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Students' motivation: differences between online and on-site lessons.

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Teaching is more than imparting
knowledge, it is inspiring change.

William Ward

Abstract

Concerns about the increasing of online teaching are spreading. The aim of this study is to provide a possible answer to a major research question: "Does the online teaching environment influence the motivation of the students?". In this thesis, it will be illustrated the main elements that were considered influential, such as: loss of time, stimulus, teacher's behaviour, all of which were collected using a direct observation of six classes of high school students in Italy. In order to obtain a wider view of the environment itself, it was asked students their point of view by submitting a questionnaire and the data collected through diary and a checklist allow to understand and describe the whole setting considered. At four months distance, it was then observed how the data gathered may have changed by submitting a second questionnaire to the students, being them the focus of this research.

This case study is thus focusing on highlighting the main differences between online and on-site lessons, and as a matter of fact it was observed that overall there are indeed some divergences. Moreover, during the research it was ascertained some interesting elements such as the evaluation of the student, which is seen to be influencing one of the main topics of the students language learning at school, and the particular difficulties of SEN students and how the context of online learning impacts them, given that among the six classes observed there was of one of them.

Keywords: second-language learning, motivational components, classroom environment, process oriented approach.

Contents

Introduction

This thesis considers the field of language education as the main subject of its study. Particular attention was given to the approach that this field has towards online learning and teaching, indeed one of the major topics to be investigated is *motivation in online learning*. The phenomenon of motivation has been widely observed due to its complexity and importance in the learning of a language. However, recently the field of language learning is increasingly encompassing the field of computer science, thus generating what can be addressed to as Online Education/Learning or E-Learning, as a matter of fact though there has been less previous evidence for this new field. A new approach is therefore needed for language education. This project aims to develop an overarching framework to this field gathering previous knowledge and testing these theoretical framework in order to obtain a clear distinction between the student's motivation in online learning and on-site learning.

Due to Covid-19 virus, starting from March 2020, language education (as education in every other field) had to face the big impacted and change that brought the online education. The intention of this study indeed, was to provide information for further improvement of online learning environments and to investigate whether the online lessons can be as much motivating as the front ones. The purpose was not

that of globally generalise a result, but rather to study a small community and see if some theoretical principles were applied. Therefore, six high school classes were analyzed and investigated through a direct observation and using instruments, both from the qualitative and the quantitative research methods to examine the impact of the online environment. As it will be seen, this study in particular is a *classroom research* and each one of them was considered as a separate subject.

The current work is organized by four main chapters: the first two chapters explain the theoretical framework and the previous knowledge of the field investigated in order to obtain a general overview of the main influences of this study and the general path that was followed as the basis of this investigation. Indeed, what is described regards a general background of language education and second language learning; the two environments of this study, on-site and online, and also blended systems; the features of motivation that were later on considered in this case scenario. The third chapter explains in depth the background method and materials used to collect the data, the participants and subsequently the outcome of these data and how they have been organized, categorized and analyzed. The collection of data starts in September 2020 and ends in April 2021. In particular the main divisions are three plus one: 3.2.1 shows the features that were supposed to be influential on the motivation of the students the most, 3.2.2 focuses on the teacher's behaviour; and finally 3.2.3 describes the data obtained from the student's point of view on the matter. It is said "three plus one" because the three sections just explained regard all the same observation and type of data; the fourth division instead is about data collected through the use of a separate questionnaire, submitted to the students on April 2021, after some time and nearly at the end of the academic year. This methodology was used in order to understand how the learning situation evolved and to check the data collected in

the first term, while the observer was present, to see if it may have influenced the data collected (3.2.4). This division was also chosen based on the instrument that was used to collect the data, as a matter of fact the first and the second point were both collected using a checklist devised by the researcher, even though the second point is far more enriched by the data collected through the diary (supported by an interview itself). The third and the last point instead, concerns the collection of data by a questionnaire supplied to the students.

