main difficulties, advantages and concerns) and the feelings about the virtual classroom environment when evaluating and assessing (e.g. for stress and anxiety issues, compared to in-presence) and about the FL/ItaL2 teacher.

[104] Available at: https://www.scuola.net/uploads/media/default/0001/03/3920763f179f86a00942d5e41479ff0baa1ca960.pdf, last accessed March 29, 2021.

The main goal of the questionnaires is to emphasise the main differences and similarities of distance and in-presence assessment and evaluation methods, modalities and to compare the voices of students and teachers, in order to show different points of view.

4.1.2. Research questions and hypotheses

The research and therefore the questionnaires have been developed around four research questions, that cover four macro-themes:

1) the instruments, platforms and methods used for DAE and the frequency with which these instruments, platforms and methods have been adopted in class;
2) reliability of the tests and the competences tested;
3) self-assessment and feedback;
4) opinions, perceptions and feelings about DAE and the teacher.

From here, further sub-questions have been developed, covering smaller, more specific areas of the previously discussed macro-themes. The questions and sub-questions are:

1) What instruments, platforms and methods have been used for DAE and with what frequency?
    1.1. How many different instruments, platforms and methods have been used and why?
    1.2. Is the DL testing modality (e.g. written, oral, group work or presentation) the same as the one adopted in presence?
    1.3. Is the frequency of DL testing the same as in presence?
    1.4. What were the reasons behind the choice of adopting a certain method for DAE?
2) How are DL tests perceived in terms of reliability?
    2.1. What are the main differences between in-presence and remote testing?
    2.2. Do teachers favour formative or summative assessment?

2.3. Do DL tests involve knowledge or competencies?

2.4. Is the grading system the same as the one in presence?

3) Are self-assessment and feedback encouraged?

3.1. What instruments are used for self-assessment (i.e. journals, self-assessment rubrics, portfolios)?

3.2. How is feedback given from teachers to students?

3.3. Do teachers ask for feedback about the tests? If they do, how often and about what?

4) What are the opinions, feelings and perceptions about DAE?

4.1. Are there any advantages in assessing and evaluating in remote contexts?

4.2. What are the main difficulties and concerns when assessing and evaluating in remote contexts?

4.3. How do students and teachers feel about DAE?

4.4. Does the teacher behaviour impact the students' feeling towards DAE?

Therefore, four research hypotheses have been developed, according to the macro-themes:

1) due to inadequate resources (such as lacking access to a computer, tablet, or stable Internet connection) or the inadequate preparation of teachers in new digitalised FL situations, the instruments adopted for DAE do not have much variety. In terms of platforms made available by the school, we think this may be a separate point to ICT access and preparation by students and teachers. The favourite way of carrying out DAE is through oral tests, that ensure more reliability and prevent students from cheating. Tests are administered almost with the same frequency as in-presence assessment and evaluation (from now on: IPAE);
2) teachers perceive DAE as less reliable when compared to in-presence AE, due to the multitude of resources that students can recur to during tests to cheat. Teachers also think that correction and feedback to the students takes less time and that is more immediate, especially for objective exercises. Tests aim at formative and assessment almost equally and both knowledge and competencies. Finally, the

grading system, is stricter, with lower grades due to the perceived lower reliability of the tests;

3) self-assessment and feedback are not encouraged to a great extent and they are given from teachers to students orally, via the official platform adopted by the school in the form of written comment, or via e-mail, when materials are submitted via e-mail. Teachers do not ask for feedback on tests often and the instruments to self-assess are very rarely used;
4) students are less anxious about DAE than in-presence AE, due to the familiar environment for both oral and written tests. However, students may feel less motivated and fostered, especially since teachers do not use a wide range of materials and platforms. Students are also worried because of the involvement of the technology in the moment of submitting a test and due to the lack of time during tests. On the other hand, teachers emphasise that the main difficulties of DAE involve the creation of tests that assess the right kind of knowledge and competencies, the instruments available to the students and the fact that students could cheat. Most teachers do not find any advantage. However, if any advantage is mentioned, is the easiness of the correction and feedback and the variety of tools available. Finally, students affirm that the teacher behaviour affects the performances.

4.2. Method

In this section, the instruments, the method of data analysis, the population and the sample are be discussed.

4.2.1. Instruments

The instruments adopted are self-administered structured questionnaires with close-ended and open-ended questions for both groups. The surveys were anonymous to

"promote greater disclosure of sensitive or stigmatizing information compared to non-anonymous methods" (Murdoch *et al.*, 2014: 1), although both Questionnaire A and Questionnaire B asked general questions about gender, age or class, school, and region of residence, in order to have some background information about the two interviewed groups. The items were different according to the group they were addressed to and divided into different sections, investigating the research questions with an additional section about personal data and structured as it follows:

Questionnaire A (students)	*Questionnaire B* (teachers)
- Personal information (items 1-4; 8) - Instruments, methods, platforms (items 5-7; 9-16) - Reliability (items 17-18; 25-26) - Self-assessment and feedback (items 19-24) - Opinions, perceptions and feelings (items 27-34)	- Personal information (items 1-6) - Instruments, methods, platforms (items 7-17) - Reliability (items 21-25) - Opinions, perceptions and feelings (items 18-20; 26-27)

Thus, questionnaire A consisted of 34 items in total, with 2 open-ended questions and 1 semi-open-ended question, whereas Questionnaire B consisted of 27 items in total, with 8 open-ended questions. The reason behind the choice of giving the teachers a higher number of open-ended questions can be found in our desire to understand from a deeper level the teachers' choice of materials, platforms, and methods and to give them the chance to express more thoroughly their opinions. Therefore, the questionnaires generated both quantitative and qualitative data. Some items were adapted from the pertinent survey about DL by *AlmaDiploma* (Questionnaire A: items 18, 25; Questionnaire B: item 21). All items required an answer in order to proceed, except for items n. 23; 26 – Questionnaire A, and item n. 22 – Questionnaire B, which were *optional*. We want to stress the fact that we are aware of the limitations of self-reported questionnaires, such as the possibility of finding dishonest answers and the possibility that the researcher's view about reality could influence the respondents' opinions, according to what they read; moreover, the interviewees could misinterpret the questions.

The surveys were proposed to the sample through Google Forms, to facilitate the sharing and the filling in and some sections were grouped to give the respondents the impression that the questionnaire was shorter. In addition, as Joinson (1998) and Suler (2004) in Trinchero and Robasto (2019: 92) put it, "la ricerca sulla somministrazione web ha mostrato come la compilazione online abbia una sorta di effetto disinibitore rispetto al timore del giudizio altrui"[105]. Google Forms allowed to display the progress bar, which helped the interviewee to visualise survey completion.
The answers to the surveys were collected during approximately 7 days: from 11:00 March 3rd, 2021, to 15:00 March 16th, 2021.

4.2.2. Population and sample

Initially, the population of the study included Upper Secondary School foreign language or Italian L2 teachers of Italy and Upper Secondary School students of Italy. Teachers had to have taught since the school year 2019/2020 and the students must have been attending at least the second class, in order to be sure that a comparison with the pre-Covid-19 situation could be possible. Anyway, due to the high number of samples sent from the Veneto region (especially in regard to the student survey), we decided to focus our research on the Veneto region, with a comparison to the whole country when teachers' responses are presented.
The method of sample choice was non-probabilistic and voluntary, and the surveys were shared through word-of-mouth, via WhatsApp text chains, e-mails, newsletters (one in particular: *Italiano L2 e molto altro*) and via Facebook posts on groups for teachers of foreign languages.

[105] *Cfr.*: "the research on web administration showed how online filling in has a sort of disinhibition effect with regards to the fear of judgement of others". Our translation.

The valid responses for Questionnaire A were 579 (students from the Veneto region), and 229 for Questionnaire B (teachers from the whole country, of which, 59 teachers only from the Veneto region). As for the teachers, the responses came from 18 regions out of 20 (Cfr. 4.3 for invalid responses).

4.2.3. Data gathering and data analysis procedure

The data were automatically collected by *Google Forms* and transposed to an Excel worksheet, where they could be checked, validated, and elaborated. As for quantitative data, they have been elaborated using percentages and Excel functions that could highlight, when possible, central tendency, minimum and maximum values. As for qualitative data, they have been evaluated and grouped into classes identified *a posteriori*, after the first scrutiny of the rough data and analysed with percentages.
In the next section, the items will be presented singularly, with graphs and tables and, when possible, compared to help the reader visualise the responses. As for the teachers, the Venetian situation will always be compared to the situation of the rest of the country.

4.3. Results

In this section, the single items will be presented with the help of some graphs and tables that should help the reader compare the key information regarding the student group and the teacher group, as well as the differences and similarities between teachers operating in the Veneto region and teachers operating in other regions.
Before proceeding with the analysis of the results, we want to explain the reasons behind the exclusion of some questionnaire responses:

- *Questionnaire A*: 69 responses excluded because of the region choice[106]; 2 responses excluded because of the wrong school degree[107]. Total invalid responses: 71;
- *Questionnaire B*: 17 responses excluded due to the wrong school degree[108]; 3 responses excluded because the system registered the same questionnaire twice[109]; 3 responses excluded because the respondent did not fulfil the criterion of being a teacher[110]; 1 response excluded due to the incoherence of the answers[111]. Total invalid responses: 24.

Hence, the total amount of valid responses was:

- 579 valid responses for Questionnaire A;
- 229 valid responses for Questionnaire B - teachers from Italy; 59 valid responses for Questionnaire B – teachers from Veneto.

All the questions presented in this section were translated from the language of administration (Italian) into English.

4.3.1. Personal information

The first section of both surveys concerned personal information: gender, school, class or age and region. The questions about personal details in Questionnaire A were items 1-5 and 8, whereas the questions in Questionnaire B were items 1-6. The respondents

[106] Subject n. 4, 16, 27, 30, 32-33, 37-38, 49-50, 87, 95, 106, 109-110, 271-272, 275-277, 386-387, 603, 619-623, 624-626, 628-642, 645-650.
[107] Subject n. 76, 199.
[108] Subject n. 53-54, 70, 88, 112-113, 126, 140-141, 160, 163, 179, 187-188, 216, 228, 230.
[109] Subject n. 12, 62, 229.
[110] Subject n. 1-2, 5.
[111] Subject n. 108.

to the survey were in both cases mostly females. The students' questionnaire was filled in by a total of 439 (75.95%) female, 134 (23.18%) male and 5 (0.87%) genderfluid/non-binary/agender students; invalid responses: 1. The teachers' questionnaire was filled in by 56 (94.92%) female and 3 (5.08%) male teachers from the Veneto region. As for teachers from the whole country, the respondents were 211 (92.14%) females and 18 (7.86%) males.

The age of Venetian teachers ranged from 25 to 63 years old, with average 47, mode 60 and median 50. As for the Italian situation, the range varied from 25 to 65, average 35, mode 35 and median 43. Hence, in the survey in both cases were involved teachers with decades of experience and young teachers, who are fresh to the world of teaching.

The pupils were students studying in Venetian *licei* in the 57.17% of the cases (331 responses), technical schools in the 25.73% (149 responses) and training schools in the 16.93% (98 responses). 1 student did not specify any school. The learners attending the second year were 121 (20.90%), 142 for the third year (24.53%), 132 for the fourth (22.80%) and 184 for the fifth (31.78%). All students in the survey were studying in the Veneto region.

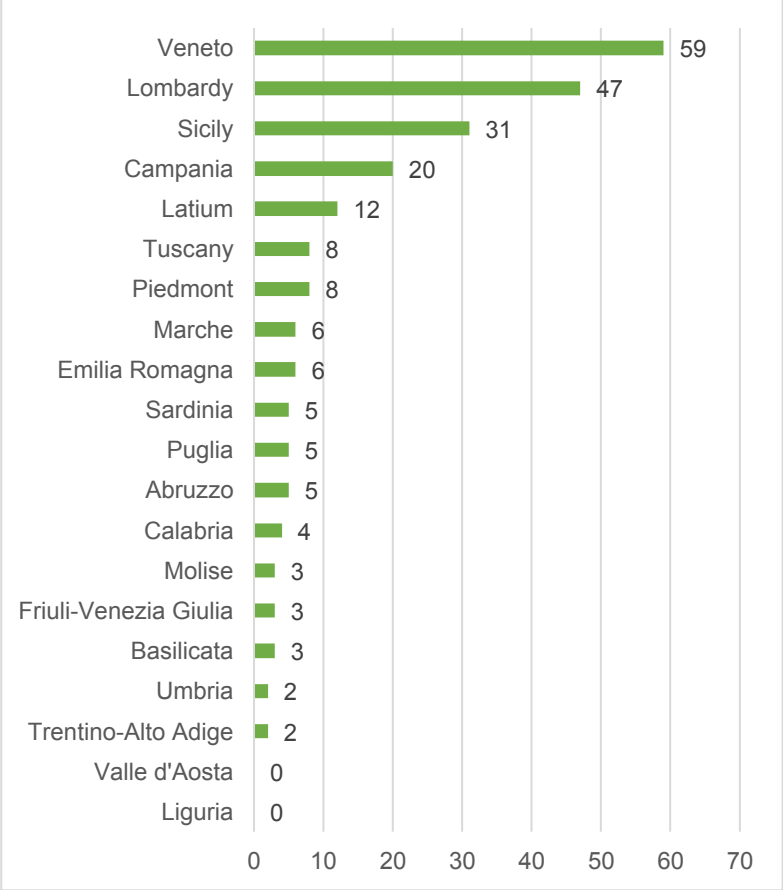
On the other hand, the interviewed teachers from the Veneto region teaches mostly in *licei* (49.15%, 29 responses), followed by technical high schools (42.37%, 25 responses) and training schools (23.73%, 14 responses). The remaining 3.39% (2 responses) taught in other schools or did not specify any school; of the 59 interviewees, 11 teachers (18.64%) taught in two different schools. Of the 48 respondents who specified it, 100% of the teachers operated in the last three classes of high school (III, IV and V), and 83.33% (40 responses) in the first two (I, II). Moreover, 56/59 respondents specified the number of classes in which they taught. The majority (55.36%, 31 respondents) taught 3 to 5 classes, followed by 6 to 10 (35.71%, 20 respondents). As for the Italian situation, 54.59% (125) of the interviewees taught in a *liceo*, 35.37% (81) in technical schools and 20.52% (47) in training schools the remaining 3.06% (7 respondents taught in other kinds of schools, middle schools or did not specify any school). 30 teachers (13.10%) taught in two schools and 1 teacher

stated to teach in 3 schools. 176 respondents (76.86%) out of 229 specified in which classes they operated: 93.18% (164) taught in the last three years of secondary school, 80.68% (142) in the first two. Finally, 211 out of 229 interviewees indicated the number of classes in which they taught: 58.77% (124) taught in 3 to 5 classes and 32.23% (68) taught in 6 to 10 classes.

The highest number of teachers taught in the Veneto region (59, 25.76%), followed by Lombardy (47, 20.52%), Sicily (31, 13.54%), Campania (20, 8.73%) and Latium (12, 5.24%). There were 0 respondents from Liguria and Valle d'Aosta, hence surveys came from 18 out of 20 regions (Graph 1).

GRAPH 01

Teachers: region where teachers teach, item 6



Most of the interviewees who teaches in the Veneto region teaches English language (49.15%, 29 respondents), followed by German (25.42%, 15 respondents) and Spanish

(13.56%, 8 respondents). 3 respondents (5.08%) teach Russian language, 2 Italian L2 (3.39%), 1 French and 1 Chinese language (1.69% respectively). English appeared to be also the most taught language according to the Italian situation highlighted from Questionnaire B (64.19%, 147 responses), followed by German (13.10%, 30) and Spanish (11.35%, 15). 6.55% of respondents teaches French (15 people) and 2.18% Chinese language (5 people). Both Russian and Italian L2 had 3 responses (1.31% respectively).

As it is taught in all upper secondary schools, English language is also the most frequently chosen one by pupils to refer to in the questionnaire (consequently, English teachers will be the most analysed in the study), with a total of 349 respondents out of 579 (60.28%). 101 students referred to Spanish (17.44%), 46 to German (7.94%), 38 to Russian (6.56%), 22 to French (3.80%), 10 to Chinese (1.73%), 8 to Italian L2 (1.38%) and 5 (0.86%) referred to another language, not present in the list.

4.3.2. Instruments, methods, platforms for DL and DAE

The first part of the section investigated the instruments available to the respondents for online classes, in order to detect issues with inadequate instrumentations (items 5-7 Quest. A; items 7-9 Quest. B). Anyway, we did not detect any significant issue. In fact, 100% of teachers and 98.10% of students (568/579 subjects) is in possession of either a computer or a tablet to teach or follow online classes. Moreover, the vast majority of teachers (Veneto: 79.66%; Italy: 74.56%) stated that they are in possession of all the instrumentation asked[112]: pc, tablet and smartphone, either personal or shared with other people. Also, more than half of the students stated to be possessors of pc, tablet and smartphone, too (56.30%).

[112] The system registered 1 missing response for subject 3 under the option “tablet” and “smartphone”. Hence, the percentages have been calculated on a basis of 228 instead of 229.

As for the instrumentation available in terms of tools indicated as optimal for following and teaching online classes in Chapter 2 (namely: webcam, microphone, headphones, printer and scanner), less than half of the subjects appear to satisfy all the criteria. In fact, only 41.28% (239/579 respondents) of the interviewed students and the 40.68% of Venetian teachers (24/59) affirmed that they have all the required tools. The situation for the rest of Italy appeared to be similar, with less than the half of the respondents (46.29%, 106/229) stating to be possessors of all five instruments. Anyhow, 100% of the teachers have a webcam, 93.22% a microphone (IT: 97.38%), 69.49% headphones (IT: 69.87%), 64.41% a printer (IT: 67.25%) and 45.76% a scanner (IT: 58.95%). 96.03% of students said that they have a working webcam, 97.75% a microphone, 82.73% headphones, 72.88% a printer and 45.94% a scanner.
Finally, the respondents appear to have a generally good and stable connection: 77.37% of students and 91.53% of teachers (IT: 89.52%) stated that the Internet connection (either cellular or Wi-Fi) is good or very good. Only 4.32% of students and 1.69% of teachers (IT: 3.06%) selected the option "very poor". The picture highlighted by this first part is therefore encouraging: most subjects are equipped with good and varied instrumentations and stable Internet connection. This could help teachers in deciding the materials to be used and the platforms to adopt for DAE. The more available tools, the more varied should be the materials, platforms, and methods.

The following part of the questionnaire concerned the platforms and methods adopted to assess and evaluate. The same question was asked to both students and teachers, who also had to respond to an item that investigated the reasons why they opted for the mentioned platforms and methods.
The highlighted situation showed in all cases that the favourite platform for testing is *Google Forms*, that was mentioned to be "always" or "often" used by 36.06% of students and 59.32% of teachers (IT: 53.71%), followed by *Microsoft Forms*, used by 22.97% of students and 15.25% of teachers (IT: 10.48%). Venetian teachers also highlighted how audio and video clips are very often used to assess and evaluate

(44.07% and 33.90% respectively), but students stated that audio and video clips were used to evaluate and assess only in 7.77% and 3.63% of cases. The reasons might be found in the relatively small number of interviewees or in the students: in fact, the students who participated to this study were in a large number part of the same classes or schools, due to the fact that the survey was not proposed by all the teachers involved in the study to their students. Debates appear also to be used by teachers in 10.17% of cases and students in 8.46%. The lowest scores in terms of use in class were registered, for students, for the following platforms and methods: *Quizlet*, *Socrative*, *NowComment*, *Edublogs*, *Flipgrid*, *Newsela*, *Wakelet*, *ScribaEpub*, *WebQuests*, with "never" all ranging between 95.34% and 99.48%. The question was different for the teachers, who confirmed the trend highlighted by the students in most cases (from 91.53% to 100% of cases): *Quizizz*, *Socrative*, *NowComment*, *Edublogs*, *Flipgrid*, *EdPuzzle*, *Newsela*, *Wakelet*, *ScribaEpub*, *WebQuests* and e-tandems were never used in class, either because teachers do not know the platforms/methods or because they do not want to use them in class. *Newsela* is the least known and popular (not known by 91.53% of the total of Venetian teachers, 54/59 and not used in the 100% of the cases), followed by *ScribaEpub* (not known by 88.14% of the interviewees and not used in 100% of cases). The situation highlighted by the teachers from the rest of the country is slightly different with the most used platforms and methods, 10.04% stated that *Kahoot* is "often" or "always" used in class, alongside with social networks (also 10.04%). The least popular platforms are once again: *Socrative*, *NowComment*, *Edublogs*, *Flipgrid, Newsela*, *Wakelet* and *ScribaEpub* together with e-tandems, not used in 91.27% to 98.69% of cases.

The reasons behind the choice of the platforms indicated by the 59 (IT: 221/228) teachers who stated to use at least one of the aforementioned platforms or methods to assess and evaluate the students during DL, categorised in classes after analysing the data, could be linked to three main categories:

- *convenience* (e.g.: the platform is easy to use and be proposed to the students, allows to correct easily, the teacher learnt how to use it confidently, is suitable for reusing or is free): 49.15% (IT: 46.15%) of the teachers;
- *obligation* (i.e.: the school obliged or chose for the teachers the instruments, tools, or platforms to be used for DAE): 37.29% (IT: 28.05%) of the respondents;
- *suitability* to the kind of test wanted or to assess a specific competency (such as to evaluate oral or written skills): 25.43% (IT: 24.89%) of the interviewees.

Other explanations given were: suitableness to diversify, stratify or to ameliorate the teaching action, reliability, suitableness to the students' abilities or to the teaching method and others, less significant in terms of numbers answers (see Table 1).

TABLE 01 **Teachers: Reasons for the choice of platforms methods, item 10**

	Veneto		Italy	
	n. responses	% on valid responses	n. responses	% on valid responses
Convenience (easy to use, easy to correct, I learnt how to use them, reusable, free)	29	49.15%	102	46.15%
Chosen or imposed by the school	22	37.85%	62	28.05%
Suitable for the kind of test or to evaluate a specific component	15	25.42%	55	24.89%
Suitable to diversify, stratify or ameliorate teaching	6	10.17%	16	7.24%
Reliability	3	5.08%	28	12.67%
Suitable to or easy for the students	2	3.39%	14	6.33%
Students' engagement and motivation boosted	1	1.69%	26	11.76%
Suitable for formative assessment or to monitor progresses	1	1.69%	8	3.62%
It helps reducing the gap generated by DL	--	--	6	2.71%
Suitable for feedback	--	--	2	0.90%
Respondents:	59		229	
Valid responses:	59		221	

Two responses were particularly interesting: two teachers explained thoroughly why they chose the aforementioned instruments, also mentioning a comparison between in-

presence education or with the first emergency period (II period 2019/2020 school year).

"In realtà per le verifiche scritte uso sempre Google Documenti, che mi permette di entrare nelle verifiche finché gli alunni le svolgono. Dopo le prime esperienze negative dello scorso anno, ho appurato che la via più seria è la verifica personalizzata (ogni alunno la sua, ma equivalente a quella dei compagni). Proprio per elaborare questo tipo di verifiche Documenti mi è sembrato utile. Le registrazioni audio servono soprattutto a tenere sotto controllo la pronuncia, che in questo periodo incontra difficoltà. I video sono amatissimi dagli studenti, come tutti i lavori creativi"[113].

(SUBJ. 25 – Veneto)

"Le ho trovate efficaci e sono servite anche ad alleggerire la lezione rendendola meno teorica. Purtroppo la DAD ha sensibilmente ridotto la possibilità di usare metodologie didattiche tipiche dell'apprendimento linguistico come ad esempio il role play che rendono più agile e anche più proficuo l'apprendimento"[114].

(SUBJ. 42 – Lombardy)

The following questions for both Questionnaire A (item 10-14) and B (items 12-13) aimed at highlighting the most used and favourite typology of test and the frequency of testing, with item 13 of questionnaire B asking the teachers to specify the reason why a certain method is their favourite. Grouping together the options "often" and "always" (item 10), the most used ways of testing from the point of view of the students revealed to be, in order: oral contribution during a video lesson (79.62%), submission of Word/PDF documents via learning platform (54.58%) and live written test during a video lesson with the webcam on (51.81%). On the contrary, the least used methods appeared to be the ones involving group works to hand in only (19.00%) and group works with PowerPoint presentations (25.56%). The same trend is confirmed by the teachers (item 12[115]), who stated to use in most cases, during DL, oral contributions

[113] *Cfr.*: "To be honest, for written tests I always use Google Documents, that allows me to access the tests while the students are writing them. After last years' first negative experiences, I realised that the most reliable way [of evaluating] is with personalised tests (every learner has their own different one, but equivalent to the other students'). Right in order to create these kinds of tests, Documents seemed useful. Audio recordings are especially useful to monitor pronunciation, especially difficult during this time. Videos are particularly enjoyed by the students, like all creative tasks". Our translation.

[114] *Cfr.*: "I found them [the platforms] effective and they were useful to lighten the lesson, making it less theoretical. Unfortunately, DL significantly reduced the possibility to use learning methodologies typical of language learning, such as role-playing, that also make learning easier and more meaningful". Our translation.

[115] Veneto – Total responses: 59. Invalid responses: "Submission of Word/PDF documents via learning platform": 1;

(Veneto: 98.31%; IT: 97.82%), followed by submission of files via learning platforms (Veneto: 89.66%; IT: 88.94%). Written contributions on learning platforms alongside with submission of tasks via e-mail revealed to be the third most used methods for DAE by Venetians teachers both with a score of 79.88%. As for the Italian situation, written contributions and submission via e-mail respectively scored 80.80% and 74.45% of consents. E-mails were the fourth-most-used method highlighted also from the point of view of the students. The three least used methods, according to teachers from all over the country, are: group works with presentation (71.19%; IT: 66.38%), live written tests (61.02%; IT: 63.33%) and group works to hand in only (54.24%; IT: 58.52%), thus above all confirming the tendency to favour group work less than the other evaluation modalities. Anyhow, we want to highlight that the number of teachers who stated to have adopted group work to assess their student did not decrease significantly if compared to in-presence modalities. In fact, it registered a 3.39% drop in DAE only for group work with presentation only in the case of the Veneto region (IT: +2.62%), and a stable score for group work with no presentation (IT: +12.67%)[116]. Keeping group work modalities for DAE processes could be connected with the teachers' desire to engage their students in in situations that encourage cooperation, collaboration and socialisation. Group activities involve interaction with one another, a process that could help recreating the real classroom relationships that would have taken place in a non-emergency classroom environment. Another reason could be that students might feel their creativity and willing to learn more fostered when socialising, becoming more active in the process of learning.

Finally, as for written tests, teachers revealed the reasons why they do not choose this method when answering item 13: reliability. In fact, teachers consider written tests as

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Italy – Total responses: 229. Invalid responses: "Live written test during a video lesson": 4; "Written comments/contributions": 5; "Submission of Word/PDF documents via learning platform": 3; "Submission of Word/PDF documents via e-mail": 2.

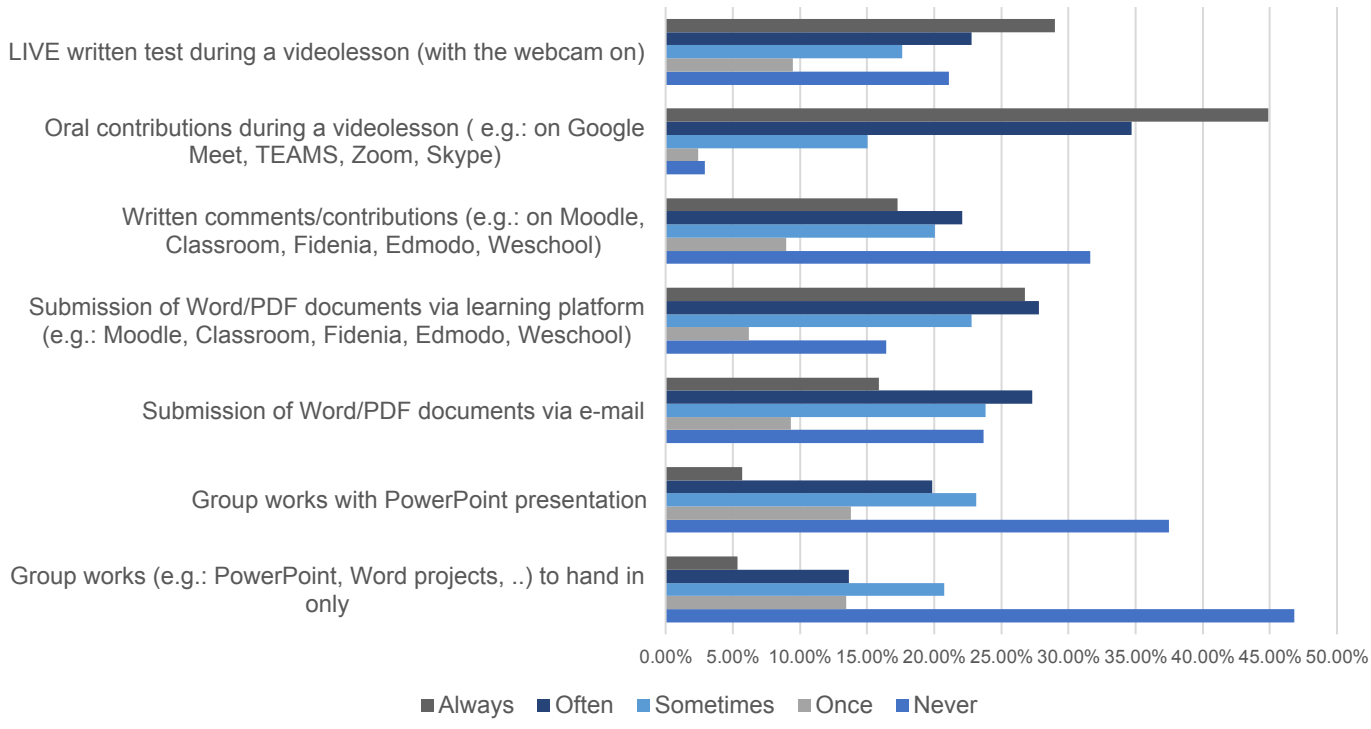
Invalid responses were considered due to the selection of either "In distance learning" or "In in-presence" + "I do not use this method".

[116] Group works with presentation: Veneto: 54.24% → 54.24% (+0%); Italy: 63.76% → 66.38% (+2.62%);
Group works to hand in only: Veneto: 74.58% → 71.19% (-3.39%); Italy: 45.85% → 58.52% (+12.67%).

difficult to perform in the online classroom, due to the availability of instruments that the students might recur to during the test, especially when written. The cause behind the fact that submitting assignments via e-mail, although very popular, is less popular than submission of documents and written comments on the learning platforms might be due to the fact that most schools regularly use an online classroom platform (such as *Google Classroom, Moodle* or *WeSchool*) that allows fast upload of documents in dedicated areas, where teachers can easily correct and comment, register the grade obtained and hence monitor the students' progresses. Also, students are automatically notified with an e-mail sent by the system every time a comment is added.

GRAPH 02

Students: methods to evaluate and assess in DL contexts, item 9



The methods to submit and assess written work have deeply changed if compared to in-presence: all these methods registered an increase between +30.51% and +52.54%

in the case of Venetian teachers and +35.68% and 52.23% in the case of Italian teachers[117].

As for the most selected options (oral, document submission on learning platforms written contributions and submission of documents via e-mail), the reasons were highlighted by the answers to item 13 (Quest. B), that asked which methods are favoured by the teachers and why. Out of 59 teachers from the Veneto region, 55 answered to the first part of the item, namely "Which methods do you prefer to evaluate your students?". The teachers' favourite method, confirming the answers of item 12, appeared to involve oral modalities, with 70.91% of the total of agreements (IT: 70.05%), followed by written[118] with 60.00% of mentions (IT: 52.07%). The third favourite modality, not present in the options given in item 12, is in presence, with 11/55 respondents (20.00%; IT: 27/217, 12.44%) specifically mentioning this modality in their answers. Then, teachers mentioned in their answers the tests that involve competencies, authentic tasks and active learning (18.18%, IT 9.22%) as their favourite method. Other common answers concerned presentations and live testing and continuous, formative assessment, group work or submission of files, especially when the Italian panorama is involved (see Table 2).

TABLE 02 **Teachers: favourite methods for DAE, item 13a**

	Veneto		Italy	
	n. responses	% on valid responses	n. responses	% on valid responses
Oral	39	70.91%	152	70.05%
Written	33	60.00%	113	52.07%
In-presence testing	11	20.00%	27	12.44%
Competency-based/authentic tasks/active learning	10	18.18%	20	9.22%

[117] Submission of Word/PDF documents via e-mail: Veneto: 42.37% → 72.88% (+30.51%); Italy: 38.77% → 74.45% (+35.68%);
Submission of Word/PDF documents via learning platform: Veneto: 48.28% → 89.66% (+41.38%); Italy: 42.92% → 88.94% (+46.02%);
Written comments/contributions: Veneto: 20.34% → 72.88% (+52.54%); Italy: 28.57% → 80.80% (+52.23%).

[118] Written tests in most cases were intended not in the *traditional* test written on paper, but rather with platforms such as Google Forms.

Presentations	7	12.73%	27	12.44%
Live testing	7	12.73%	14	6.45%
Continuous, *in itinere*, formative assessment	5	9.09%	11	5.07%
In groups/pairs	4	7.27%	16	7.37%
Submission of file	4	7.27%	18	8.29%
Feedback and self-assessment	2	3.64%	5	2.30%
Evaluation grids	--	--	3	1.38%
Cooperative learning	--	--	3	1.38%
Summative evaluation	--	--	1	0.46%
Respondents:	59		229	
Valid responses:	55		217	

The reasons appear clear when the second part of item 13 ("Why?") is analysed. In fact, the choice being guided mainly by the aim of the test was mentioned by 28.46% (IT: 19.33%, third most mentioned reason) of Venetian teachers responding to item 13b (15/39). Reliability was the second most popular answer, with 35.90% (IT: 46.00%, most important reason) and the possibility of evaluating competencies and language-specific components was the third most cited reason, with 39.77% (IT: 30.00%, second most selected reason) of Venetian teachers mentioning it, especially concerning oral tests. Reliability was very often connected with the fact that students tend to cheat during written tests and hence with the fact that the grades obtained did not reflect the usual or the real performances of the students. Other popular answers were the suitability to the students' characteristics and the fact that digital tools allow easy differentiation and stratification and the possibility of interaction with the selected kind of test or the lack of socialisation with other kinds of tests, as well as convenience, in terms of easiness to use a certain modality, time required to administer the test and/or to correct it (see Table 3).

TABLE 03 **Teachers: reason for favouring a specific method for DAE, item 13b**

	Veneto		Italy	
	n. responses	% on valid responses	n. responses	% on valid responses
Aim of the test	15	38.46%	29	19.33%
Reliability, efficacy	14	35.90%	69	46.00%

Evaluation of competencies or language-specific skills	12	30.77%	45	30.00%
Suitability to the students/to differentiate	6	15.38%	15	10.00%
Interaction and socialisation	6	15.38%	17	11.33%
Easy to use, convenient	3	7.69%	16	10.67%
Allows creativity and self-expression	3	7.69%	8	5.33%
Evaluation and monitor of progresses	2	5.13%	8	5.33%
Graphical interface	2	5.13%	2	1.33%
Allows objective correction	1	2.56%	5	3.33%
Facilitate and motivate student, avoid anxious situations	--	--	4	2.67%
Self-assessment opportunity for the teacher	--	--	1	0.67%
Official instrument that keeps tracks of obtained grades	--	--	1	0.67%
Respondents: Valid responses:	59 39		229 150	

Some teachers, who selected multiple kinds of tests also indicated the reason behind every choice, sometimes also mentioning the issues encountered with previous attempts with other kinds of tests:

"Durante la dad prove di competenza (scritte), brevi compiti di realtà (scritte).
La valutazione dell'orale in dad è molto difficile (causa problemi frequentissimi di audio estudenti riescono a leggere, difficoltà nell'interzione e suoi tempi [di latenza])"[119].

(SUBJ. 28 – Veneto)

"Verifiche scritte individuali in presenza, verifiche orali anche in DAD. Con [Google] Moduli, con esercizi particolari molto differenziati si riesce ad avere una qualche credibilità. Con anche due o tre file, gli studenti dimostrano evidenti copiature e aiuti da internet/ WhatsApp tra studenti...
Solo esercizi di scrittura libera su foglio con webcam accesa su spazio di lavoro, fotografia immediata del materiale compilato garantiscono un po' l'autenticità ma rappresentano una enorme difficoltà di correzione (le immagini spesso sono sfuocate e non ci sono strumenti di correzione di facile utilizzo: un incubo!)"[120],

(SUBJ. 40 – Veneto)

"Registrazione di audio e video per monitorare i miglioramenti nella pronuncia e nella fluency. Verifiche scritte in presenza perché più attendibili. Test su Google Moduli a distanza a tempo con scelta multipla per monitorare l'apprendimento grammaticale. Domande in aula o in videoconferenza Meet per vedere l'andamento dello studio del lessico. Dialoghi role play preparati in gruppo e presentati alla classe in aula o

[119] *Cfr.*: "In DL (written) competency tests, and (written) reality tasks.
Evaluation of oral performances during DL is very difficult (due to very frequent issues with the audio and students that manage to read, difficulty in interaction and its [latency] times)". Our translation.

[120] *Cfr.*: "Individual written tests in presence, oral tests in DL, too. With [Google] Forms, with particular exercises very differentiated, you manage to have a certain reliability. With two or three different tests, the students demonstrate evident signs of cheating and some kinds of Internet/WhatsApp support between students…
Only exercises of free writing on paper with the webcam set on the working space, with a photograph of the material created taken [and sent] right after the test, guarantee reliability a little, but constitute a huge difficulty in correcting (the pictures are often out of focus and there are no easy-to-use instruments to correct: a nightmare!)". Our translation.

in Meet. Ricerche di gruppo con presentazione Google o Ppt o jamboard alla classe. Test di lessico o di ascolto in aula. Lavori tipo testi o risposte a domande consegnati in Classroom"[121].

(SUBJ. 183 – Veneto)

"Trattandosi di una lingua straniera prediligo l'interrogazione orale intesa come interazione in lingua straniera su macro-argomenti trattati in classe e che permettano una personalizzazione dei contenuti. Le prove scritte, pur facendone anche in didattica a distanza, sono preferibili in presenza, non tanto per evitare copiature, ma perché non sempre è scontato che gli alunni sappiano computare correttamente i caratteri speciali della lingua straniera"[122].

(SUBJ. 213 – Veneto)

Concerning the reasons why to opt for a certain platform or modality, we decided to ask the teachers to evaluate the impact of their knowledge of the platforms and technology, the instrumentation possessed (also by the students and the one made available by the school and their *relationship* with technology. Interviewees could also add any other personal opinion (see Graph 3). The choices appeared to be homogeneous both for the Venetian and the Italian situation, with the most influent factor identified in the instruments that the school made available, the guidelines and the connection that the school offers (69.49%; IT: 67.69%). One teacher specified:

"Gli strumenti NON vengono messi a disposizione dalla scuola. Uso i miei strumenti personali. Quanto alla connessione, funziona benissimo il mio wifi da casa, molto peggio la connessione wifi da scuola (quando la classe è in Dad e il docente a scuola)"[123].

(SUBJ. 18 – Veneto)

[121] *Cfr.*: "Audio and video recording to monitor progresses in pronunciation and fluency. Written tests in presence because they are more reliable. Remote tests on Google Forms with time limits with multiple choice to monitor grammar learning. Questions during [physical] classes or during Meet videoconferences to verify vocabulary progresses. Role-play dialogues developed in groups and presented in the physical classroom or on Meet. Group works with Google or Ppt or Jamboard presentations to the class. Vocabulary or listening texts in presence. Assignments such as texts or answers to questions handed in on Classroom". Our translation.

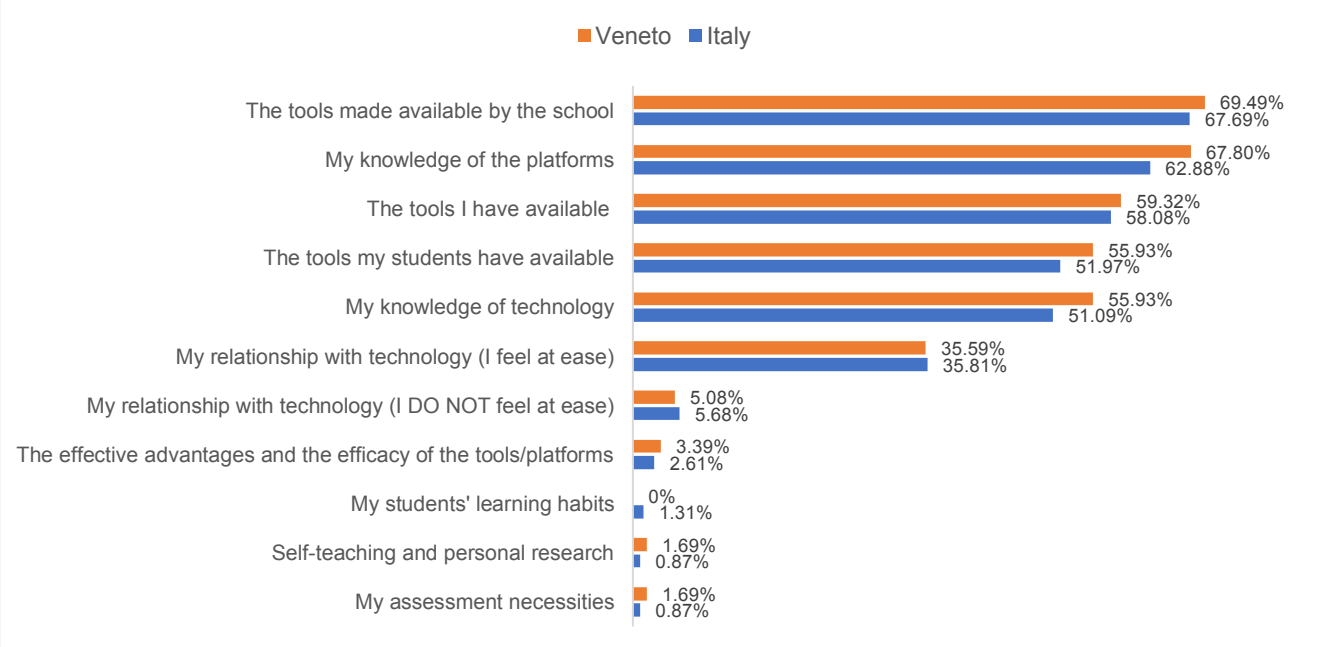
[122] *Cfr.*: "Since I am dealing with a foreign language, I prefer oral tests in the meaning of interaction in a foreign language about macro-topics dealt with in class, and that allow content personalization. Written tests, although I still do them during distance learning, are preferable in presence, not so much to avoid cheating, as because it is not always obvious that the students know how to correctly compute special characters of the foreign language". Our translation.

[123] *Cfr.*: "The tools are NOT made available by the school. I use my own personal instrumentation. As for the connection, the Wi-Fi from home works perfectly, while the Wi-Fi connection at school works a lot worse (when the class is DL and the teacher is at school)". Our translation.

The second and third most selected options were the ones concerning knowledge of the platforms (67.80%; IT: 62.88%) and the tools available the teachers have available (59.32%; IT: 58.08%) and the ones available to the students (51.09%). We can therefore state that tools have a great influence on the teachers' choices, since more than the half of the interviewees selected at least one of the three options about the tools. Of course, knowledge of the platforms is determining in terms of educational choices: in order to assess correctly and reliably, teachers need to be confident in using a certain platform or modality, mastering the tools and foreseeing the highest number of scenarios possible. Among the ones who specified it (Veneto: 40.67%, 24/59; Italy: 41.49%, 95/229), the vast majority affirmed to feel at ease with technology (87.50%; IT: 86.32%). We might assume that the teachers who did not select either option have no strong opinions concerning technology. Anyway, we find encouraging that only in few cases technology generated strong opinions of difficulty. Other options selected and added by the teachers to the original categories concerned the effectiveness of the tools adopted, the students' learning habits, personal research and assessment necessities.

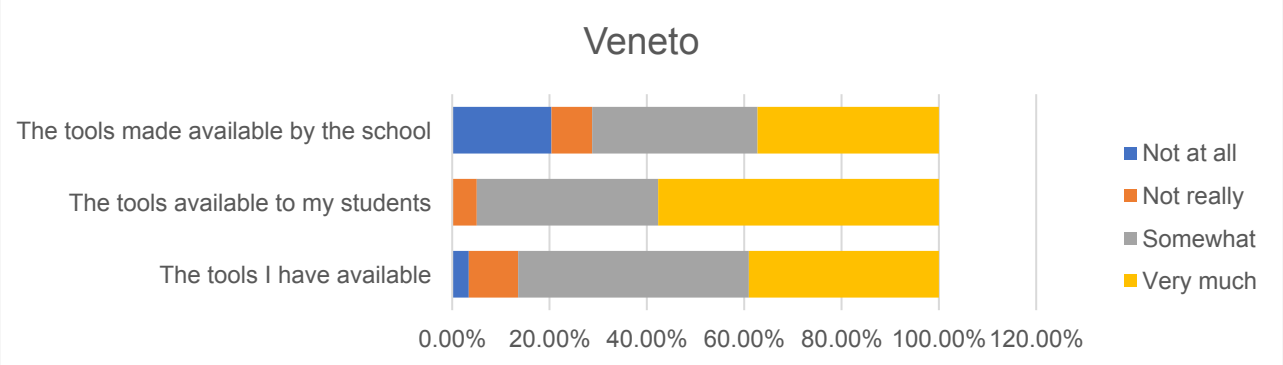
GRAPH 03

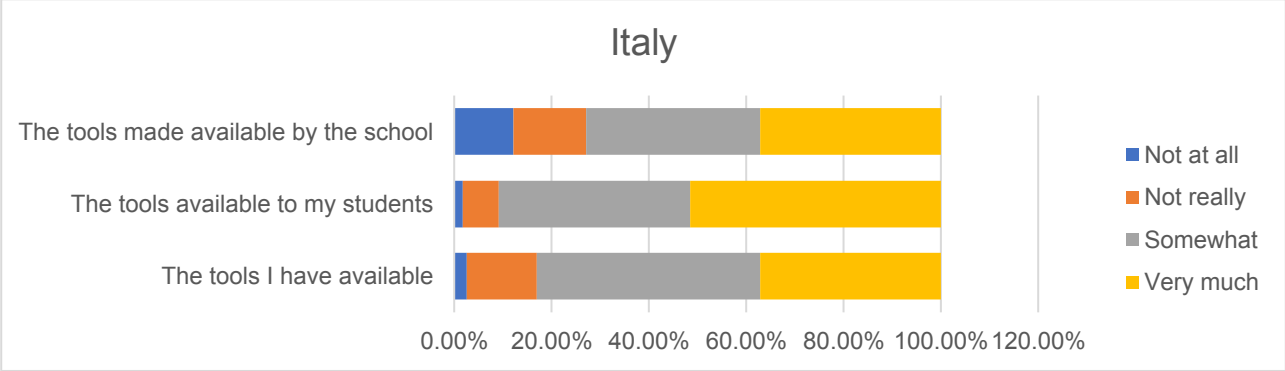
Teachers: factors influencing the choice of platforms and methods in DL, item 14



We also asked the teachers to which extent the instruments available influenced the testing modalities (item 15) and to assess instruments available, the knowledge of technology and of the platforms and the relationship with technology (item 16).
According to the data analysed, all the factors are considered "somewhat" or "very much" influent at least by the 71.19% of Venetian respondents and by 72.93% of the overall respondents (the tools made available by the school). The most influent of the three given options, anyway appears to be the one concerning the tools available to the students, with a peak of 94.92% (IT: 90.83%) of agreements, followed by the resources available to the teacher (86.44%; IT: 82.97%). The cause of the answers might be that the teachers have to adapt to the students' tools especially, which are a high number, and which might be very varied depending on each class: bad connection, lack of adequate devices or instrumentations (e.g.: headphones or microphone) could deeply influence the teacher's choices, that would maybe be different if all the learners were in possession of optimal resources. The option "the tools made available by the school" might be considered less important because many schools do not impose a specific method or instrument for DAE, or because the school does not give the teachers tools suitable for their purposes. Finally, we believe that, since teachers can opt for their preferred modalities and platforms, according to the solution that most suits their tools and needs, the option "the tools I have available" was the least popular (see Graph 4).

GRAPH 04 **Teachers: extent of factor influence on the choice of platforms and methods in DL, item 15**





Item 16, as anticipated, asked the teachers to assess some aspects of DL. As reported in Graph 5, all the given factors, except for the tools available to the students and the tools made available by the school, received a positive evaluation (either "good" or "excellent"). The most positive results were highlighted in the relationship with technology (77.97%; IT: 77.29%), the tools available to the teacher (72.88%; IT: 76.86%) and the teacher's knowledge of technology (64.41%; IT: 72.05%), followed by the teacher's knowledge of the platforms (54.24%; IT: 64.19%). The personal skills and resources possessed by the teachers in Veneto and across Italy trend overall on the positive and adequate. This might be also thanks to the fact that teachers responding to the survey had almost one year (i.e.: from March 2020 to March 2021) to adapt to the DL situation caused by Covid-19. On the other hand, "the tools available to the students" was the option with the lowest scores, with 72.88% (IT: 59.39%) of interviewees stating that the tools are either "poor" or "fair" and followed by "the tools made available by the school", with 57.63% (IT: 54.59%) of negative answers. As for the instrumentation available to the students, the lack of devices or the poor quality of the Internet connection could be linked to the financial difficulties that the families are experiencing. According to *La Repubblica* (2021), the situation was already problematic before the Covid-19 outbreak in March 2020:

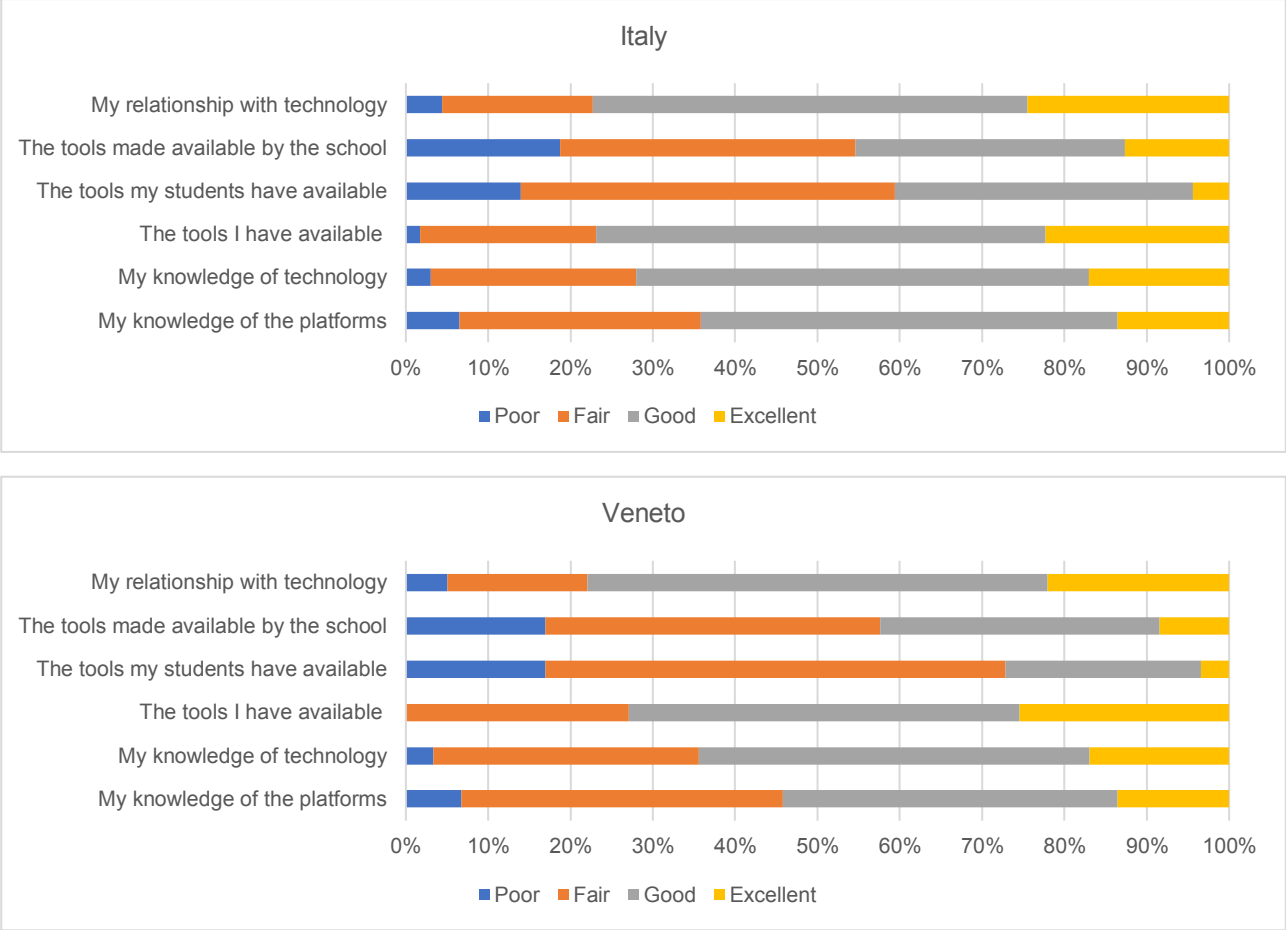
> "Già prima dell'emergenza (2019), il 9,2% delle famiglie con almeno un figlio si trovava in povertà assoluta (contro una media del 6,4%). Quota che tra i nuclei con 2 figli supera il 10% e con 3 o più figli raggiunge addirittura il 20,2%. Ma anche i divari territoriali e

> nella condizione abitativa, con il 41,9% dei minori vive in una abitazione sovraffollata. Un ulteriore aspetto critico è stato rappresentato dai divari tecnologici. Prima dell'emergenza, il 5,3% delle famiglie con un figlio dichiarava di non potersi permettere l'acquisto di un computer. E appena il 6,1% dei ragazzi tra 6- 17 anni viveva in una casa con disponibilità di almeno un pc per ogni membro della famiglia"[124].

The reasons for the tool inadequacy of the students could be therefore linked to the financial crisis, aggravated by the pandemic. As for the tools made available by the schools, teachers could, for example, be looking for a better Internet connection or for more efficient instruments. Although the *Decreto Cura Italia* (March 17, 2020) allocated EUR 85 million for distance learning, of which EUR 10 million to favour the use of e-learning platforms and the amelioration or buying of necessary instrumentations for DL, the answers to item 16 could mean that the efforts made by the schools were not satisfactory in terms of quality.

[124] *Cfr.*: "Even before the emergency (2019), 9.2% of the families with at least a child was in a situation of absolute poverty (compared to an average of 6.4%). Amount that among the family units with 2 children exceeds 10% and with 3 or more children even reaches 20.02%. Not only this, but also territorial disparities and housing conditions, with 41.9% of minors living in an overcrowded house. Another critical aspect is represented by technology gaps. Before the emergency, 5.3% of the families with one child declared to not be available to afford to buy a computer. And only 6.1% of the children between 6 and 17 years old lived in a house with at least one computer for each family member". Our translation.

GRAPH 05 **Teachers: evaluation of factors influencing the choice of platforms and methods in DL, item 16**

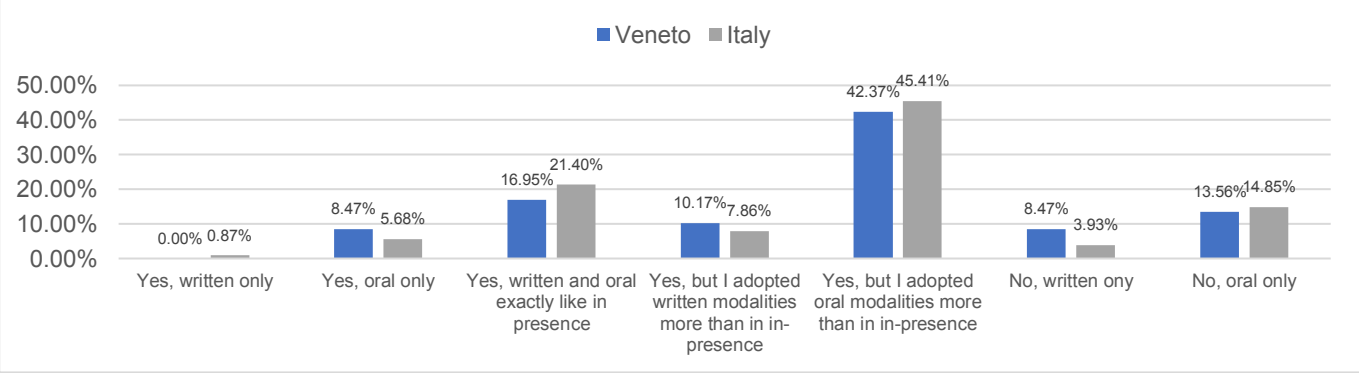


In order to pinpoint the changes in the modalities to test the students in DL compared to in-presence, we asked the students in the items 11-15 and the teachers in item 17 to highlight the frequency of testing and the kinds of tests that have been carried out the most. First of all, we asked the teachers whether they changed the modalities of the tests, comparing DL and in-presence learning. As Graphic 6 shows, the most popular option was the one highlighting an increase in the oral modalities during DL, although keeping also written tests (42.37%; IT: 45.41%), followed by the option that highlighted that the methods remained unaltered when compared to in presence (16.95%; IT: 21.40%) and the one that expressed a change in favour of oral tests only (13.56%; IT: 14.85%). All in all, the increase in in the oral methods and the necessity

to assess students orally is evident also when compared to the choices of adopting written only or more written tests. In fact, the teachers who affirmed to have kept a written only method were 0% in the case of Veneto and 0.87% for the rest of the country. The teachers who stated to have changed the method to written only tests were 8.47% (IT: 3.93%), and those who stated to have adopted a higher number of written tests than in presence amounts to 10.17% (IT: 7.86%). Teachers who stated to have adopted, as it happened in presence, only oral tests amount to the 8.47% (5.68%). Hence, the teachers who stated to have changed their testing methods at least to some extent amount to 74.58% for the Veneto region and to 72.05% for the whole country. This might be linked to the necessity of seeing more points of view than in presence, due to the lack of interaction or due to the reliability of the test (as we have already mentioned, many teachers are afraid that students might cheat especially during written tests). Anyway, another reason could be that teachers and students are already familiar with oral test: the so-called in Italian *interrogazioni* (cfr.: oral tests) are carried out in the same way as they were carried out in presence, except for the fact that conversation is mediated by a screen. Also, oral tests are faster in terms of correction and are especially important in FL learning, since talking is one of the most important components of the language. Finally, teachers might have preferred oral tests also for the interaction with the students itself: being able to read the students and their reactions, to empathise with them, to adapt the content of the test to their abilities, might be especially important for the teacher on the one hand, and for the students on the other hand, who could feel more at ease seeing other people and conversating with them. More generally, we can say that teachers had to adapt their usual testing modalities to the new situation, giving more or less space to testing according to the needs of the teachers themselves, the students and to the learning process.

GRAPH 06

Teachers: changes in the modalities of testing, item 17

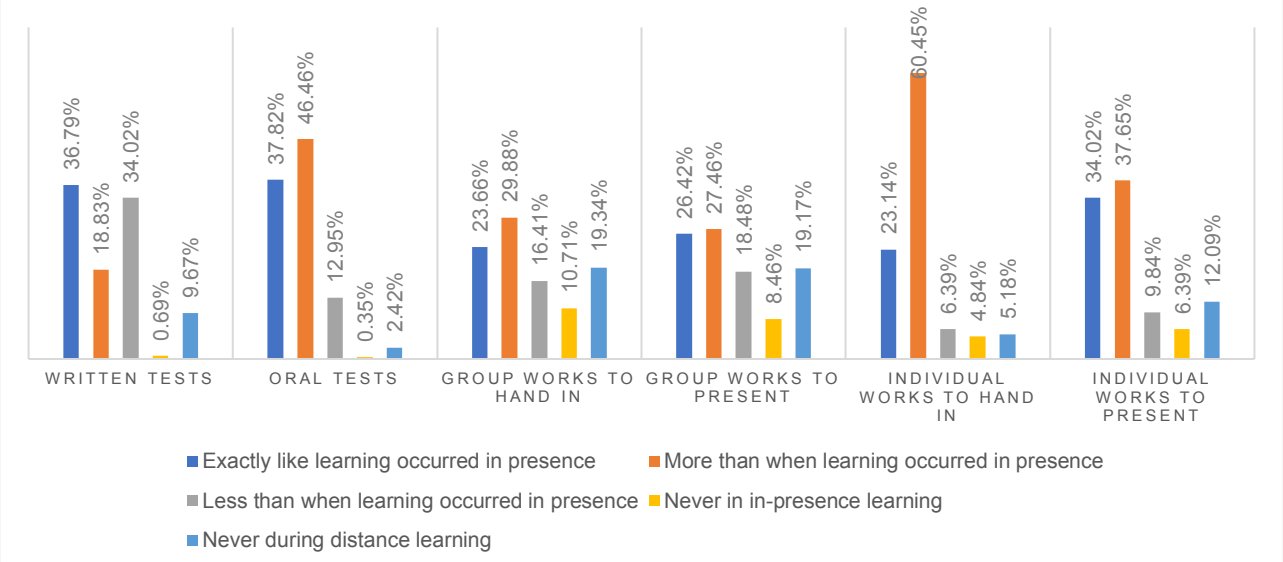


Students were asked which kinds of tests they usually carry out during DL and to compare the answers with the testing modalities in presence. Individual appeared to be the kind of assignments that received the highest increase, with 60.45% of students stating that the amount of individual assignments to hand in has increased during DL times. Oral tests also registered an increase in number: 46.46% of the subjects interviewed stated that oral tests increased during DL. The same increase was registered for individual work to present, group works to hand in and group works to present, respectively with 29.88%, 37.65% and 27.46% of interviewees declaring to use these methodologies more with remote teaching. As for written tests, students stated that this kind of tests is proposed either as frequently as in presence (36.79%) or less frequently than in presence (34.02%), with only 18.83% of students noticing a higher number of written tests. We have to specify that two options in this item recited: "never in in-presence learning" and "never during distance learning", in order to be sure that the students answering to this item could compare the frequency of in-presence and distance education. Therefore, we find important also to highlight that 19.34% of students did not present group works to hand and 19.17% did not have any group work presentation during DL. Anyway, in most cases, as highlighted in Graph 7, the number of learners who stated that the testing modality frequency is the same as

in presence is similar to the number who stated that tests have increased or decreased in number.

Item 11 confirms what the teachers stated in the item explained in the previous paragraph: more oral tests than written tests. The increase in the number of individual assignments to hand in especially could be related with the fact that teachers need to give homework to receive some kind of feedback about the students' progresses and also to have some kind of written material to assess. By assigning a task asynchronously, in fact, teachers can also foster the student's creativity and motivation, ask more complex questions or, for example select personalised options for each student, such as different topics that the learner appreciates or has an interest for.

GRAPH 07 **Students: frequency of testing modalities, item 11**



Referring to the importance of planning the tests in order to help the students feel more at ease (cfr. Chapter 2), we decided to ask the students whether written and oral tests were planned in both DL and in-presence in items 12 and 13.

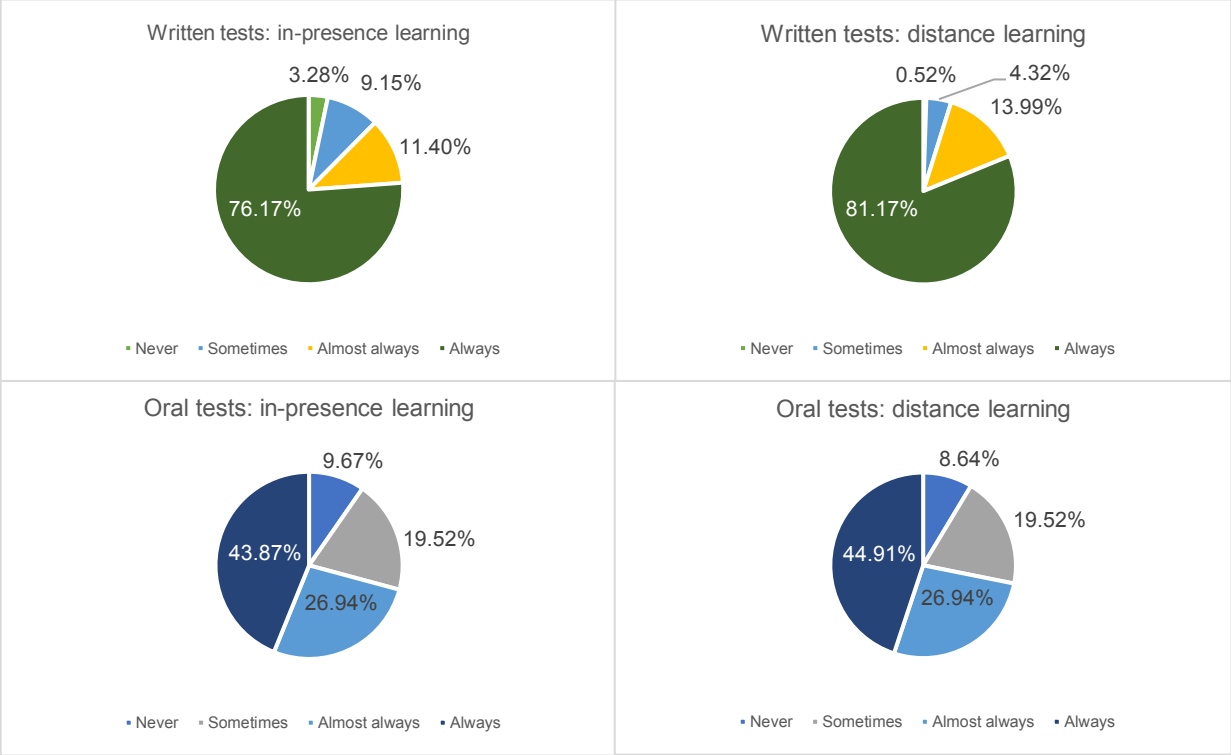
As we can see in Graph 8, written tests were in most cases already planned during in-presence learning, with a score of 87.57% of "always" and "almost always" (with "always" selected in 76.17% of cases) and a score of 3.28% on "never". It is

encouraging, anyway, to see an increase in the number of planned written tests during DL: the students who selected one of these two option were the 95.16% (with "always" selected in 81.17% of cases) of the total, hence reducing the "never" option to only 0.52% of respondent (3/579). A similar situation was highlighted in item 13, asking about the planning of oral tests: a slight increment in the tests planned shows that teachers generally opted for either keeping oral tests planned or to start planning them, making the number of scheduled tests grow from 70.81% to 71.85%.

The fact that written tests happen to be scheduled more frequently than oral tests might be found in different reasons. First of all, written tests are very often used as summative evaluation, hence they require the students to be tested in large parts of the module/curriculum and most teachers prefer to plan in advance these kinds of tests, to help students being less anxious at the moment of the test and hence perform better. It is also true that in live DAE, in many cases, students are required to satisfy some requirements in terms equipment during the test: for example, students might be asked to be constantly surveilled by a second device, or maybe teachers could ask for a specific Google extension or for a specific platform or app to use during for the test. This would mean that students need to be prepared with the right tools before the test, in order to be ready to sit the test. The same is true for oral tests, to some extent. Another reason for the increase of planned tests both in the case of oral and written modalities could be to help the students feel more relaxed and less anxious, since in DAE even more problematic issues (such as connection that might be lost or computers not working) are involved in the psychological load that the pupils have to deal with. Finally, as for the lower number of scheduled oral tests (compared to written tests) could be that teachers think that a language oral test does not need to be planned, since it involves the use of the language itself. In fact, teachers might ask to translate, to talk about personal experiences, to express thoughts or, for example, role-play: something that, to some extent, does not require topic-based knowledge, unlike written tests, that are very often topic-based.

Finally, we asked the students to indicate the frequency of testing sessions compared to learning in presence (item 14). A large part of the students (44.56%) stated that DAE took place with the same frequency as IPAE, but another large part indicated "more often" as their choice (39.90%); only 15.54% indicated less often. It might be true, therefore, that teachers found a balance with the modalities indicated in the items analysed above and the test modalities that satisfy their evaluation needs. Alternatively, teachers might not want to overload or stress their students. In the case the frequency of testing grew, the question does not indicate which kinds of tests are performed. It might be that more oral tests are added to have a direct feedback from the students or to be sure that the students master a certain topic; it could also be that teachers assess more assignments as written tests or that shorter, quicker tests have been added in order to monitor or to verify different skills. Anyway, we can assume from the fact that only 90/579 students indicated that tests take place less frequently, that teachers generally have the need to be sure that students learnt and studied the topics involved in the tests.

GRAPH 08 **Students: planning of the tests, items 12-13**



Items 15 and 16 of Questionnaire A asked the students to express opinions about the time available for written tests in DL.

First of all, we asked the students to say how much time they usually have available for completing a written test in DL (see Table 4). Most students collocated their answers in a time span that ranges from 40 minutes to 60 minutes (95.80%), with the highest scores registered in the 40-49 minutes time span (37.59%) and 60-69 (36.86%). Anyway, some students indicated that the time available varies according to the kind of test and the teacher, indicating also more options, as can be seen in the Table below.

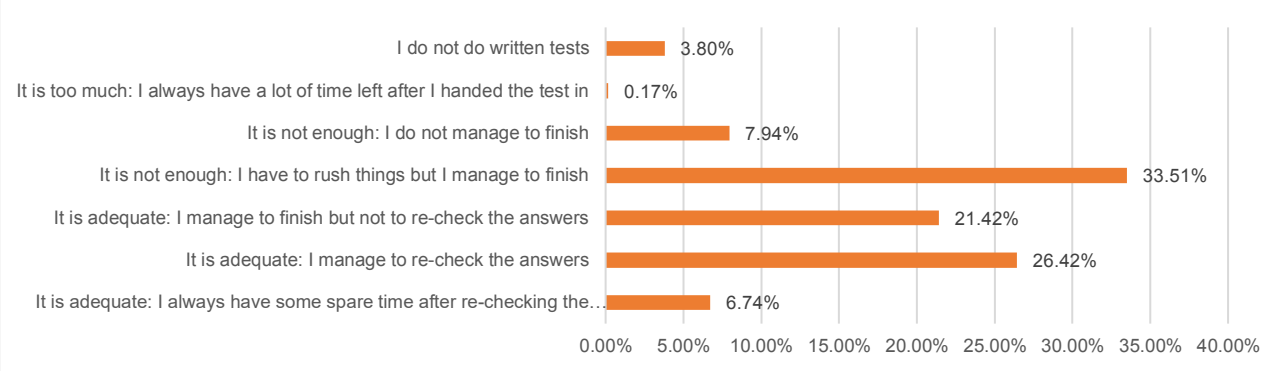
TABLE 04 **Students: time available for live written tests during DL, item 15**

	n. responses	% on valid responses
<15 minutes	4	0.73%

15-29 minutes	24	4.38%
30-39 minutes	59	10.77%
40-49 minutes	206	37.59%
50-59 minutes	117	21.35%
60-69 minutes	202	36.86%
70-89 minutes	13	2.37%
90-119 minutes	4	0.73%
120 minutes	33	6.02%
180 minutes	3	0.55%
Respondents:	579	
Valid responses:	548	
Respondents with 2 options:	113	20.62%
Respondents with 3 options	2	0.36%

The following item asked the students to express opinions about the time available for the written tests. We wanted to inquire if the time given to complete the tasks was enough for the students to feel confident and relaxed, finish all the items of the test with some spare time or with time to check the answers or if the time was not sufficient (see Graph 9). According to the most popular answers, students feel that the time available for the test is sufficient to complete all the tasks, even though they may have to rush in order to finish (33.51%) or they do not manage to re-check the answers (21.42%). Anyway, 26.42% stated that they have enough time also to check the answers, and 6.74% stated that they have some spare time after they checked the answers. On the other hand, 7.94% declared that they consider the time available as not enough to finish the test. The reason why the majority of students (7.94% + 33.51% + 21.42% → 62.87%) seems to have some issues with the time given for the completion of a written test could be due to the choice of the teachers to shorten the test session in order to avoid cheating situations or to choose more difficult or elaborated items, to prevent students from cheating. Another problem could be the student's personal skills in terms of technology: some learners may struggle with digital competencies, and lack the skills to answer quickly on a personal computer or tablet.

GRAPH 09 **Students: time available for DL written tests, item 16**



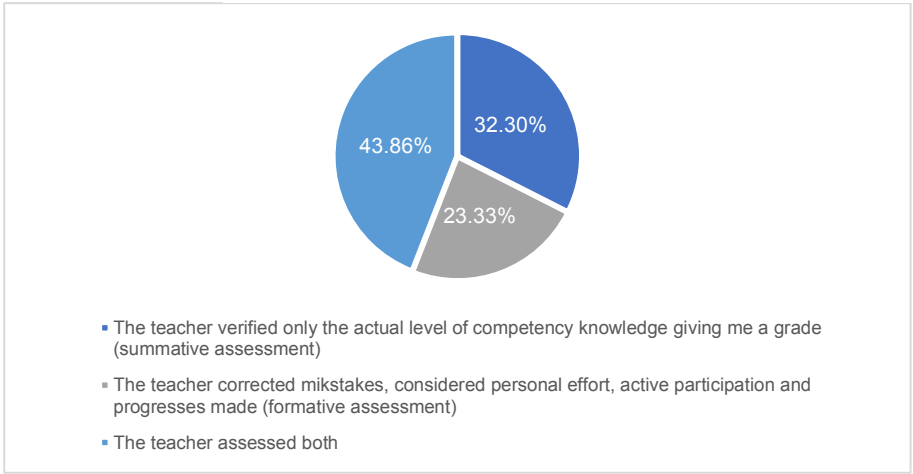
4.3.3. Test reliability

The second research question was investigated by items 17-18 and 25-26 of Questionnaire A and by items 21-25 of Questionnaire B.

First of all, we asked the students to express how their teachers verified language acquisition (item 17): the majority of students (37.65%, 218/576) said that they are only asked to say something they learnt by heart, followed by the options that indicated that they are asked to say what they think of or what they would do in a certain situation (30.22%, 175/579) and that they are asked to use the language knowledge in an authentic situation (29.02%, 168/576). Hence, the difference between the second and the third option was not especially significant. Anyway, if we group together these two options, we can confidently say that the vast majority of teachers favours competency-based and authentic assessment, as desirable during DAE. The reason for these answers could be linked to the fact that authentic and competency-based questions ask students to involve deep thinking and personalisation, hence ensuring more reliability. Other answers added in the section "Other" by the students (3.11%) indicated that teachers ask more than one of the aforementioned options or specified that the teacher frequently asks for translations or for personal elaborations.

Item 18 concerned formative and summative assessment. Out of the 570 students that indicated that the teacher carried out assessment, the majority indicated that both formative and summative assessments are involved in their educational process (43.86%), followed by summative assessment only (32.30%) and finally by formative assessment only (23.33%) (see Graph 10). We find positive that the majority of interviewees indicated that both assessments are provided during the learning process, since formative assessment is particularly important for the learners during remote teaching, as discussed in Chapter 3. On the other hand, we also think that the fact that formative assessment only is less frequent than summative assessment only could be linked to the fact that the Italian school system asks for *official* testing and grades, that are usually connected with summative, final assessment.

GRAPH 10 **Students: formative or summative assessment, item 18**



In items 25-25 of Questionnaire A and items 21-22 we asked the same questions to both groups, to know if the grading system adopted in DAE was the same as the one adopted in presence and the reasons why was or was not changed. Item 25 and 22 did not require a compulsory response. Venetian teachers stated in the majority of cases that they did not evaluate tests in the same way as they would have in presence (52.54%), and the students confirmed that, in most cases, they did not feel that

evaluation of tests was carried out in the same way as in presence (66.15%). As for the rest of the country, teachers seem to agree that the DL affected the grading system, although the group seems divided into two, almost equal parts (50.22% stated that they adopted the same correction method, 115 respondents, 49.78% stated that they changed the correction method at least to some extent, 114 respondents). Table 5 and 6 show the reasons for these answers. The majority of interviewees, in all cases, stated that the main reason could be connected with the reliability of the test: 60.06% of the students and 29.79% of teachers from the Veneto region (IT: 32.28%). Reliability is followed, in the case of students, by lower grades (29.75%) and issues with the online learning environment and lack of feedback (10.20%) on the one hand, and same correction method (9.92%) on the other hand. Hence, students highlighted how teachers, who very often considered tests as *not reliable*, also lowered the grading system or adopted stricter criteria for assessing. Other issues with evaluation were then connected with the lack of interaction and student's feedback. On the contrary, in the students' opinion, other teachers assessed remote testing in the same way they would have done in presence. Venetian teachers stated that the difference in the final evaluation could be connected with the difference in the tests themselves and the introduction of ITC in testing (19.15%; IT: 14.59%) or with the online learning environment (14.89%; IT: 17.46%). Teachers mentioned how they tried to ensure objectivity with the adoption, for example, of assessment grids and standard parameters (12.77%; IT: 14.81%). The overall results coming from the students' and the teachers' responses to the items are aligned, bringing to surface issues with reliability and objectivity of assessment. Both teachers and students mentioned the correction and assessment criteria being changed and adapted to the new modalities of DAE, that in some cases resulted even in higher grades. Students then mentioned the teacher's attempt to discourage the learners from cheating, by adding questions, giving less time, or differentiating the tests. The psychological status of the students was mentioned by both teachers and students as influential during the test performance (i.e. if the students do or do not feel stressed or anxious). Teachers called the issues with technology determining in testing situations.

Furthermore, teachers said that one of the most common reasons for the grades not being lowered was their higher tolerance for mistakes and higher grades, maybe to help students feel more motivated or to show that they are being understood, with the issues determined by technology and the difficulties that remote learning involves.

TABLE 05

Students: reasons behind the teacher's way of assessing, item 26

	n. responses	% on valid responses
Reliability	212	60.06%
Lower grades	105	29.75%
Online learning environment: lack of interaction	36	10.20%
Same correction method/no significant changes	35	9.92%
More criteria added to assessment: active participation, engagement and DL disadvantages	17	4.82%
Teachers know or trust their students, I trust my teacher	13	3.68%
Higher grades	11	3.12%
Grades not consistent with abilities and teacher's favouritisms	11	3.12%
More difficult questions, not enough time	11	3.12%
Active participation and engagement not part of assessment	6	1.70%
Higher number of tests and differentiated tests	4	1.13%
Automatic correction	2	0.57%
DL made DAE more difficult	1	0.28%
Students feel less stressed	1	0.28%
Easier tests	1	0.28%
Respondents:	368	
Valid responses:	353	

TABLE 06

Teachers: reasons behind way of assessing, item 22

	Veneto		Italy	
	n. responses	% on valid responses	n. responses	% on valid responses
Reliability	14	29.79%	61	32.28%
Different tests, changes introduced by ITC	9	19.15%	27	14.29%
Different learning environment	7	14.89%	33	17.46%
Objectivity ensured by assessment grids and standard parameters	6	12.77%	28	14.81%
Higher grades, more tolerance to mistakes	4	8.51%	12	6.35%
Assessment of student's active participation and engagement/ teachers' trust towards their students	4	8.51%	25	13.23%
Same tests or few changes, same student profile	3	6.38%	20	10.58%
No summative assessment	2	4.26%	2	1.06%
Issues with technology, Internet connection and lack of adequate tools	2	4.26%	11	5.82%
Lack of interaction and live feedback	1	2.13%	5	2.65%
Lower grades, stricter pass criteria	1	2.13%	3	1.59%

Assessment of competencies, personal elaborations, deep thinking	1	2.13%	8	4.23%
Remedial tests carried out in presence	--	--	2	1.06%
Less anxious students	--	--	1	0.53%
More anxious students	--	--	1	0.53%
Implemented feedback	--	--	1	0.53%
Respondents:	47		189	

Some responses expressed by interviewees on the reasons why they believe that the grading system changed when DAE is involved are particularly interesting, highlighting the difficulties that the Covid-19 situation brought, or specifying how the grades are lower than they used to be in presence:

Teachers:

"È impossibile valutare allo stesso modo, alcuni studenti non hanno buone competenze digitali o sono lenti a scrivere al computer. Inoltre non tutti gli studenti hanno gli stessi mezzi tecnologici, le famiglie più abbienti con buona connessione internet sono risultate avvantaggiate"[125].

(SUBJ. 223 – Veneto – Strongly disagree)

"Non si possono attribuire ad un'evoluzione umana e formativa delle categorie statiche e prive di stimolo. Il percorso formativo insegnamento/apprendimento si sta evolvendo ed ogni giorno esige malleabilità e spirito di adeguamento"[126].

(SUBJ. 242 – Lombardy – Strongly disagree)

"Non è possibile valutare con la stessa severità della didattica in presenza, viste le diverse problematiche tecnologiche che i ragazzi e le ragazze hanno riscontrato e la mancanza di un confronto diretto, in aula, nello scioglimento di dubbi e perplessità. Il rapporto docente-studente, sia sul piano della relazione, che della didattica, dipende spesso dagli strumenti che gli studenti hanno a disposizione, dalla tranquillità dello spazio di studio, dal supporto delle famiglie, che non è uguale per tutti. Inoltre, le diverse metodologie didattiche adottate e sulle quali i docenti sono formati, sono state studiate per classi in presenza e sono di difficile adattamento ad una classe virtuale"[127].

(SUBJ. 249 – Latium – Somewhat disagree)

Students:

[125] *Cfr*.: "It is impossible to evaluate in the same way, some students do not have good digital competencies, or are slow in typing. Besides, not every student has the same digital instruments, well-off families with a good Internet connection resulted in being advantaged". Our translation.

[126] *Cfr*.: "You cannot classify human and educational evolution into static and not encouraging categories. The educational path of teaching and learning is evolving and requires malleability and spirit of adaptation every day". Our translation.

[127] *Cfr*.: "It is not possible to evaluate with the same strictness as in presence, due to the various technological difficulties that the students experience and to the lack of direct interaction in the classroom, to solve doubts and uncertainties. The teacher-student relationship, both from the point of view of the human relationship and the educational one, often depends on the tools available to the students, from the quietness of the place of study, from the families' support, which is not the same for everyone. Furthermore, the different educational methodologies adopted, on which the teachers were educated, were designed for in-presence contexts and are difficult to adapt to a virtual context". Our translation.

"Per lo stesso principio per cui da quando siamo tornati in presenza al 50% le verifiche e interrogazioni sono quasi raddoppiate:i professori vogliono sfruttare questo tempo in presenza per fare più cose possibili, spesso in modo veloce e non approfondito. Questo, aggiunto al fatto che nella maggior parte delle materie, i voti massimi si sono abbassati a 8 (senza uno specifico motivo, oltretutto) ha comportato un abbassamento della media totale della classe, nella quale solo 2 o 3 persone riescono a spiccare. Il fatto che spicchino solo pochissime persone su una classe di 28 anime ci porta ad un altro importante avvenimento: i professori tendono a guardare ed elogiare solo queste persone, continuando il programma praticamente solo con loro senza nemmeno provare ad aiutare coloro che sono rimasti indietro"[128].

(SUBJ. 156 – Strongly disagree)

"I voti in D.A.D si sono abbassati, più che altro per quanto riguarda le verifiche scritte. Nelle prove orali i voti sono stati abbastanza equiparabili a quelli della didattica in presenza, perchè all'evidenza delle capacità di un alunno non si può mettere un voto non veritiero, anche se occasionalmente ho notato che il massimo dei voti non fosse più molto alto ma si limitasse all'8"[129].

(SUBJ. 521 – Somewhat disagree)

Teachers were asked to consider, in the light of all the answers given, the reliability that they attribute to live written tests, oral tests and group works, to choose the kind of test they think is most reliable and to argue the answers in items 23-25.

Item 23 pinpointed how a very small number of teachers believes that the three ways of assessing produce *more* reliable results (Veneto: 2/59 on group works; Italy: 1/229 on written tests, 4/229 on oral tests, 14/229 for group works). In general, teachers often evaluated as less reliable both written and oral tests (written tests are considered less reliable by 97.94% of the Venetian teachers, and by 91.36% of the Italian teachers; oral tests: 52.54% for Venetian teachers and 49.34% of Italian teachers), but the vast majority of teachers also feel that group works are just as reliable as in presence

[128] *Cfr.*: "For the same reason why since when we went back to 50% of in-presence lessons, oral and written tests are almost doubled: the teachers want to use in-presence time to do the highest number of things possible, often in a fast and superficial way. This, added to the fact that for the majority of subjects the maximum grades were lowered to 8 (without a specific reason, on top of it all), resulted in a drop of the class average, where only 2 or 3 people manage to stand out. The fact that only few people in a class of 28 souls leads us to another important event: the teachers tend to look at and praise only these people, carrying on with the [ministerial] program only with them, without even trying to help those students who lagged behind". Our translation.

[129] *Cfr.*: "The grades in DL were lowered, mainly for what concerns written tests. For oral tests, the grades are more or less comparable to the ones given in in-presence, since in front of the real abilities of a student you cannot give a grade that does not reflect those abilities, even though I sometimes noticed that the maximum grade was not high, and limited to 8 instead". Our translation.

learning (79.63%; IT: 71.98%)[130]. Oral tests are also considered as valid as in presence by 47.46% of Venetian teachers and by 48.90%, pointing at the fact that oral tests are probably the most similar method of assessing to the methods used in presence.
It is also evident (see Graph 11) that the favourite way for DAE is through oral tests, with 55.17% (IT: 55.95%) of preferences[131].

GRAPH 11 **Teachers: favourite kind of test for reliability, item 24**

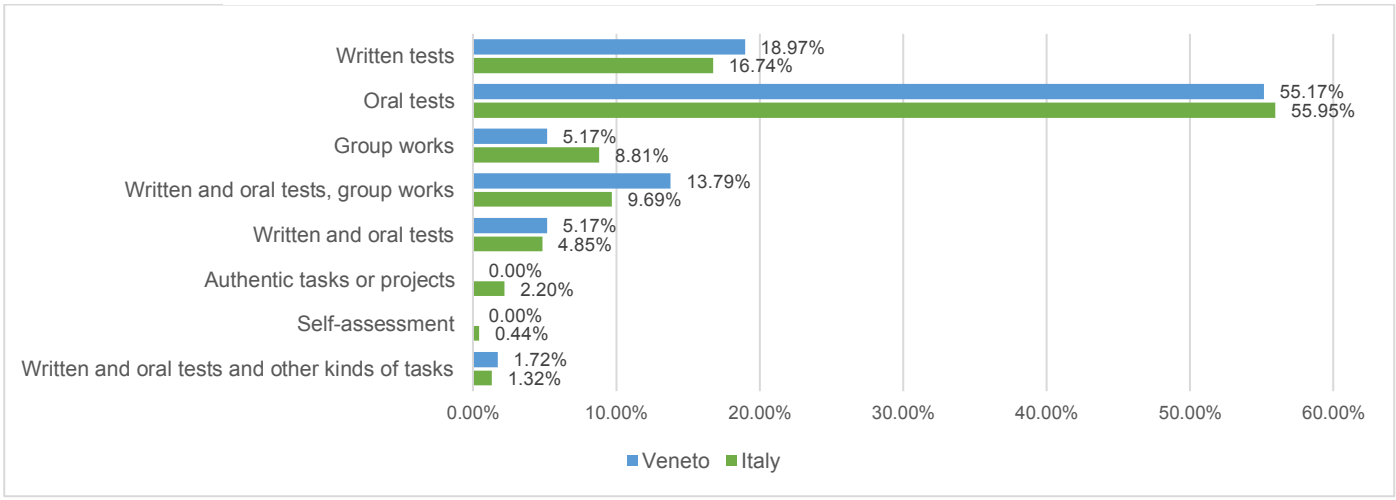


Table 7 shows the main reasons for the choices of the previous two items. The most common answer is relatable to the fact that the chosen method allows to assess competencies, spoken skills and helps the students in feeling freer and spontaneously reacting to the teacher's questions or problems (45.76%; IT: 42.11%). Reliability and objectivity were popular reasons (respectively: 23.73% and 23.73% for the Veneto region and 31.14% and 14.91% for Italy) for the choice of the selected assessment method[132], as well as the fact that the method chosen allows to solve the problems related to technical issues (IT: 7.89%; Veneto: 3.39%), such as latency or interaction

[130] Some teachers selected the option "I do not use this method": Veneto: *Written tests* → 2, *Group works* → 5; Italy: *Written tests* → 9, *Oral tests* → 2, *Group works* → 22. The percentages cited in this paragraph are calculated on the number of teachers who stated to use these methods.
[131] Invalid responses: 1 (Veneto). The percentages are therefore calculated on 58/59 and 228/229.
[132] Almost all cases referred to oral tests.

(e.g.: written tests solve the problems with latency and oral tests allow interaction). Other reasons concerned the assessment method happening live, suitability to what needs assessing, or the methods helping correction or integrating different methods, as well as the facilitation of cooperative learning. The most popular choice, namely the fact that students can *speak*, could be implied by the fact that foreign languages in particular require speaking and teachers might want to foster students' speaking skills, since these skills are one of the most important part of FL learning. Moreover, the fact that speaking tests might involve authentic tasks or make the students answer to real-like situations, may help the students in understanding the importance of the language studied and feel assessment as part of the FL education process. There is an important difference between the number of teachers who mentioned the fact that the method selected helps the students in feeling less anxious or more motivated (IT: 7.46%; Veneto: 1.62%) and the teachers who mentioned the fact that the method selected allows to monitor and keeps tracks of the progresses of the students (IT: 6.14%; Veneto: 1.69%). This might indicate that, if the number of teachers interviewed in the survey had been higher, the students' psychological status would have been involved to a greater extent in the determination of the methods and materials for DAE.

TABLE 07 **Teacher: favourite way of assessing, reasons, item 25**

	Veneto		Italy	
	n. responses	% on valid responses	n. responses	% on valid responses
Useful to assess competencies, spoken abilities or to make the students be more spontaneous	27	45,76%	96	41.11%
Reliability	14	23,73%	71	31.14%
Ensures objectivity	14	23,73%	34	14.91%
They happen live	4	6,78%	10	4.39%
Suitable to what needs assessing and to the students	3	5,08%	12	5.26%
Integration of different methods	2	3,39%	3	1.32%
Solves technical issues, latency and interaction	2	3,39%	18	7.89%
Fast correction	2	3,39%	2	0.88%
Imposed or necessary	1	1,69%	3	1.32%
Facilitate and motivate students, makes students feel less anxious	1	1,69%	17	7.46%
Monitor progresses and tracks them	1	1,69%	14	6.14%
Suitable both to in-presence and distance learning	1	1,69%	1	0.44%

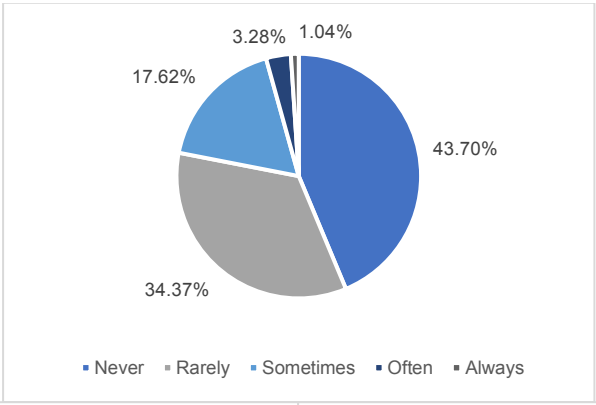
Favours cooperative learning	1	1,69%	9	3.95%
Respondents:	59		229	
Valid responses:	59		228	

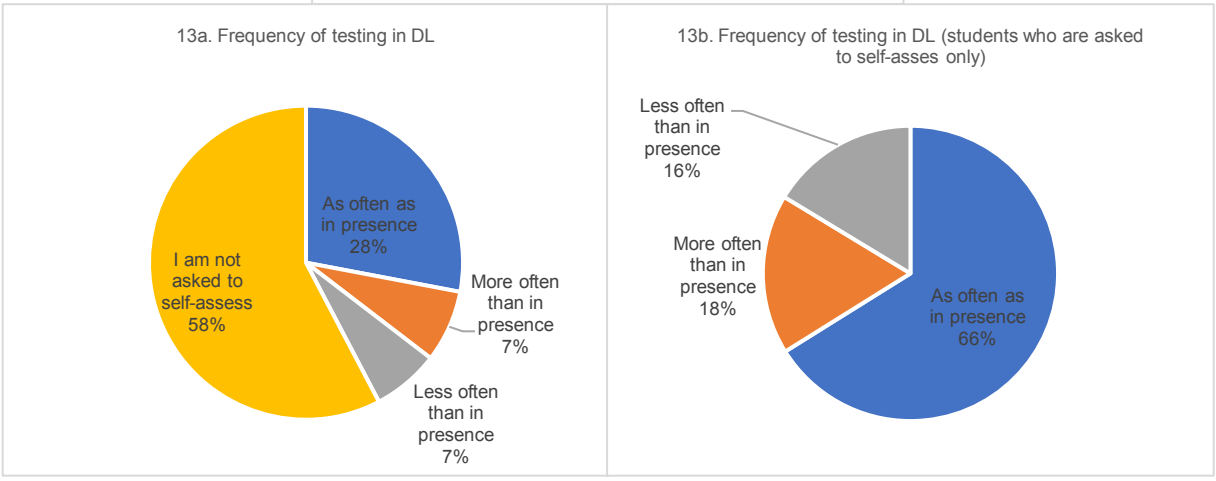
4.3.4. Self-assessment and feedback

The next section deals with the students' opinions on feedback and self-assessment, investigated by items 19-24.

Item 19 highlighted how self-assessment is "rarely" or "never" encouraged by the teachers, according to the students, in 78.07% of cases. On the other hand, "often" and "always" were selected only by 4.32% of students. The remaining 17.62% states that they are encouraged "sometimes" (see Graph 12). Even more concerning are the answers to item 20, where students were asked if teachers encourage self-assessment during DL and how frequently they ask for it if compared to in presence. If 43.70% of learners stated that, in general, they are never asked to self-assess in item 19, in item 20 the total of respondents who selected "never" amounts to 57.59%. Among the students who ask to self-assess (42.31% of the total), anyway, the majority stated that they are asked to self-assess as frequently as in presence (66.12%) and 17.55% that they are asked more often than in presence. Unfortunately, 16.33% stated to be asked to self-assess less frequently than in presence (see Graph 13). The reasons for the low number of students who are asked to assess themselves might be linked to the fact that, in DL especially, the time available for live classes is even less than in presence and hence teachers do not have enough time to encourage students to self-assess. However, we find encouraging that some teachers decided to boost this kind of assessment in the virtual class. By asking the students to analyse their learning choices, teachers raise their pupils' awareness on the progress made, as DL requires the students to be more independent to succeed.

GRAPHS 12-13 **Students: frequency of self-assessment and comparison IPL-DL, items 19-20**





Item 21 concerned the tools used to self-assess, especially the ones highlighted in Chapter 3: portfolios, rubrics and journals. The respondents highlighted a situation where these instruments are not used by almost all students responding to the survey: portfolios were adopted in class only by the 2.07% of students, with the lowest of the three scores, journals by 2.42% and self-assessment rubrics by 2.76%.

Items 22-23 asked whether students are provided with feedback by the teacher or not and how the teacher gives written feedback. The survey allowed the selection of more options for both items. Item 22 registered 12 invalid responses[133] (valid responses: 567/579). Most of the students (84.83%) argued that they receive some kind of feedback. The most selected options were the ones that indicate that teachers give

[133] Invalid due to the selection of one option + "The teacher does not provide me with feedback".

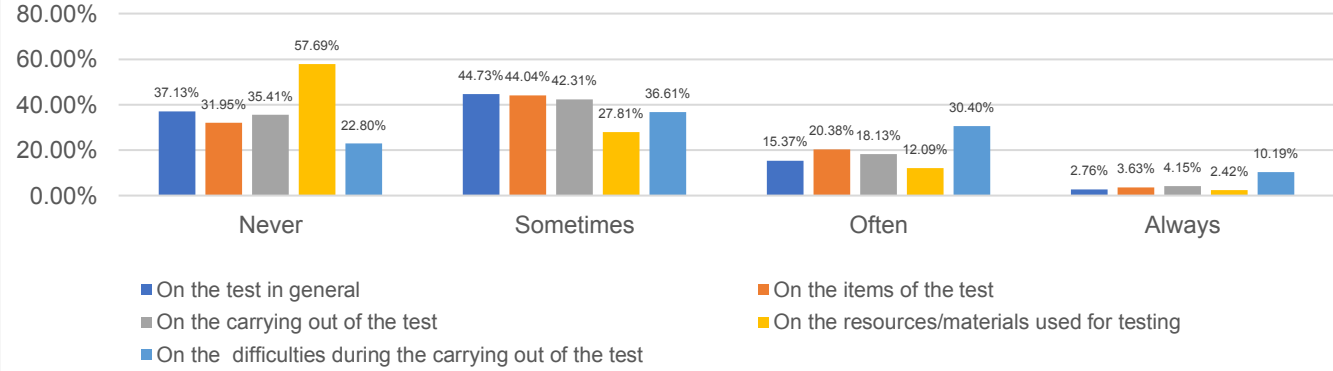
general feedback: 46.74% selected general oral feedback. The second most common option was personal written (34.92%) followed by personal oral (34.74%). Written general feedback was selected by 19.93% of respondents. Two students (0.35%) added in the "Other" section the option "the teacher provides me with feedback only if I ask for it". Finally, 15.17% stated that the teacher does not provide them with feedback. We think that the fact that the most common way of giving feedback is given generally and orally could be because it is the fastest and easiest way for the teachers. Personal written feedback is also very common, and it could be thanks to the platforms of file upload, such as Moodle and Classroom, that allow teachers to easily note corrections and suggestions on the upload page. We believe that personal oral feedback is also common even though DL lesson time is even less than in presence, and oral feedback requires a high amount of time, because the teachers want to talk to their students when giving a test back, being able to *read* the student's reaction and to have a direct conversation, where the student can ask questions live. Students' valid responses to item 23[134] (417/579) pointed at the fact that written feedback is sent mainly via the upload page of the file (48.92%) or via a comment added to the document (42.93%). A little less common are e-mails: 33.81% of teachers gives feedback replying to e-mails and 22.54% sends e-mails. Even less common are informal messages (e.g.: via WhatsApp and TEAMS) and comments on learning platforms (e.g.: SeeSaw, Mahara, Kaizena), used in the 10.79% and 4.08% of cases respectively.

The last item of the section asked the learners if the teacher encourages to express opinions on the test, on the items/tasks of the test, on the carrying out of the test (e.g.: time, length, …), on the resources used for the test or on the difficulties that the test involved. Graph 14 shows how teachers tend to not ask the student's feedback on any of the proposed categories. By grouping together the answers to "never" - "sometimes" and "often" - "always" we can see that the only option that had more than 40% of

[134] Total responses: 437; invalid responses: 20.

interviewees selecting "often" or "always" (40.59%) was the one that concerned the difficulties during the carrying out of the test. 85.49% of the learners stated that they are never or sometimes asked to express opinions on the resources/materials/platforms used for testing, 81.87% on the test in general, 77.72% on the carrying out of the test (e.g.: time available or length of the test) and 75.99% on the items of the test. The reason why the teacher might ask more frequently the pupils' opinion on the difficulties encountered during the carrying out of the test might be because of the novelty of the situation, or to spot important obstacles that might undermine the students' performances, since the learners are not responsible for digital issues. On the contrary, students' feedback could not be requested for the other options of item 24 because teachers do not think that asking for this kind of feedback is important, or maybe, in some cases, because the teacher had no other option to present the test (for example in the case of the materials/platforms used for the test, that might be imposed by the school or unchangeable because of the tools available).

GRAPH 14 **Students: frequency of student feedback, item 24**



4.3.5. Opinions, feelings and perceptions about DAE

Items 27-34 of Questionnaire A and items 18-20 and 26-27 of Questionnaire B dealt with teachers' and students' opinions, perceptions and feelings about DAE. In

particular, we asked the teachers to express difficulties, concerns and possible advantages of DAE. Moreover, we asked the students how they feel about their teachers and how much the teacher's personality and behaviour affect the testing performances. We asked both groups to express their feelings generated by carrying out assessment and evaluation online platforms and digital devices and a final opinion on how they would describe DAE.

Table 8 shows the concerns expressed about by the teachers. The vast majority of both groups of teachers identified in reliability the main concern of assessing and evaluating remotely (79.66%; IT 80.35%); all the other concerns expressed did not involve more than 14% (IT: 9%) of teachers. The second-most important concern, anyway, is represented by possible issues with technology and Internet connection (13.56%; IT: 8.30%), and finding a right way of assessing (13.56%; IT: 6.11%). Other reasons of concern were the lack of interaction and live feedback (10.17%; IT: 4.80%) and the creation of tests that are appropriate for the students' abilities and that are clear (6.78%; IT: 5.24%). The Italian situation highlighted also how the students' psychological wellbeing is considered important by some teachers (3.06%) and also how 4.37% of teachers did not encounter any significant concern. The fact that reliability is the most popular concern among teachers of both groups might be because it represents the main concern, the novelty, and the only part that teachers actually feel they can control, or attempt to solve. On the contrary, for example, the issues with the Internet or the ICT devices cannot be controlled nor solved by the teachers. Anyhow, this does not mean that reliability is the only concern that teachers have. We believe that, while it is of course true that many teachers think reliability is the main issue of DAE, they also identify other, minor, concerns that were not expressed in the answer to this item. Finally, most concerns for reliability were expressed especially when written tests are involved. The two answers reported below represent the opinions of teachers who did not express particular issues with reliability of their tests.

"Le verifiche scritte sono prove oggettive con inserita già la correzione, cerco di non renderle molto difformi da quelle presentate in cartaceo e l'unica preoccupazione è che siano chiare anche se durante il tempo della verifica sono comunque collegata online con gli studenti che in qualunque momento possono chiedere spiegazioni. Le verifiche orali sono simili all'interrogazione in classe, é un dialogo con gli studenti. Mi rifiuto però di interrogarli a telecamera spenta"[135].

(SUBJ. 48 – Veneto)

"Nessuna, la partecipazione attiva è fortemente valutata è compensa l'eventuale uso di ausili da parte dei ragazzi"[136].

(SUBJ. 50 – Sicily)

TABLE 08 **Teachers: concerns of DAE, item 18**

	Veneto		Italy	
	n. responses	% on valid responses	n. responses	% on valid responses
Reliability	47	79.66%	184	80.35%
Issues with technological devices or the Internet	8	13.56%	19	8.30%
Evaluating rightly	8	13.56%	14	6.11%
Lack of interaction and feedback	6	10.17%	11	4.80%
Creating appropriate and clear tests	4	6.78%	12	5.24%
Students' abilities	2	3.39%	2	0.87%
Creation of a relaxed environment	2	3.39%	3	1.31%
No concerns/same concerns as in presence	1	1.69%	10	4.37%
The students' psychological wellbeing (anxiety, stress, boredom, impaired concentration)	1	1.69%	7	3.06%
No concerns for oral tests	--	--	4	1.75%
The students' awareness of DAE	--	--	3	1.31%
Distractions due to the house environment	--	--	2	0.87%
The parents' reactions	--	--	1	0.44%
Respect of the deadlines	--	--	1	0.44%
Respondents:	59		229	
Valid responses:	59		229	

Item 19 asked teachers to identify difficulties with DAE, if any, and to explain how these difficulties have been solved, or the attempts implemented to solve them. For this item, too, reliability was the most mentioned difficulty: to ensure that the test is valid, that really tests the students' abilities and skills, and that the students do not cheat

[135] *Cfr.*: "Written tests are objective tests with automatic correction, I try to not create them [the tests] very different from the usual paper ones and the only concern is to make them clear, even though during the test I am connected online with the students, who can ask for explanations at any moment. Oral tests are similar to the ones that took place in presence, they are a conversation with the students. Anyway, I refuse to carry out oral tests with the webcam off". Our translation.

[136] *Cfr.*: "No concerns, active participation is highly assessed and it compensates the students' possible use of aids". Our translation.

during written tests especially (60.38%; IT: 50.48%). What we find encouraging, though, is that 26.42% of Venetian teachers and 30.95% of Italian teachers did not identify any relevant difficulty. We believe this is encouraging to consider DAE not as an *enemy* to fight, but rather as an *ally* that could help teachers in implementing and ameliorating the educational process, with ITC allowing to personalize, diversify and foster different intelligences. Anyhow, the second issue in order of number of respondents who cited it, was the one concerning technology and Internet, with 13.21% of Venetian teachers and 12.38% of Italian teachers. Another fact mentioned was the concern about the students' wellbeing: teachers worry that the students might feel anxious, stressed, bored, not motivated or that they do not focus, that they get distracted easily. Of particular concern is that many students do not have a dedicated and quiet place to participate in online classes (3.77%; IT: 3.81%). Other difficulties cited were: finding a right way to evaluate (3.77%; IT: 1.90%), the time to correct the tests, especially when the students do not have the right devices (e.g.: teachers receive blurry pictures of tests) (1.89%; IT: 2.86%) (for all the difficulties: see Table 9).

TABLE 09 **Teachers: difficulties in DAE, item 19a**

	Veneto		Italy	
	n. responses	% on valid responses	n. responses	% on valid responses
Reliability	32	60.38%	106	50.48%
No/not relevant	14	26.42%	65	30.95%
Issues with technological devices or the Internet (real or pretended)	7	13.21%	26	12.38%
The students' psychological wellbeing (anxiety, stress, boredom, impaired concentration, lack of motivation)	2	3.77%	8	3.81%
Evaluating rightly	2	3.77%	4	1.90%
Time to correct the tests	1	1.89%	6	2.86%
Get used to the new way of testing	1	1.89%	3	1.43%
Not be able to check on and control the students during the test	1	1.89%	3	1.43%
The students being slow in completing the test	1	1.89%	1	0.48%
Lack of interaction and feedback	--	--	6	2.86%
Not be able to assess the student's progresses	--	--	2	0.95%
The way to propose the test	--	--	2	0.95%
Difficulties in oral tests	--	--	1	0.48%
Lack of material and experience sharing among teachers	--	--	1	0.48%
Respondents:	59		229	
Valid responses:	53		210	

Teachers tried to solve the issues with reliability especially by adopting anti-plagiarism techniques and checks (32.61%; IT: 16.39%), by changing the tasks of the test into more authentic, competency-based tasks or into assignments that required students to be creative or to adopt critical thinking techniques (15.22%; IT: 13.66%) and by carrying out oral tests only or combining oral tests with written tests, especially when the written test looks *suspicious* (15.22%; IT: 14.75%). Some teachers, for example, stated that they used different, same-difficulty tests with random order of the questions and no numbers or letters to indicate references; other teachers stated that they reduced the time for the test. 6.52% of Venetian teachers and 6.56% of Italian teachers did not find a solution or believes that there is no possible solution to the issue presented in 19a. 6.52% of Venetian teachers and 4.37% lowered the maximum grade obtainable, changed the correction method or adopted assessment grids when evaluating. Other teachers decided to carry out tests only in presence (especially when BL is possible), purchased better devices or Internet connection. In the box below, we reported some of the opinions that also reported useful tips on how to solve issues concerning DAE:

"Quanto detto sopra si ripercuote anche sulle difficoltà nell'attribuzione del voto. Ho cercato di attribuire valutazione eque, che rispecchiassero anche il comportamento generale dello studente (puntualità, partecipazione, interventi, impegno), premiando laddove ritenevo giusto premiare, soprattutto in luce all'enorme sacrificio che stiamo chiedendo ai ragazzi, dopo mesi e mesi di apprendimento davanti a uno schermo sterile"[137].

(SUBJ. 196 – Umbria)

"Correggere le verifiche scritte, fotografate dagli studenti, richiede molto più tempo che la correzione su carta. Poiché insegno cinese è fondamentale verificare che gli studenti sappiano scrivere gli ideogrammi sua al pc che a penna. Per risolvere il problema del tempo impiegato per le correzioni ho acquistato un iPad ed Apple pencil, dimezzando il tempo impiegato"[138].

[137] *Cfr.*: "What stated above [item 18] has repercussions also on the difficulties of grading. I tried to give fair evaluations, that also reflected the general behaviour of the student (punctuality, active participation, comments, engagement), rewarding when I thought it was right to reward, after months and months of learning in front of a sterile screen". Our translation.

[138] *Cfr.*: "Correction of written tests, photographed by the students, requires a lot more time than correction on paper. Since I teach Chinese language, it is fundamental to verify that the students are able to write ideograms both on the computer and by pen. To solve the problem of correction time, I bought an iPad with Apple pencil, which halved the time spent to correct". Our translation.

(SUBJ. 68 – Sardinia)

"Nessuna. Sono sufficienti regole chiare, griglie di valutazione detragliare e coerenti condivise con gli studenti e fiduvia reciproca (l'insegnate aiuta ad imparare, non ha senso cercare di imbrogliare)"[139].

(SUBJ. 214 – Piedmont)

"Non penso che la valutazione a distanza sia realistica. (Vedi sopra). Soprattutto per l'eterogeneità degli strumenti a disposizione degli studenti (webcam che funziona/non funziona. Idem con microfono.) Impossibilità di introdurre il blocco schermo degli studenti. Durante alcune interrogazioni orali si sente la voce di qualcuno che fornisce la risposta negli auricolari dello studente, prima della voce dello studente stesso. Per le verifiche scritte, ne faccio tre/ quattro diverse e faccio porre le domande in ordine diverso da Google moduli. Faccio te ere webcam e microfoni accesi durante lo svolgimento, ma c'è sempre qualcuno a cui non funziona la webcam o il microfono. È snervante. Durante le verifiche orali faccio condividere lo schermo, ma c'è sempre qualcuno a cui non funziona bene la connessione, o si collega con tablet o cellulare, quindi diventa impossibile condividere schermo e fare tenere webcam accesa. La connessione cade proprio in concomitanza di domande a cui non sanno rispondere...ad alcuni non funziona il microfono o la webcam il giorno dell'interrogazione. Potrei continuare...."[140].

(SUBJ. 96 – Lombardy)

"Le difficoltà sono legate alla mancanza della dimensione reale, della comunicazione non verbale. Si cerca di stabilire e mantenere un buon rapporto di fiducia con gli studenti, in modo che non si sentano vittime al macello, giudicare senza pietà e sentano il dovere di collaborare con coscienza e serenità"[141].

(SUBJ. 218 – Basilicata)

TABLE 10 **Teachers: solution to difficulties of DAE, item 19b**

	Veneto		Italy	
	n. responses	% on valid responses	n. responses	% on valid responses
Anti-plagiarism checks, adoption of anti-cheating techniques	15	32.61%	30	16.39%
Authentic, competency-based, creativity, critical thinking tasks	7	15.22%	25	13.66%

[139] *Cfr.*: "None. Clear rules, detailed and coherent assessment grids shared with the students and reciprocal trust are enough (the teachers helps to learn, it makes no sense trying to cheat)". Our translation.

[140] *Cfr.*: "I do not think that DAE is realistic. (see above [item 18]). Mainly due to the heterogeneity of instruments available to the students (webcam that works/does not work. Same with the microphone). Impossibility to introduce the screen block for the students. During some oral tests you can hear somebody's voice answering on the student's headphones, before the student even talks. As for written tests, I design three/four different ones and I randomise the order of the questions with Google Forms. I ask to keep webcams and microphones on during the administration of the test, but there is always someone to whom either the webcam or the microphone do not work. It is frustrating. During oral tests I ask to share the screen, but there is always someone to whom the connection does not work properly, or who is connected with smartphone or tablet, so it becomes impossible to share the screen and keep the webcam on [at the same time]. The connection stops working just right when the students do not know how to answer to a question… other students do not have a working microphone or webcam on the day of the oral test. I could go on…". Our translation.

[141] *Cfr.*: "The difficulties are connected with the lack of the dimension of reality, of non-verbal communication. You try to establish and maintain a good relationship of trust with the students, so as they do not feel like lambs sent to the slaughter, judged with no mercy, and feel the willingness to collaborate with awareness and peace". Our translation.

Carry out oral tests only or combine oral tests with suspicious written tests	7	15.22%	27	14.75%
No solution	3	6.52%	12	6.56%
Lower the grades, change the correction method, use assessment grids	3	6.52%	8	4.37%
Carry out tests in presence	2	4.35%	5	2.73%
Better devices and Internet connection	1	2.17%	3	1.64%
Pretend not to see, accept the fact that students might cheat, get used to the new way od assessing	1	2.17%	7	3.83%
Assign group or pair works	1	2.17%	3	1.64%
Consider the student's progress and active participation	1	2.17%	7	3.83%
Provide the students with clear tasks	1	2.17%	1	0.55%
Combine written and oral tests	--	--	3	1.64%
Carry out written tests only	--	--	1	0.55%
Give more feedback, boost self-assessment and engage students more	--	--	6	3.28%
Cancel the test	--	--	2	1.09%
Turn written tests into formative assessment	--	--	1	0.55%
Administer less tests	--	--	1	0.55%
Learn new things, follow teacher training courses	--	--	1	0.55%
Respondents:	59		229	
Valid responses:	46		183	

The majority of teachers said that no relevant advantage comes from DAE. On the other hand, teachers who expressed their opinion on advantages, identified in rapidity of correction and administration the main advantage (10.17%; IT: 10.92%), followed by quality of feedback and self-assessment moments for the students (6.78%; IT: 6.99%). Italian teachers also considered important the fact that pupils feel more relaxed in the home environment or highlighted a better relationship with the teacher (6.55%) and thought it is important that ITC allows to employ different resources (4.80%) and diversification, stratification, and student-oriented design (3.93%; Veneto: 5.08%). Interviewees also indicated the increase in the number of tests (and grades), the opportunity for the students to familiarise with ITC in FL learning, the possibility to monitor and track progresses and the boost of creativity. Some Italian teachers (2.18%) were also happy to note that they were able, thanks to DAE, to give higher grades (see Table 11).

TABLE 11 **Teachers: advantages of DAE, item 20**

Veneto		Italy	
n. responses	% on valid responses	n. responses	% on valid responses

No advantages/not relevant	35	59.32%	146	63.76%
Rapidity of correction and administration	6	10.17%	25	10.92%
Better, personalised, continuous, rapid feedback, better occasions for self-assessment and increase of students' autonomy	4	6.78%	16	6.99%
More tests and grades	3	5.08%	4	1.75%
More relaxing environment, lack of environmental distractions	3	5.08%	5	2.18%
The test can be designed for the single student	3	5.08%	9	3.93%
Students' opportunity to familiarise with ITC	2	3.39%	4	1.75%
Monitor and track students' progresses	2	3.39%	3	1.31%
Creativity fostered	2	3.39%	3	1.31%
Dematerialization, resources easy to share	1	1.69%	3	1.31%
DAE helps saving time during BL	1	1.69%	1	0.44%
Helps remaining safe during the health emergency	1	1.69%	4	1.75%
More relaxed and motivated, less anxious students, better relationship with the teacher	--	--	15	6.55%
Test can be diversified, ITC accessed FL education	--	--	11	4.80%
The possibility to give higher grades	--	--	5	2.18%
Objective evaluation	--	--	2	0.87%
Respondents:	59		229	
Valid responses:	59		229	

The box below shows the answer of one teacher who saw in DAE and DL in general the opportunity to get closer to the students:

> "Non solo la valutazione, ma la DaD tout court ha, paradossalmente, permesso un avvicinamento tra docenti e studenti, in particolare durante il primo periodo di DaD. Per raggiungerli, stato necessario infrangere delle barriere "formali", come dare il proprio numero di telefono, contattarli via whatsapp, chiamarli, sentirli su Skype. In generale, è stato necessario mettersi in ascolto delle loro problematiche, anche oltre l'orario di lavoro"[142].
>
> (SUBJ. 249 – Latium)

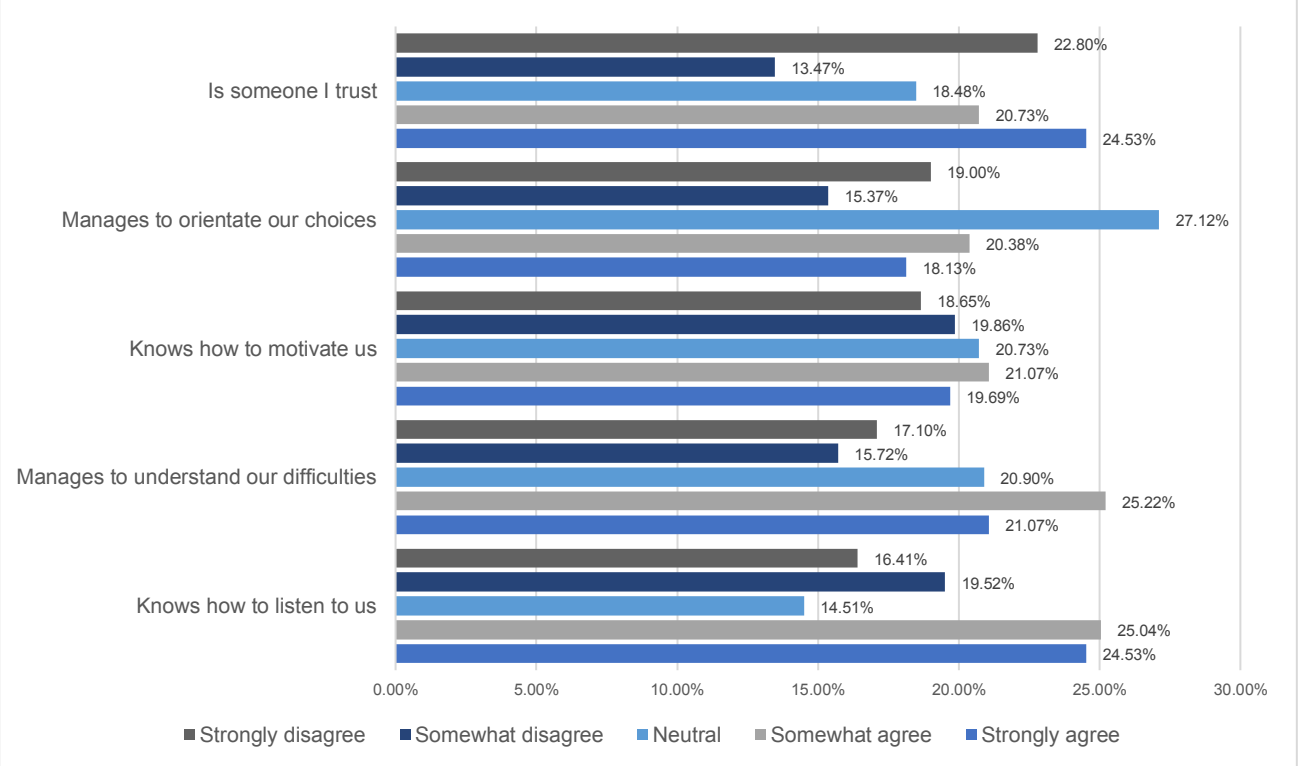
We want to start with the answer of Subject 249 from Latium to introduce the topic investigated by items 27-28 of Questionnaire A: teacher's personality and the repercussion that teacher's behaviour and personality have on DAE. We asked the students if the FL teacher is someone they trust, who manages to orientate their choices, motivate, understand, and listen to them.

The overall results are mainly positive. No option registered the majority of students evaluating the FL teacher's characteristics in a negative way: most students expressed

[142] *Cfr*.: "Not only DAE, but *tout court* DL allowed, paradoxically, teachers and students to get closer, especially during the first period of DL. In order to reach them [the students], we had to break the *formal* barriers, such as giving them our personal phone number, contact them via WhatsApp, call them, reach them on Skype. In general, it has been necessary to listen to their problems, even beyond the working hours". Our translation.

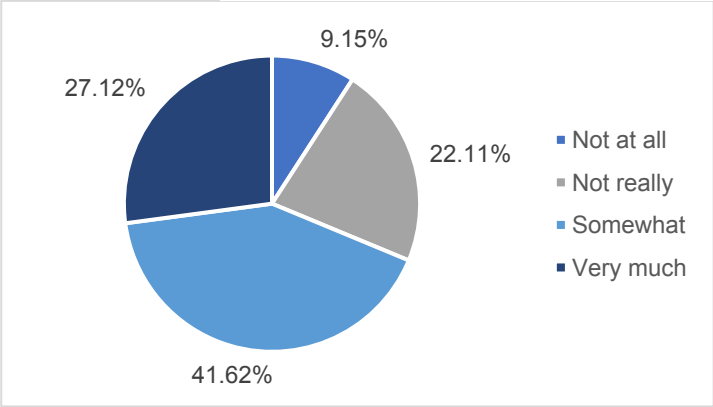
positive or neutral opinions. When considering only the answers that expressed either positive or negative assessment, grouping together "somewhat agree" – "strongly agree" and "somewhat disagree" – "strongly disagree" we can infer that 58.52% thinks that their teacher is able to understand their difficulties, 57.98% believes that the FL teacher knows how to listen to the students and 55.51% of students trusts the FL teacher. 52.84% of students stated that the FL teacher knows how to orientate the students' choices and, finally, 51.42% of respondents stated that the teacher knows how to motivate them. The highest scores for "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" were both registered in the option that inquired trust: 30.08% strongly trusts their teacher, but 27.97% does completely not. The reason why this item registered the strongest polarity in the answers might be due to the fact that the sentiment of trust is very strong and is unlikely to change according to the situation, unlike other options given for item 27. Graph 15 shows the overall answers, with neutral responses, too.

GRAPH 15 **Students: description of the FL teacher, item 27**



Graph 16 shows how teacher's personality affect performances when DAE occurs. 68.74% of respondents said that the teacher's actions "somewhat" or "very much" affect test performances, and 90.85% stated that performances are at least a little influenced. We can confidently say that it is important for teachers to establish a relaxed (virtual) classroom environment, and cover the roles seen in Chapter 1 and 2, being a parent, a friend and a guide at the same time, heling students especially in the difficult times of DL to make students perform at their best.

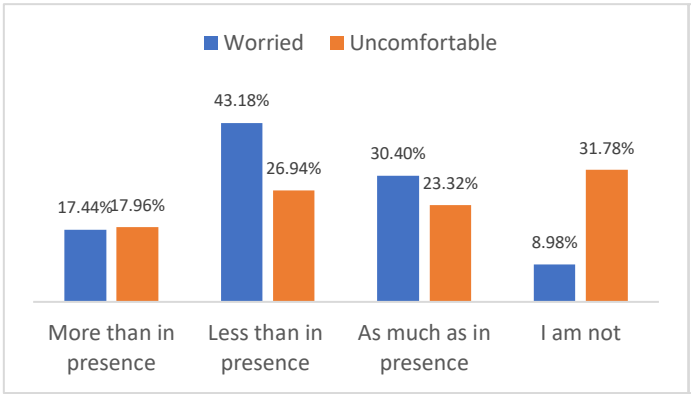
GRAPH 16 **Students: influence of FL teacher personality on DAE, item 28**

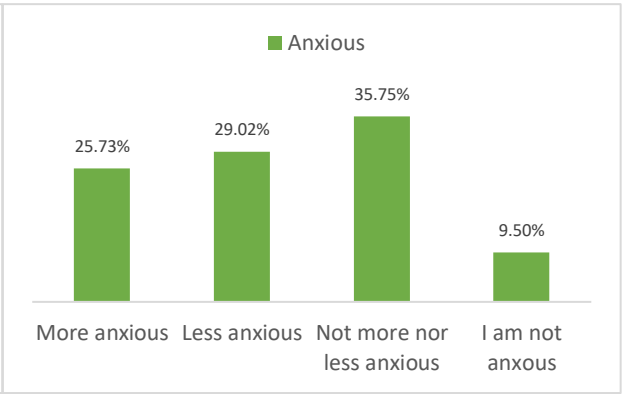


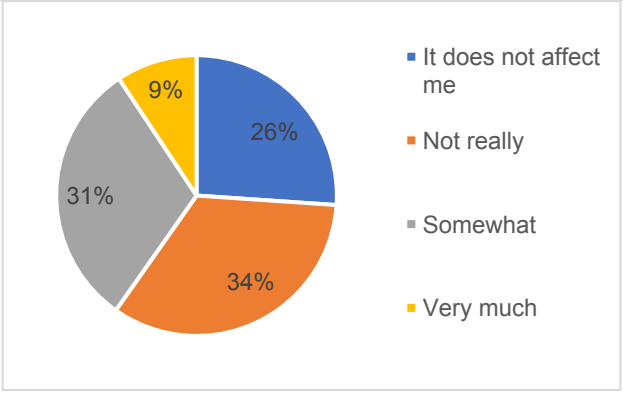
Items 29-31 concerned the students' feelings towards DAE: we asked them whether and how much they feel worried, uncomfortable or anxious during a test and to what extent ITC impacts their status of anxiety. 31.78% of subjects stated that they do not feel uncomfortable, 9.50% that they do not feel anxious and 8.98% that they do not feel worried. Of those who feel worried (524/579), 47.44% feel less worried and 19.17% feel more worried. The remaining subjects (33.40%) feel as much worried and in presence. Similar answers are highlighted for responses to uncomfortability (524/579): 39.49% of students feel less uncomfortable during DAE, 26.33% more uncomfortable and 34.18% feel as uncomfortable as in presence. As for anxiety, 524/579 respondents indicated that they feel at least to some extent anxious. Of these, 39.50% does not feel either more nor less anxious than in presence, 32.06% stated that they feel less anxious and 28.44% that they feel more anxious. Item 31 asked the

students whether carrying out tests with technological devices impacts their state of anxiety or not, and, if it does, to what extent. 26.08% stated that technology does not impact them, 33.68% that it impacts them a little, 30.92% that it somewhat does and 9.33% that it affects their psychological status very much. We think that, to feelings of concern, comfortability and anxiety co-occur several different factors and not only the adoption of technological tools. First of all, the house environment might be more or less relaxed, quiet or loud, with parents who support or who do not support their children, and with the students following online classes in more or less crowded environments or sharing their rooms with other siblings also in DL contexts. Also, the fact that the teacher is not present in the room might help in feeling more relaxed, but on the other hand, being *alone* at home, without the classmates, could have a negative impact on the test performances. Anyway, we find positive that the majority of students felt that the remote testing is not more worrying, uncomfortable or anxious, but less or as much as in presence instead.

GRAPHS 17-18-19 **Students: feelings during DAE, items 29-31**

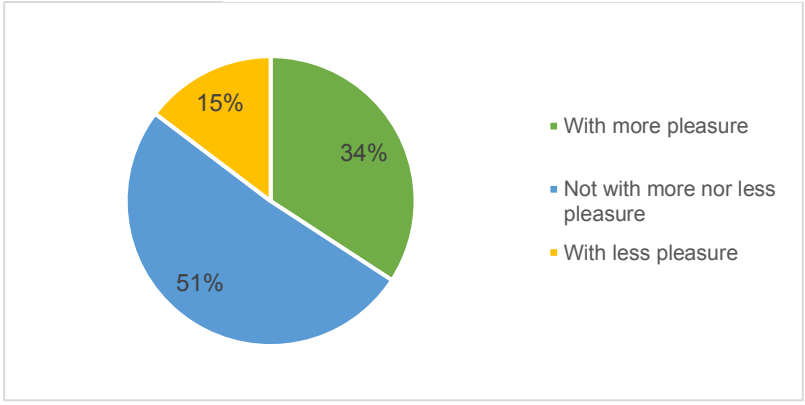






Feeling towards DAE were also investigated by item 33, that asked students whether they carry out tests with more, less or as much pleasure during DAE (see Graph 20). The majority of students did not identify any changes in the pleasantness of carrying out assessment and evaluation remotely rather than in presence (51.12%), and 34.20% stated that DAE is more pleasant than IPAE; 14.68% said that DAE is performed less willingly. The reasons can be connected with responses to items 32 and 34 (see below) or to the fact that students do not understand the real importance of testing, especially in situations of DL, where assessment, self-assessment and feedback are especially important.

GRAPH 20 **Students: pleasantness of carrying out DAE, item 33**



Item 26 of Quest. B and item 32 of Quest. A asked the respondents to express opinions of DAE, especially concerning tests. Table 12 shows the teachers' opinions on the involvement of technology for DAE. The results for Veneto and Italy are always aligned, highlighting a homogeneous and positive panorama. The vast majority (67.80%; IT: 61.14%) of teachers thinks that technology helps and only 1.69% (IT: 9.17%) thinks it interferes with the teacher's goals. 40.68% (IT: 44.10%) say that technology makes them feel at ease and only (6.78%; IT: 6.99%) that it makes them feel uncomfortable. The vast majority of interviewees also thinks that technology is motivating for them to find new methods to assess (69.49%; IT: 69.00%) and many

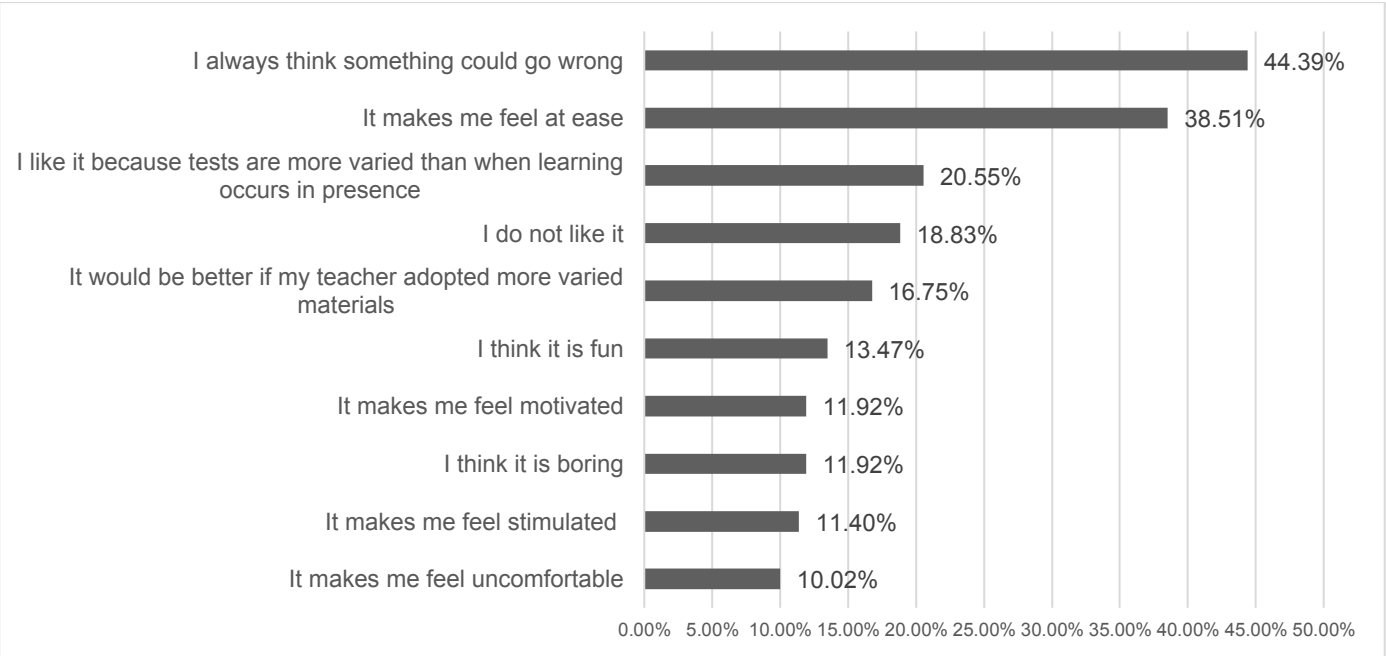
teachers also find technology motivating for them (47.46%; IT: 46.29%) or for their students (37.29%; IT: 36.68%). A huge number of teachers indicated that technology makes data gathering easier (77.97%; IT: 74.67%) and gives them the chance to use varied resources (88.14%; 84.28%). On the other hand, 64.41% of Venetian teachers and 62.01% of Italian teachers indicated that DAE requires more time than IPAE. 50.85% (IT: 50.22%) of subjects indicated that DAE facilitates feedback and 40.68% (IT: 39.30%) stated that DAE facilitates students' self-assessment. Finally, more difficult to interpret due to the slight difference in the results, is the option that identified DAE as a chance to improve the teacher's assessment method: all the answers indicated a percentage between 32.20%-35.59% in the case of the Veneto region and 31.00%-35.81% in the case of Italian teachers (slightly higher number in favour of "yes" in both cases). This might depend especially on the opinion on reliability that teachers have, since they might think that DAE does not add value to assessment and evaluation.

TABLE 12 **Teachers: technology and DAE, item 26**

	Veneto			Italy		
	Yes	No	Neutral	Yes	No	Neutral
It helps me	67.80%	10.17%	22.03%	61.14%	12.23%	26.64%
It interferes with my goals	1.69%	77.97%	20.34%	9.17%	66.81%	24.02%
It makes me feel at ease	40.68%	18.64%	40.68%	44.10%	17.47%	38.43%
It makes me feel uncomfortable	6.78%	66.10%	27.12%	6.99%	65.50%	27.51%
It motivates me in finding new methods to assess	69.49%	8.47%	22.03%	69.00%	11.79%	19.21%
It makes data gathering easier	77.97%	6.78%	15.25%	74.67%	12.23%	13.10%
It is motivating to me	47.46%	23.73%	28.81%	46.29%	22.71%	31.00%
It is motivating to my students	37.29%	22.03%	40.68%	36.68%	28.38%	34.93%
Takes more time than IPAE	64.41%	23.73%	11.86%	62.01%	24.45%	13.54%
It gives me the chance to improve my assessment method	35.59%	32.20%	32.20%	35.81%	31.00%	33.19%
It gives me the chance to use varied resources	88.14%	5.08%	6.78%	84.28%	5.68%	10.04%
Facilitates feedback	50.85%	18.64%	30.51%	50.22%	25.33%	24.45%
Facilitates students' self-assessment	40.68%	22.03%	37.29%	39.30%	24.02%	36.68%
Respondents:	59			229		
Valid responses:	59			229		

Students were asked to fill in a similar item, that investigated their opinions on the use of technology for testing. Looking at Graph 21, it is evident how students are worried that something could go wrong (e.g.: the Internet connection not working properly or the computer not sending the test) in 44.39% of cases, but that DAE makes them feel at ease in 38.51% of cases, maybe thanks to the fact that tests take place in a familiar, more relaxed, environment. All the other options were selected less frequently: 20.55% thinks that DAE is nice because the tests are more varied than in presence, by that, at the same time, DAE would be better if the teacher varied more the resources chosen (16.75%). 18.83% do not like DAE, 11.92% think it is boring, but only 10.02% feel uncomfortable during DAE. 13.47% think DAE is fun, 11.92% feel motivated and 11.40% stimulated. The overall picture, especially if compared to the one highlighted by the teachers, seems to be more negative, although shows room for improvement, according to the methods and resources adopted by the teacher especially.

GRAPH 21 **Students: technology and DAE, item 32**



The last question for both surveys asked to summarise an opinion to describe DAE. The responses, that can be read on Table 13 and Table 14, outlined a very diverse

panorama, both for teachers and students for the opinion given: from very positive to very negative to some neutral ones. Teachers expressed how they believe that DAE is not as objective and reliable as IPAE (36.21%; IT: 23.21%), and how evaluating remotely is difficult, complicated or requires high amounts of time (13.79%; IT: 19.64%) but how, at the same time, allows varied methodologies and tools and could, thanks to ITC, improve IPAE (13.79%; IT: 8.93%). 10.34% (IT:5.80%) find DAE motivating and challenging and 6.90% (5.36%) think it should be complementary to IPAE. On the other hand, many Italian teachers also think that DAE needs improvement or that teachers need more training (9.38%) and almost the same number of teachers (8.93%) believes that DAE is only a necessity, 5.80% (Veneto: 3.45%) thinks that DAE is a failure and 7.14% (Veneto: 6.90%) that IPAE is better.

TABLE 13 **Teachers: description of DAE, item 27**

	Veneto		Italy	
	n. responses	% on valid responses	n. responses	% on valid responses
It is not as objective and reliable as IPAE	21	36.21%	52	23.21%
It is complicated, difficult or requires high amounts of time	8	13.79%	44	19.64%
Varied, complete, improves IPAE thanks to ITC	8	13.79%	20	8.93%
It is challenging and motivating	6	10.34%	13	5.80%
It should be complementary to IPAE	4	6.90%	12	5.36%
IPAE is better	4	6.90%	16	7.14%
I need to learn more/it needs improvement	3	5.17%	21	9.38%
It has the same problems as IPAE	3	5.17%	5	2.23%
It is convenient, makes correcting easier	3	5.17%	7	3.13%
It is only a necessity	3	5.17%	20	8.93%
Potentially as good as IPAE, managed to evaluate as in presence, reliable	2	3.45%	14	6.25%
Self-assessment occasion also for the teacher and availability of personal feedback	2	3.45%	7	3.13%
It is a failure	2	3.45%	13	5.80%
It is impersonal, lacks interaction and feedback	1	1.72%	7	3.13%
It motivates and makes students available of their progresses, shortens the teacher-student gap or enhances the importance of the student's work	1	1.72%	9	4.02%
I like it	1	1.72%	6	2.68%
It demotivates students and teachers	1	1.72%	6	2.68%
No opinion	1	1.72%	5	2.23%
It is useful in terms of formative assessment, allows to assess different criteria	--	--	6	2.68%
The subjects using it still lack instrumentations	--	--	3	1.34%
Should be adopted either for IPL or DL, not both	--	--	1	0.45%
Respondents:	59		229	
Valid responses:	58		224	

On the other hand, students are divided into two halves when giving an opinion concerning DAE: 17.46% believe it is difficult or confusing, 16.54% consider it easier or more relaxed; 10.85% said that it is less stressful, more motivating and stimulating and 4.41% says it is more comfortable, faster and tests are shorter but 8.82% cited the fact that DAE is stressful, demotivating or tiring, 11.58% that time is not enough, 6.43% said that they have issues with the devices or the Internet and 7.72% that tests are too long or longer than IPAE. Another group believes that DAE is similar to IPAE (17.28%) or that it is fine, better or that only needs improvements to be fine (6.62%). Some other students believe that DAE is a waste of time and that results are not reliable (8.64%). All in all, hence, as it happened with teachers, also students have very different opinions on whether DAE is positive or negative, whether DAE helps them or not. This might be due to the fact that, especially in the case of the student group, the interviewees were referring to a limited number of teachers, therefore generating similar answers for a high number of students.

TABLE 14 **Students: description of DAE, item 34**

	n. responses	% on valid responses
Difficult, confusing	95	17.46%
Similar to IPAE	94	17.28%
Easier, more relaxed	90	16.54%
Time is not enough	63	11.58%
Less stressful, more motivating or stimulating	59	10.85%
Stressful, tiring, demotivating	48	8.82%
It is not useful, reliable, it is a waste of time	47	8.64%
Tests are too long/longer than IPAE	42	7.72%
It is fine, better, improvable or a necessity	36	6.62%
Issues with technology and home environment	35	6.43%
My performances are worse	30	5.51%
You can cheat	25	4.60%
Shorter, faster, more comfortable	24	4.41%
Technology and home environment help	21	3.86%
Grading system is lower or stricter	21	3.86%
It is a failure	18	3.31%
Boring, tedious	14	2.57%
It requires personal reasoning more often	12	2.21%
My teacher is the problem	9	1.65%
My teacher is the problem	9	1.65%
I perform better, I am more confident	8	1.47%
We carry out more tests (especially oral)	6	1.10%

It is different than IPAE	5	0.92%
It lacks interaction, no freedom of expression	3	0.55%
Tests happen less frequently	3	0.55%
Respondents:	579	
Valid responses:	544	

To conclude, on the box below we reported some positive and negative comments on DAE from the last item for both teachers and students. We decided to report here some opinions to highlight comfort and discomfort from both points of view, as it was the goal of this research.

Teachers:

"Non mi trovo affatto a mio agio con la Dad, valutazione compresa. Ho trovato i ragazzi dopo mesi di Dad stanchi, demotivati e in difficoltà nei rapporti interpersonali, decocentrati... Per chi invece non ha voglia di fare è il metodo migliore per andare avanti con ancora più trucchetti...
X noi insegnanti la Dad significa il triplo di lavoro NON riconosciuto e NON pagato che peggiora tra l'altro il ns stato di salute (vista, schiena, sonno, astenia etc.). La scuola vera è altro!!!!"[143].

(SUBJ. 231 – Veneto)

"È stata una soluzione di emergenza che ci ha permesso di continuare a lavorare, dare una continuità ai nostri ragazzi. È un buon metodo per farli partecipare a delle videoconferenze anche con studenti e docenti di altre parti d'Italia e dall'estero. In nessun modo può sostituire la didattica in presenza, bensì arricchirla, di tanto in tanto"[144].

(SUBJ. 118 – Sicily)

"Mi piace perché ho sperimentato nuovi metodi d' insegnamento, utilizzando nuovi e vari materiali e metodi. Detesto valutare perché molti alunni sfuggono alla valutazione oppure ricorrono a strategie per falsare"[145].

(SUBJ. 114 – Sicily)

"È efficace quasi come in presenza, mi sento di specificare che però dipende molto dal contesto scolastico e culturale in cui si insegna. Se si ha la fortuna, come nel mio caso, di avere studenti prevalentemente motivati la DAD e le valutazioni funzionano perfettamente"[146].

[143] *Cfr.*: "I do not feel at ease with DL at all, DAE too. I found the students after months of DL tired, demotivated and experiencing difficulties with interpersonal relationship, deconcentrated… for the ones who do not feel like studying it is the best method to carry on cheating even more…
For us teachers, DL means thrice as much work NOT recognised and NOT paid that worsens, among other things, our physical condition (sight, back, sleep, asthenia, etc.). The real school is something else!!!!". Our translation.

[144] *Cfr.*: "It was an emergency solution that allowed us to continue to work, to give our student a continuity. It is a good method to make them participate to videoconferences also with other students and teachers from other parts of Italy and abroad. By no means can it replace in-presence learning, but enrich it, from time to time". Our translation.

[145] *Cfr.*: "I like it because I experimented new methods of teaching, using new instruments and methods. I despise evaluating because many students avoid being assessed or recur to cheating strategies". Our translation.

[146] *Cfr.*: "It is almost as efficient as IPAE, I feel I have to specify, though, that it depends largely by the school and cultural context where you teach. If you are lucky, as in my case, to have mainly motivated students, DL and DAE work perfectly". Our translation.

(SUBJ. 68 – Sardinia)

"La didattica a distanza non è la semplice trasposizione digitale di quella in presenza, ma è innegabile che abbia comportato delle difficoltà a livello di valutazione degli alunni. Il tempo ha agito a favore, perché nel giro di un anno sono stati proposti dei validi strumenti, soprattutto dagli editori, comportanti diverse strutturazioni delle verifiche, anche tramite moduli Google, che impediscono allo studente di copiare sistematicamente dalla rete e consentono al docente di rilevare quali sono le effettive conoscenze e competenze dello studentenità"[147].

(SUBJ. 218 – Lombardy)

Students:

"Stressanti. Ho sempre paura che il mio lavoro venga valutato nell'ottica che io possa aver copiato. Fare una verifica in classe, circondata da compagni in ansia come me, mi rilasserebbe di più, anche se forse ciò è dovuto al fatto che per 13 anni di scuola utilizzavo libri, quaderni e penne e non smartphone, computer e tasti per studiare"[148].

(SUBJ. 298)

"L'effettiva comprensione ed assimilazione di un argomento non è verificabile come invece lo è in presenza. Di cui, in molti casi, in entrambe non lo è al 100%: per via delle varie modalità di verifica che vengono usate, per via delle tempistiche disponibili che non sempre permettono l'interno svolgimento della verifica e se si in modo superficiale, per via dei vari suggerimenti fra compagni e copiatura sempre possibili in varie situazioni.
Penso sia possibile verificare la comprensione e l'assimilazione si un argomento anche permettendo di consultare schemi/riassunti o il libro davanti, dato che la conoscenza generale dell'argomento è valutabile anche in questo modo e spingerebbe lo studente as arrangiarsi e fare l'interrogazione/verifica da sé, autonomamente. Ovviamente magari questo non sempre, ma nella maggior parte dei casi"[149].

(SUBJ. 340)

[147] *Cfr*.: "DL is not the simple digital transposition of IPL, but it is undeniable that it involved some issues from the point of view of the evaluation of students. Time helped, since in one-year time reliable instruments have been proposed, mainly by the publishers, that involved different ways of structuring tests, also with Google Forms, that prevent students from systematically cheating recurring to the web and that allow the teacher to assess the real knowledge and competencies of the student". Our translation.

[148] *Cfr*.: "Stressful. I am always scared that my work could be evaluated under the light that I could have cheated. Carrying out a test in the [physical] classroom, surrounded by my classmates, anxious just like me, would relax me more, even though it [being anxious] could be due to the fact that for 13 I have been using books, exercise books and pens, rather than smartphone, computer and keys to study". Our translation.

[149] *Cfr*.: "The real knowledge and acquisition of a topic is not testable as it is in presence. They are not, very often, in both cases 100% [testable]: due to the various testing modalities used, due to the time available that not always allows to complete the whole test and if it does, in a superficial way, due to the various prompts coming among the classmates and cheating always possible in various situations.
I think it is possible to test comprehension and acquisition concerning a topic also allowing to consult schemes/summarisations or with open books, since the general knowledge of a topic is evaluable in this way too and would boost the students to cope on their own and sit the written/oral test by themselves, autonomously. Obviously, not always, but in the majority of cases". Our translation.

"Migliori da certi punti di vista: riesce a stare un po' più tranquillo forse e magari trovare una soluzione se non sai cosa fare; mentre dall'altro direi che sono delle corse contro il tempo... non hai il tempo di leggere e comprendere ciò che chiede"[150].

(SUBJ. 2377)

"Data l'insegnante, le verifiche sono costruite in maniera ambigua, con troppo poco tempo e con voto massimo 8 perché c'è la convinzione di fondo che gli alunni copieranno. Inoltre la verifica viene fatta rifare se la valutazione non corrisponde all'andamento generale dello studente (se uno studente da 6 prende 4 la rifà, mentre se uno studente da 4 prende 4 rimane invariata..... Terribile.)"[151].

(SUBJ. 480)

"Le prove orali mettono molta pressione, perché in classe si condivide il momento di agitazione pre-verifica assieme ai compagni, ci si confronta e ci si supporta, invece da casa tutto ciò non è possibile. Inoltre, è più difficile la comunicazione perciò non si riesce a dare il massimo di sé stessi durante la prova, nonostante le conoscenze siano state ben acquisite. Per quanto riguarda le verifiche scritte, non noto particolari cambiamenti rispetto a quelle in presenza, forse vengono svolte addirittura più tranquillamente, ma trovo che manchi la meritocrazia in quanto ognuno è libero di copiare e raggiungere voti alti, per questo credo che svolgere prove di questo tipo sia inutile e demotivante per chi si impegna veramente"[152].

(SUBJ. 521)

4.4. Discussion

This study aimed to identify and highlight similarities and differences between distance assessment and evaluation (DAE) and in-presence assessment and evaluation (IPAE). This study was conducted from the points of view of students from the Veneto region and teachers from the Veneto region. A comparative analysis was conducted on the responses of teachers from across Italy, including Veneto. In general, the comparison

[150] *Cfr*.: "Better from some points of view: you can remain calmer and maybe find a solution if you do not know what to do; on the other hand, I would say that sometimes they [tests] are races against time… you do not have time to read and understand what it [the test] asks for". Our translation.

[151] Cfr.: "Knowing the teacher, the tests are created in an ambiguous way, with too few time available and with maximum grade 8 because there is this underlying conviction that the students will cheat. Besides, the test is re-sit if evaluation does not correspond to the general trend of the student (if a student that is worth a 6 gets a 4, re-sits the test, if a student that is worth a 4 gets a 4, the result stays….. terrible.)". Our translation.

[152] *Cfr*.: "Oral tests make us feel a lot of pressure, because in the [physical] classroom you share the pre-test agitation together with your classmates, you share and support each other, instead from home all of this is not possible. Besides, interaction is more difficult, and therefore you cannot perform at your best during the test, even though knowledge has been acquired. As for written test, I do not notice significant changes compared to in presence, maybe they are carried out even more calmly, but I think that there is a lack of meritocracy, since anyone can cheat and obtain high grades, so I think that carrying out this kind of tests is useless and demotivating for those who really commit". Our translation.

between the group "only Venetian teachers" and "teachers from all over Italy" did not bring to surface significant differences.

The research highlighted how the platforms and methods used for DAE are not very varied, even though the participants to the study said that the overall quality of the instrumentation (devices and connection) available is good, especially for what concerns the teachers. The most used platforms for testing are *Google* and *Microsoft Forms* and audios and videos are often proposed by the teachers as a method to assess, especially because they foster creativity and allow teachers to assess aspects of the language that involve pronunciation, fluency, and appropriateness to the context. The platforms are often proposed, obliged, or encouraged by the schools and the teachers feel confident when using them. Moreover, most teachers did not know most of the platforms indicated in the questionnaire, leading to limited variations in terms of platforms adopted for assessing and evaluating. There were some discrepancies between teachers' and students' responses about the adoption of audio and video clips to assess. We believe that this might be imputable to the fact that the students answering the survey were not coming from very diverse realities, but rather they were only from the Veneto region and often from the same class or school. Anyway, the choice of the platforms could also relate to convenience: the resources available to the school and to the fact that they satisfy the teacher's needs to evaluate specific skills or competencies in the students. Item 14, in fact, highlighted how the school's resources were in almost half of the cases judged as inadequate. On the other hand, the teachers overall evaluated positively their knowledge of technology, their relationship with technology and the resources available. Negatively assessed in approximately half of the cases and yet very important in the teachers' opinion, were the instruments available to the students. Especially the instruments available to the students, who are the main actors of learning, are crucial for the planning of any testing activity. The most frequent way to assess, identified by both teachers and students, is through oral tests, that, in the teachers' opinion, ensure reliability and allow the living use of the language and socialisation. As for written tests, that resulted being the second-most frequent way of

assessing, many teachers cited *Google* or *Microsoft Forms* helping in the implementation of anti-cheating strategies. Students said that tests are almost always planned, especially in DL situations. We think that the planning of written tests especially could be to ensure that students are psychologically ready for the test, and with the right equipment (especially webcam, microphone and, when possible, computer or tablet). By letting the students know when they will be tested, we think that teachers might help the students feel more relaxed and perform the test at their best. Although the test frequency was classified as more or less unvaried if compared to IPAE, students said that the number of individual works to present in class or to hand in is higher (to hand in especially, with a 60.45% of students who said that the quantity of this kind of assignments increased during DL). Oral tests were carried out more frequently (46.46%), while written tests less frequently (36.79%) (trends confirmed by the teachers). The time available for live written tests ranges from 40 to 60 minutes, time that students think is enough to finish, but rushing things and very often without being able to double check the answers.

Formative and summative assessment happen equally in most cases, although summative assessment only is identified as exclusively used in 32.81% of cases (against 23.33% of cases of formative assessment only). Tests assessed mainly contents learnt *by heart* (37.65%), but a large number of students is also asked to carry out authentic, real-like or competency-based tasks (30.22% and 29.02%). The way of evaluating changed, according to both teachers and students, becoming stricter, sometimes lowering the grades, and other times adopting new criteria to assess (such as active participation or the evaluation of the whole process), mainly due to issues with reliability. Teachers also thought it is more difficult to assess fairly (something that the students understand, also from their point of view). In general, both written and oral tests are perceived as less reliable, but in the case of written tests this uncertainty reaches 97.94% of the total. The preferred way to test the students is with oral tests (followed by written tests, especially with Google Forms), because these

kinds of tests makes students actively use the FL, considered by the teachers as one of the most important components of language learning.

Students are very rarely asked to self-assess, and the frequency is almost identical to in presence, although some changes were implemented: 17.55% of students stated that self-assessment is encouraged more than in presence and 16.33% stated that self-assessment is less encouraged than in presence. Moreover, only in around 2% of cases teachers propose to their class instruments such as journals, portfolios, and self-assessment rubrics, that would instead be particularly useful in DL situations. 84.83% of students noted that they regularly receive feedback, that usually happens either orally, in general for the whole class, or personal, either written or orally. As for written feedback, students are provided with feedback via the upload platform page (such as *Moodle* or *Classroom*) or under the form of comment on the document or with an e-mail. Teachers do not ask for feedback very often, although 41% of students said that teachers ask for opinions on the difficulties encountered during the test.

The main concerns with DAE are identified in reliability, in most cases. Most teachers also think that reliability represents also an issue, that can be solved with anti-plagiarism techniques, such as the ones explained in Chapter 3 (e.g.: for written tests, randomise the order of questions and remove any landmark, differentiate the tests; in general, ask for opinions rather than mere knowledge and involve deeper levels of the DOK model), or by changing the method from written to oral (methodology that, according to the teachers, ensures more reliability, also since it was not affected much by changed, if compared to IPAE). The second most cited option was that teachers did not find significant issues to signal, but the third-most popular answer involved technology-related issues, that can be solved purchasing new devices or improving the Internet connection. Moreover, most teachers do not find any advantages in DAE, although other teachers said that DAE is faster and more comfortable in most cases. The larger group of teachers added that DAE is a chance to reduce students' anxiety and stress, to diversify tests and an opportunity to give personal feedback. As for the students, who were asked to describe their teacher answering to item 27, they painted

a positive picture of the FL teacher, responding positively to all the options, especially to the one concerning trust. Positive teacher behaviour is significantly important during DAE for students, since 68.74% believe teacher's personality affects their testing performances "somewhat" or "very much" and 90.85% believe that it affects them at least a little. Of the students who feel affected, most students during DAE feel less or just as much uncomfortable, worried and anxious or just as in presence. We therefore give no strong importance to ITC in DAE in terms of anxiety, concerns and uncomfortability, although item 32 highlighted ho 44.39% of respondents think that with DAE something could always go wrong. The second most selected option was the one that indicated how DAE makes students feel at ease (38.51%), followed by 20.55% of students stating that they like DAE more thanks to the variety of instruments and resources used. Anyway, 51% of interviewees stated that they do not carry out assessment either more or less pleasantly, but 34% stated that they like it more. As for the last item of both questionnaires, answers coming from both groups were dichotomous, showing how both groups were basically divided into two groups, who either liked or disliked DAE, especially for what concerned reliability, comfort, and stress.

To conclude, we want to emphasise how this study should be proposed to a larger number of students coming from different regions of the country, to listen to more voices and to compare the teachers' opinions of this survey (that could also be enlarged, to reach teachers from all Italian regions with a proportional number). Moreover, we might suggest involving more male respondents, since male teachers especially were a very small number. Hence, this study needs further research in order to be able to generalise the results. As for the studies of *AlmaDiploma*, *Indire* and *LaFabbrica* cited at the beginning, we believe that this study could have helped implementing the sections about assessment and the ones about opinions, at least to some extent.

From the findings of this research, we want to stress how important it is to vary and differentiate the platforms and methods used for DAE, implementing formative assessment, feedback and self-assessment, since the overall picture highlighted by this

survey presented issues especially with the last three. Self-assessment and feedback, as well as formative assessment are vital to raise students' awareness towards their learning, their strengths, and weaknesses, and to be aware of progresses made, as well as to monitor learning, as largely explained in the first three chapters of this thesis. Furthermore, by changing and differentiating the platforms, creating more interactive tests and a relaxed environment, students should feel more engaged, motivated, and responsible for their own learning. We therefore suggest teachers to always try new ways of assessing, also to discourage students who want to cheat. We also believe that, by adopting platforms more student-friendly (for example Kahoot, Quizlet or Socrative, but also social networking apps such as Instagram or TikTok) students might be more active and stimulated in learning and in trying their best. We want to emphasise once again that the teacher, the guide of learning (see Chapters 1 and 2), during DL covers even more and more important roles. It is important, in fact, that teachers ensure not only to deliver content to their students, but that also represent trust, setting an example for their future. The fact that DAE is not seen as completely negative by the respondents to this survey, makes us think that DAE can be implemented and adopted even in *normal*, non-pandemic, situations, especially if blended learning is involved.

Conclusions

We can therefore conclude simply by saying that assessing and evaluating students is a difficult, challenging, part of the teacher's job, and that needs to consider very different aspects of the students and their progresses. Bovolo (2019) said that

> "il docente ha, purtroppo, questo ingrato compito di dare un voto all'alunno, che scaturisce dalla media delle prove scritte e orali, ma che non devono tenere conto soltanto della media aritmetica ma di una serie di dinamiche che riguardano la personalità dell'alunno e le varie fasi di apprendimento"[153].

We believe that Bovolo's quote emphasises what we expressed in the first lines.
The process involved with evaluation and assessment, there are two main characters: the teacher and the student. The teacher, who can be considered as the director for the film in which the students are the actors who need indications to act in the right way, covers the important role of the guide. A guide that is able to consider and assess the students' very diverse characteristics, as seen in Chapter 1 and 2, and that involve different multiple intelligences, cognitive and learning styles, personality traits, socio-cultural and relational factors, as well as personal motivation and aptitude towards learning and the FL studied. Moreover, we have seen how, to this already varied panorama, more factors concerning the student have to be evaluated in order to assess and evaluate correctly in a DL and BL context. Since remote learning occurs with technological tools, IT resources (computers, tablets, connection, …), IT competencies and IT impact on psychology need to be acknowledged and taken into consideration when carrying out DAE. Each of these factors are amplified by a lack of interaction. The teacher's job is, therefore, not only to evaluate the single test or performance, but

[153] *Cfr.*: "the teacher has, unfortunately, this unpleasant job of assigning a grade to the student, that results from the average of written and oral tests, and that not only need to take into account the arithmetic average, but also of a set of sequences of events that involve the student's personality and the different learning stages". Our translation.

also to ponder grades according to these multiple factors. Hence, if evaluating students in presence is already a tough job, evaluating students in DL contexts is even harer. To ensure equity and rightfulness, it is necessary to add different and diverse criteria, designed under the light of the changes and issues caused by the pandemic. Thus, the teacher has to be trained not *only* in terms of glottodidactic techniques, but also in terms of ITC and DL.

Evaluation and assessment have to start from above, from an accurate planning of DL, following, as suggested in Chapter 2, the *Five-step planning procedure*, that ensures to consider all the students in the MAC and to lead students to meaningful learning, through open loops and reiteration of knowledge.

In Chapter 3, we explained how continuous assessment, made of moments of formative and summative assessment, together with feedback and self-assessment and that involved authentic and competency-based tasks is auspicial not only to give a right evaluation, but also to ensure students' meaningful and conscientious learning. We also saw how the multitude of online platforms and instruments can help in finding new, stimulating, motivating, efficient and reliable methods for assessing, evaluating, and correcting, as well as useful to plan and deliver remedial work, to administer the test, to keep track of the progresses and to give feedback. DAE can also, potentially, reach all the students and their diversities, with characteristics that facilitate stratification and diversification, thanks to the multitude of channels that ITC overs. On the other hand, DAE can result in being very difficult when the subjects involved in the process (students, teachers, and school) are not sufficiently equipped: the lack of devices or poor connection can discourage fair and reliable evaluations. Another factor that could impair teacher's judgement is relatable to the teacher's training concerning DL, DAE and IT in general: the more the teacher is used to technology and to the digital learning environment especially when assessing, the better the tests and the DAE sessions will be, also increasing the students' morale. Because the Covid-19 pandemic is still

ongoing[154] there is not a safe formula to facilitate in presence learning. Accordingly, the digital competencies of both students and teachers have adapted to improve the processes of alternative digital learning over time.Moreover, the situation boosted the introduction of ITC in FL learning and the production and distribution of free resources to use online (especially from the publishers and the MIUR), which we find especially beneficial and positive to better the quality of learning in the 21st century. Not only platforms and resources made available by the publishers, but also governmental allocations for DL (*Decreto Cura Italia* allocated EUR 85 million for DL, EUR 10 of which explicitly destined to amelioration of school instrumentation for DL) helped distance education in making progresses.

From here, our desire is to investigate the current effectiveness of DL in Italy. The study, addressed to Upper Secondary School students and FL/ItaL2 teachers, focused on the situation in the Veneto region, with a comparison of the Venetian teachers' opinions with the opinions of a larger teacher group (from all over the country, Veneto too). The study, carried out with self-administered surveys, highlighted a relatively homogeneous situation, that we believe is not very negative, but that, certainly, can be and needs further development and betterments. Not all the students stated to have a personal computer accessible for DL, and, overall, the students' instruments are judged as not adequate by many teachers to follow the classes and especially to be tested and evaluated. As predictable, the teachers' main concerns involved reliability of the tests, also perceived as the main difficulty of DAE, and the students' expressed how the grading system changed, producing lower or stricter grades because of the teacher's concerns about reliability. Our study also highlighted how teachers increased the number of personal works to hand in and to present in class (often hence compensating the decrease in number of live written tests) as well as the number of oral tests. As hypothesized, the vast majority of teachers prefers oral tests for DAE. This can be connected with different reasons: first of all, both teachers and pupils are used to oral

[154] As for March 2021.

tests in presence and remote oral tests do not appear to be very different from IPAE, also allowing a semblance of normality; secondly, teachers think oral tests are more reliable than other kinds of tests in DL, thanks to the fact that oral tests offer less possibilities to cheat (i.e. live interaction allows teacher to *read* their students' expressions and to notice, for example, if they are reading or cheating); finally, teachers said that oral tests suit their needs in terms of skills tested and they allow their pupils to use the language actively, in authentic or real-like situations.

Anyhow, even though many teachers seem to have found a solution that suits them, we think that more online software tools could be adopted, in order to make good use of what DAE has to offer. Our survey highlighted how most teachers did not know the platforms proposed in the survey, which could enrich DAE, especially in the event of written tests. Among the teachers who noticed some advantages, the possibility to save time and convenience (in terms of administration and correction of the test) stand out. Some teachers also identified in DAE an opportunity to speed up the ITC integration in FL learning and testing.

Although many students indicated that their teachers carry out formative and summative assessment almost equally, we believe that formative assessment could be implemented, especially together with feedback and self-assessment (that appeared to be largely neglected). As Innovation for Education suggested, DAE should involve continuous and transparent feedback, to adjust learning and teaching actions to pursue meaningful learning. Implementing feedback, self-assessment and formative assessment could facilitate positive attitudes towards testing and DAE and towards being assessed and evaluated and learning in general, as explained in Chapter 3. An amelioration of DL can also be achieved adopting self-assessment instruments such as journals, portfolios, and grids, that our study revealed to be in almost no occasion used in DL.

The survey highlighted that learners have a positive perception of the FL teacher, the guide of their learning, but also, sometimes, a friend, a parent, and a philosopher: students assessed very positively their teacher's personality. The students said that the

FL teacher is someone they can trust, that motivates them, who understands them, listens to them, and orientates them in most cases.

Finally, groups of teachers and students expressed polar opinions about DAE. We think that negative opinions could be decidedly more positive if all the participants of DL had the right equipment (a non-shared computer and a good Internet connection). Another solution we suggest is to vary as much as possible the tests and the platforms (instead of using *Google* or *Microsoft Forms* only), to boost motivation and to foster different kinds of students.

Although the research demonstrated that some positive changes have been made, we want to pinpoint the fact that, as for now, DL in schools needs further development, to be more reliable and diverse, stratified and student oriented. We believe that the best way to achieve this is not only continuous teacher training, but also the sharing of experiences and suggestions and, most importantly, the strengthening of interpersonal relationships. Strain on the ability to form relationships is observable in DL contexts. Evaluation is the valorization of competencies and knowledge, thanks to Smart teaching and Smart learning, that allow to learn autonomously and responsibly. Meaningful assessment and feedback, according to Cinganotto (2020) are "valid, individualised, understandable, communicate high expectations and lower emotional barrier". We think that the secret to develop DL and DAE, lies in a relaxed classroom environment, based on reciprocal trust, as stated by Rossanese (2016)

> "Uno studente ha bisogno di sentire che si guarda nella stessa direzione, che il progetto di crescita è comune e negoziabile. L'alunno ha bisogno di sapere che il professore è un suo alleato, che lo potrà sostenere nei momenti difficili e indirizzare qualora ne avesse necessità. Ha bisogno di essere accettato in quanto persona, con i propri limiti ed errori ed essere stimato e degno di fiducia. Solo quanto l'alleanza educativa c'è, vera e reale

allora, forti del traino emotivo che questa ha, si potrà lavorare sulle aree più disfunzionali. Un altro fattore centrale è la valorizzazione del positivo"[155].

[155] *Cfr.*: "A student needs to feel that you are looking towards the same direction, that the project of growth is shared and negotiable. The learners need to know that the teacher is their ally, who can support them in difficult times and guide them whenever they need it. They need to be accepted as a person, with their limitations and errors and to be valued and trustworthy. Only when there is educational alliance, true and real, then, thanks to the emotional load that it carries, you will be able to work on the more dysfunctional areas. Another central factor is the valuation of what is positive". Our translation.

Appendix A:

Questionario sulla valutazione delle lingue straniere durante la didattica a distanza

Ciao! 😊
Mi chiamo Beatrice Dei Rossi e sono una studentessa laureanda dell'Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia.

So che durante questi mesi di scuola tu, i tuoi compagni ed i tuoi insegnanti vi siete trovati catapultati ir una situazione che mai nessuno si sarebbe aspettato, a causa dell'emergenza Covid-19. So che non sempre è stato semplice e che avete dovuto affrontare nuove sfide ed adattarvi a tutte le nuove modalità di fare scuola, non sempre facilmente.
Per la mia tesi di laurea vorrei sapere come nelle scuole superiori l'emergenza Coronavirus ha cambiatc il modo di fare verifiche e interrogazioni e la valutazione delle lingue straniere.
Per questo ho bisogno del tuo aiuto e dei tuoi compagni di classe!

Grazie in anticipo! 😊
⏱ La compilazione richiede circa 10 minuti.
📌 Il questionario è rivolto agli studenti di seconda, terza, quarta e quinta superiore.

Le tue opinioni sono importanti. Ti assicuro che il questionario rimarrà anonimo e i dati raccolti saranno trattati rispettando il GDPR 679/2016, d.lgs. 101/2018.

*Campo obbligatorio

Informazioni personali

1. Sesso *

   Contrassegna solo un ovale.

   - ◯ F
   - ◯ M
   - ◯ Altro: _____

2. Che tipo di scuola frequenti (es: liceo scientifico, istituto tecnico turistico, istituto professionale)? *

   _____

3. Che classe frequenti? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Seconda
- ◯ Terza
- ◯ Quarta
- ◯ Quinta

4. In quale regione frequenti la scuola? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Abruzzo
- ◯ Basilicata
- ◯ Calabria
- ◯ Campania
- ◯ Emilia Romagna
- ◯ Friuli-Venezia Giulia
- ◯ Lazio
- ◯ Liguria
- ◯ Lombardia
- ◯ Marche
- ◯ Molise
- ◯ Piemonte
- ◯ Puglia
- ◯ Sardegna
- ◯ Sicilia
- ◯ Toscana
- ◯ Trentino-Alto Adige
- ◯ Umbria
- ◯ Valle d'Aosta
- ◯ Veneto

Strumenti a disposizione per la didattica a distanza

5. Quali strumenti hai a disposizione per seguire le lezioni a distanza? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Sì, lo uso solo io.	Sì, lo condivido con qualcuno.	Sì, ma non lo uso per la DaD.	Non è disponibile
Computer	◯	◯	◯	◯
Tablet	◯	◯	◯	◯
Smartphone	◯	◯	◯	◯

6. Indica quali strumenti hai a disposizione per la DaD tra quelli indicati: *

Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.

- ☐ Webcam (integrata o esterna)
- ☐ Microfono (integrato o esterno, es: cuffie)
- ☐ Cuffie
- ☐ Stampante
- ☐ Scanner

7. *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Decisamente scarsa	Abbastanza scarsa	Abbastanza buona	Decisamente buona
Come reputi la qualità della tua connessione ad Internet (Wi-Fi o cellulare)?	◯	◯	◯	◯

Strumenti utilizzati per la valutazione delle lingue straniere in DaD

Pensa ad UNA delle LINGUE STRANIERE che studi a scuola ed all'insegnante della lingua che hai scelto:

8. A quale lingua straniera ti riferisci in questo questionario? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Inglese
- ◯ Francese
- ◯ Spagnolo
- ◯ Tedesco
- ◯ Russo
- ◯ Cinese
- ◯ Italiano lingua seconda
- ◯ Altro

9. Quali dei seguenti metodi e piattaforme sono stati utilizzati per verifiche e/o interrogazioni durante la didattica a distanza? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Mai	Una volta	Qualche volta	Spesso	Sempr
Google Moduli	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Microsoft Forms	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Kahoot	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Quizlet	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Quizizz	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Socrative	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
NowComment	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Edublogs	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Flipgrid	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
EdPuzzle	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Newsela	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Wakelet	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
ScribaEpub	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
WebQuest	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Dibattiti	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
e-tandem (conversazione con un madrelingua, esterno alla classe)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Social networks (es: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, ...)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Registrazione e invio di audio	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Registrazione e invio di video	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

10. Quali di questi metodi sono stati utilizzati per verifiche e/o interrogazioni durante la didattica a distanza? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Mai	Una volta	Qualche volta	Spesso	Sempr
Test scritto live durante una videoconferenza (con la webcam accesa)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Interventi orali in videoconferenza (es: su Google Meet, TEAMS, Zoom, Skype)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Interventi scritti (es: su Moodle, Classroom, Fidenia, Edmodo, Weschool)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Consegna di documenti Word/PDF tramite piattaforma (es: su Moodle, Classroom, Fidenia, Edmodo, Weschool)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Consegna di documenti Word/PDF via e-mail	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lavori di gruppo con presentazione PowerPoint	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lavori di gruppo (es: PowerPoint, progetti con Word, ...) solo da consegnare	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

11. Rispetto a quando la didattica era in presenza, indica quanto spesso svolgete: *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Come quando la didattica era in presenza	Di più rispetto a quando la didattica era in presenza	Di meno rispetto a quando la didattica era in presenza	Mai in didattica in presenza	Mai in didattica a distanza
Verifiche scritte	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Verifiche orali	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lavori di gruppo da consegnare	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lavori di gruppo da presentare	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lavori individuali da consegnare	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lavori individuali da presentare	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

12. Le verifiche scritte sono/erano programmate? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Mai	Qualche volta	Quasi sempre	Sempre
In didattica a distanza	◯	◯	◯	◯
In didattica in presenza	◯	◯	◯	◯

13. Le verifiche orali sono/erano programmate? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Mai	Qualche volta	Quasi sempre	Sempre
In didattica a distanza	◯	◯	◯	◯
In didattica in presenza	◯	◯	◯	◯

14. Nel complesso, verifiche e interrogazioni vengono svolte: *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Più spesso di quando la didattica era in presenza
- ◯ Meno spesso di quando la didattica era in presenza
- ◯ Come quando la didattica era in presenza

15. Pensa ai test scritti live in didattica a distanza: in media, quanto tempo hai a disposizione?

_____

16. Di solito, in didattica a distanza, quando fai una verifica scritta, il tempo per completare la verifica: *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ è sufficiente: mi avanza sempre del tempo dopo aver ricontrollato
- ◯ è sufficiente: riesco a ricontrollare
- ◯ è sufficiente: riesco a finire ma non riesco a ricontrollare
- ◯ è poco: devo fare le cose di fretta ma riesco a finire
- ◯ è troppo poco: non riesco a finire
- ◯ è troppo: mi avanza sempre molto tempo dopo che ho consegnato
- ◯ non faccio verifiche scritte

17. Durante interrogazioni e verifiche scritte ti viene chiesto più spesso... *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ di dire qualcosa che hai imparato a memoria
- ◯ di dire cosa pensi su un argomento o cosa faresti in certa una situazione
- ◯ di utilizzare le conoscenze linguistiche in una situazione verosimile o autentica
- ◯ Altro: _____

18. Come ha valutato l'insegnante le attività svolte a distanza? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Ha verificato solamente l'effettivo livello di apprendimento delle competenze assegnandomi un voto (valutazione sommativa)
- ◯ Ha corretto gli errori, valutato l'impegno, la partecipazione ed i progressi svolti (valutazione formativa)
- ◯ Entrambe le precedenti
- ◯ Non ha effettuato nessun tipo di valutazione

Autovalutazione e feedback

Sempre in riferimento alla lingua ed all'insegnante a cui ti sei riferit* nella sezione precedente:

19. Quanto spesso ti viene chiesto di auto-valutarti? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Mai
- ◯ Raramente
- ◯ Qualche volta
- ◯ Spesso
- ◯ Sempre

20. Rispetto alla didattica in presenza, quanto spesso vieni invitato ad auto-valutarti in didatti a distanza? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Come in didattica in presenza
- ◯ Di più rispetto alla didattica in presenza
- ◯ Di meno rispetto alla didattica in presenza
- ◯ Non mi viene chiesto di auto-valutarmi

21. L'insegnante ti invita a compilare: *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Sì	No
Diario di bordo	◯	◯
Rubrica di autovalutazione	◯	◯
Portfolio	◯	◯

22. Quando l'insegnante ti fornisce un feedback, come lo fa? *

Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.

- ☐ Non mi fornisce alcun feedback
- ☐ Fornisce un feedback generale scritto
- ☐ Fornisce un feedback generale a voce
- ☐ Fornisce un feedback personale scritto
- ☐ Fornisce un feedback personale a voce

Altro: ☐ _____

23. Nel caso in cui il feedback sia personale scritto, quali strumenti vengono utilizzati per dare feedback?

Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.

- [ ] Commento nella pagina di upload del documento (es: Moodle, Classroom, ..
- [ ] Mail di risposta all'invio del documento
- [ ] Mail personale
- [ ] Commento aggiunto al documento
- [ ] Commento su piattaforma (es: SeeSaw, Mahara, Kaizena, ...)
- [ ] Messaggio informale (es: su WhatsApp)
- [ ] Altro: _____

24. Per quanto riguarda la didattica a distanza, ti viene chiesto di esprimere opinioni: *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Mai	Qualche volta	Spesso	Sempre
Sulla verifica in generale	◯	◯	◯	◯
Sugli esercizi della verifica	◯	◯	◯	◯
Sullo svolgimento della verifica (es: tempo, lunghezza)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Sui materiali utilizzati per la verifica	◯	◯	◯	◯
Sulle difficoltà riscontrate durante lo svolgimento della verifica	◯	◯	◯	◯

Impressioni sulla valutazione svolta a distanza

Sempre in riferimento alla lingua ed all'insegnante a cui ti sei riferit* nella sezione precedente:

25. Credo che i miei insegnanti abbiano dato ai compiti e alle prove gli stessi voti che avrebbe dato anche se avessimo fatto lezione in presenza *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Decisamente sì
- ◯ Più sì che no
- ◯ Più no che sì
- ◯ Decisamente no

26. Perché?

_____

27. Pensando al/alla docente di lingue, come ti sentiresti di descriverlo/a? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Decisamente no	Più no che sì	Né sì né no	Più sì che no	Decisamente sì
Sa ascoltarci	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Sa comprendere le nostre difficoltà	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Sa incoraggiarci	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Sa orientarci nelle scelte	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
È una persona di cui mi fido	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

28. Quanto contribuisce personalità del tuo insegnante al tuo stato d'animo durante una verif (scritta o orale)? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Per niente
- ◯ Poco
- ◯ Abbastanza
- ◯ Molto

29. Pensando alle verifiche a distanza, come ti senti? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Di più rispetto alla didattica in presenza	Come in didattica in presenza	Di meno rispetto alla didattica in presenza	Non lo sono
Preoccupato/a	◯	◯	◯	◯
A disagio	◯	◯	◯	◯

30. Rispetto alla didattica in presenza, essere valutato/a in didattica a distanza ti rende: *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Più ansioso/a
- ◯ Meno ansioso/a
- ◯ Né più ansioso/a né meno ansioso/a
- ◯ Non sono ansioso/a

31. Quanto contribuisce il fatto di usare la tecnologia sul tuo sentirti o meno in ansia? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Non influisce
- ◯ Influisce poco
- ◯ Influisce abbastanza
- ◯ Influisce molto

32. Come reputi l'utilizzo della tecnologia per lo svolgimento delle verifiche? *

Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.

- ☐ Mi fa sentire stimolato/a
- ☐ Mi fa sentire motivato/a
- ☐ Mi fa sentire a mio agio
- ☐ Mi fa sentire a disagio
- ☐ Mi piace perché le verifiche sono più varie rispetto alla didattica in presenza
- ☐ Sarebbe migliore se il mio insegnante utilizzasse materiali più vari
- ☐ Mi diverte
- ☐ Lo trovo noioso
- ☐ Penso sempre che qualcosa possa andare storto
- ☐ Non mi piace

33. Nel complesso, rispetto alla didattica in presenza, svolgi le verifiche a distanza: *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Più volentieri
- ◯ Meno volentieri
- ◯ Né più volentieri né meno volentieri

34. Come descriveresti le verifiche a distanza? *

Appendix B:

Questionario sulla valutazione delle lingue straniere durante la didattica a distanza

Buongiorno!
Mi chiamo Beatrice Dei Rossi e sono una studentessa laureanda dell'Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia.

A partire da marzo 2020, a causa dell'emergenza dovuta al Covid-19, sono state numerose le sfide che avete dovuto affrontare in qualità di docenti: dalle nuove modalità di fare scuola, agli strumenti da utilizzare, dalla mancanza di interazione, al dover trovare nuovi modi di rapportarsi con gli studenti, dal trovare modi adeguati per valutare, al dover risolvere problemi dovuti alla tecnologia. Probabilmente no sempre è stato facile e magari ad un certo punto vi siete anche sentiti scoraggiati.
Per la mia tesi di laurea sto indagando come nelle scuole secondarie di secondo grado l'emergenza Coronavirus ha cambiato il modo di svolgere verifiche e interrogazioni di lingua straniera e come l'emergenza ha modificato la valutazione delle lingue straniere.

Grazie in anticipo! 😊
⏱️ La compilazione richiede circa 10 minuti.
📌 Il questionario è rivolto a docenti di lingue straniere nella scuola secondaria di secondo grado che insegnano almeno dall'inizio dell'anno scolastico 2019/2020.

Le Sue opinioni sono importanti. Le assicuro che il questionario rimarrà anonimo e i dati raccolti saranno trattati rispettando il GDPR 679/2016, d.lgs. 101/2018

*Campo obbligatorio

Informazioni personali

1. Sesso: *

   Contrassegna solo un ovale.

   ◯ F
   ◯ M
   ◯ Altro: _____

2. Età *

   _____

3. In che tipo di scuola insegna (es: liceo scientifico, istituto tecnico turistico, istituto professionale)? *

4. In quante e quali classi insegna? *

5. Quale lingua insegna? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Inglese
- ◯ Francese
- ◯ Spagnolo
- ◯ Tedesco
- ◯ Russo
- ◯ Cinese
- ◯ Italiano lingua seconda
- ◯ Altro

6. In quale regione insegna? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- Abruzzo
- Basilicata
- Calabria
- Campania
- Emilia Romagna
- Friuli-Venezia Giulia
- Lazio
- Liguria
- Lombardia
- Marche
- Molise
- Piemonte
- Puglia
- Sardegna
- Sicilia
- Toscana
- Trentino-Alto Adige
- Umbria
- Valle d'Aosta
- Veneto

Strumenti a disposizione per la didattica a distanza

7. Quali strumenti ha a disposizione per le lezioni a distanza? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Sì, ad uso personale	Sì, ad uso condiviso	Sì, ma non utilizzato per la DaD	Non è disponibile
Computer	◯	◯	◯	◯
Tablet	◯	◯	◯	◯
Smartphone	◯	◯	◯	◯

8. Indica quali strumenti ha a disposizione per la DaD tra quelli indicati: *

Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.

- ☐ Webcam (integrata o esterna)
- ☐ Microfono (integrato o esterno, es: cuffie)
- ☐ Cuffie
- ☐ Stampante
- ☐ Scanner

9. *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Decisamente scarsa	Abbastanza scarsa	Abbastanza buona	Decisamente buona
Come reputa la qualità della Sua connessione ad Internet (Wi-Fi o cellulare)?	◯	◯	◯	◯

Strumenti utilizzati per la valutazione delle lingue straniere in DaD

10. Quali dei seguenti metodi e piattaforme ha utilizzato per verifiche e/o interrogazioni durar la didattica a distanza? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Non so cosa sia	So cos'è ma non lo uso	Una volta	Qualche volta	Spesso	Sempr
	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Google Moduli						
Microsoft Forms						
Kahoot						
Quizlet						
Quizizz						
Socrative						
NowComment						
Edublogs						
Flipgrid						
EdPuzzle						
Newsela						
Wakelet						
ScribaEpub						
WebQuest						
Dibattiti						
e-tandem						
Social networks (es: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, ...)						
Registrazione ed invio di audio da parte degli studenti						
Registrazione ed invio di video da parte degli studenti						

11. Per quali motivi utilizza le piattaforme che ha indicato alla domanda precedente? *

12. Quali metodi utilizza per valutare gli studenti? *

Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.

	In didattica a distanza	In didattica in presenza	Non utilizzo questo metodo
Test scritto live durante una videoconferenza (con la webcam accesa)	☐	☐	☐
Interventi orali in videoconferenza (es: su Google Meet, TEAMS, Zoom, Skype)	☐	☐	☐
Interventi scritti (es: su Moodle, Classroom, Fidenia, Edmodo, Weschool)	☐	☐	☐
Consegna di documenti Word/PDF tramite piattaforma (es: su Moodle, Classroom, Fidenia, Edmodo, Weschool)	☐	☐	☐
Consegna di documenti Word/PDF via e-mail	☐	☐	☐
Lavori di gruppo con presentazione PowerPoint	☐	☐	☐
Lavori di gruppo (es: PowerPoint, progetti con Word, ...) solo da consegnare	☐	☐	☐

13. Quali metodi preferisce per valutare gli studenti? Perché? *

14. Quali tra le seguenti opzioni influenza/ha influenzato la scelta delle piattaforme e delle modalità di verifica? *

Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.

- [ ] La mia conoscenza delle piattaforme
- [ ] La mia conoscenza della tecnologia
- [ ] Gli strumenti che ho a disposizione
- [ ] Gli strumenti che gli studenti hanno a disposizione
- [ ] Gli strumenti messi a disposizione dalla scuola
- [ ] Il mio rapporto con la tecnologia (NON mi trovo a mio agio)
- [ ] Il mio rapporto con la tecnologia (mi trovo a mio agio)

Altro: [ ] _____

15. Quanto influiscono sulla scelta degli strumenti e delle modalità di verifica... *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Per niente	Poco	Abbastanza	Molto
Gli strumenti che ho a disposizione	◯	◯	◯	◯
Gli strumenti a disposizione degli studenti	◯	◯	◯	◯
Gli strumenti messi a disposizione dalla scuola	◯	◯	◯	◯

16. Come reputa: *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Scarso	Sufficiente	Buono	Ottimo
La mia conoscenza delle piattaforme	◯	◯	◯	◯
La mia conoscenza della tecnologia	◯	◯	◯	◯
Gli strumenti che ho a disposizione	◯	◯	◯	◯
Gli strumenti che gli studenti hanno a disposizione	◯	◯	◯	◯
Gli strumenti messi a disposizione dalla scuola	◯	◯	◯	◯
Il mio rapporto con la tecnologia	◯	◯	◯	◯

Impressioni sulla valutazione a distanza

17. Le modalità di verifica a distanza sono le stesse che utilizzava in presenza? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Sì, solo scritto
- ◯ Sì, solo orale
- ◯ Sì, scritto e orale esattamente come prima
- ◯ Sì, ma utilizzo lo scritto di più rispetto a prima
- ◯ Sì, ma utilizzo l'orale di più rispetto a prima
- ◯ No, solo scritto
- ◯ No, solo orale

18. Quali sono le principali preoccupazioni quando valuta a distanza (sia per verifiche scritte che per verifiche orali)? *

19. Ha riscontrato difficoltà nella valutazione a distanza? Se sì, quali? E come le ha risolte/ha cercato di risolverle? *

20. Riscontra vantaggi nella valutazione a distanza? Se sì, quali? *

21. Quanto è d'accordo con l'affermazione: "Ho dato ai compiti e alle prove gli stessi voti che avrei dato se avessimo fatto lezione in presenza"? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Decisamente d'accordo
- ◯ Più in accordo che in disaccordo
- ◯ Più in disaccordo che in accordo
- ◯ Decisamente in disaccordo

22. Perché?

23. In didattica a distanza, come reputa l'affidabilità di: *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Più affidabile rispetto alla didattica in presenza	Tanto affidabile quanto in didattica in presenza	Meno affidabile rispetto alla didattica in presenza	Non utilizzo questo metodo
Test scritti	◯	◯	◯	◯
Test orali	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lavori di gruppo	◯	◯	◯	◯

24. Quale metodo preferisce per valutare gli studenti? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ◯ Test scritti
- ◯ Test orali
- ◯ Lavori di gruppo
- ◯ Altro: _____

25. Perché? *

26. L'utilizzo della tecnologia per la valutazione degli apprendimenti (più opzioni selezionabili)

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	Sì	No	Né sì né no
Mi è d'aiuto	◯	◯	◯
Mi è d'ostacolo	◯	◯	◯
Mi fa sentire a mio agio	◯	◯	◯
Mi fa sentire a disagio	◯	◯	◯
Mi motiva a cercare sempre nuovi metodi per valutare	◯	◯	◯
Facilita la raccolta dei dati	◯	◯	◯
È per me stimolante	◯	◯	◯
È stimolante per i miei studenti	◯	◯	◯
Richiede più tempo rispetto alla valutazione in presenza	◯	◯	◯
Mi offre possibilità per migliorare la valutazione	◯	◯	◯
Mi offre possibilità di utilizzare materiali vari	◯	◯	◯
Facilita il feedback	◯	◯	◯
Facilita l'autovalutazione degli studenti	◯	◯	◯

27. Se dovesse descrivere la valutazione a distanza in breve, cosa direbbe? *

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