Section 3.3 concerns a feature that was noticed during the collection of data, but that was not initially brought into the research. With advancing the observation, the feature of the evaluation emerged as an important topic in the field of online education, and in particular language education. It was observed that being the oral test the only method of evaluation it raises the level of anxiety provoked; moreover, the attention given to the so-called "excellent students" is less than in the other environment. Lastly, chapter four explains the main conclusions of this study and acknowledges the limitations that it has, such as the amount of time that was dedicated to this research.

The main achievements, including contributions to the field can be summarised as follows. Mainly, the hypothesis that the two environments have different impacts on students' motivation and the research questions affiliated are confirmed for the most part of the data. Considering the lack of time; the decreasing interest and participation; the evaluation structured in the wrong way; and the general opinions of the students, it is possible to affirm that the two environments report many differences in student's motivation at their current state. The main reason behind this discrepancy involves the methods applied in online teaching, which appears to have

little differences with on-site lessons. As a matter of fact, there is a clear advantage in following a different method, specific to online learning, rather than apply the knowledge and methods that already exist for the front lessons.

All of this, other than being confirmed in this thesis through the data collected and the direct observation of the scenario, is also asserted and supported by the theoretical framework that was reported and used to develop the research at stake.

Chapter 1

Language learning and teaching

1.1 Key concepts for language education

When we talk about Language Learning we must also introduce the main concepts for the *language education*. Among them, there are *implications of motivation and attitude, strategies, styles, aptitude* and *processing* (which involves the input, the short and long term memory and the output). All of these focus on a so-called **learner-centredness** in language education programmes. The concept of learner-centredness regards the idea of focusing on the learner, which is at the centre of the learning process. The curriculum in which the learner is the main criteria has three aspects: the planned curriculum; the actual curriculum; and the evaluated curriculum. In this thesis, as already introduced, the focus will be mainly on Motivation [see Chapter 3], but given the importance of the other principles they will be introduced briefly:

- *Implications of Motivation and Attitude*: in psychology, **attitude** is associated to a set of emotions, beliefs, and behaviors toward a particular object, person,

thing, or event. Attitudes are often the result of experience and they can have a strong influence on behavior (Cherry, 2018)[11]. Gardner in 1985 [35] devised **The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery** (AMTB) which measures five parameters associated with L2 learning: ***Integrativeness*** which refers to the willingness and interest of the person in having social contacts with the L2 group. It is evaluated by three scales: (1) Attitudes Toward the Language Group, (2) Interest in Foreign Languages, and (3) an Integrative Orientation toward Learning the Language; ***Attitudes toward the Learning Situation***: they express the student's assessment of formal instruction and is tested by two measures: (2) Attitudes Toward the Teacher, and (2) Attitudes Toward the Course; ***Motivation***: it refers to one's attitudes, desires, and effort to learn the second language and it is appraised by three scales: (1) Attitudes toward Learning the Language, (2) Desire to Learn the Language, and (2) Motivational Intensity; ***Anxiety***: it reflects the individual's concern in the language class or in environments where the language is used; ***Other Attributes***: this refers to other variables measured by the Instrumental Orientation scale.

- *Strategies*: **strategies** are techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge and improve their skills. They can also be defined as useful to encompass both second language learning and use strategies. Taken together, they constitute the steps or actions consciously selected by learners either to improve the learning of a second language, the use of it, or both. Some models proposed are: **Communication strategies** by Faerch and Kaspar [23], employed when the student is communicating, either in a direct interaction with somebody or speaking to a public where interaction is more difficult and may not be as intense as in a direct conversation; **Direct** and **Indirect strategies**

by Oxford [41], respectively used either directly on the linguistic material or adopted not in the language itself, but around it; and Chamot's **Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning** (1990) [9], which proposed three classes of strategies: (a) *Metacognitive*, (b) *Cognitive*, and (c) *Socio-Affective*, which are devised according to four major metacognitive processes: planning, monitoring, problem solving and evaluating. Strategies are important also because a strategic learner is also a **self-regulated student** who uses all the strategies, such as metacognitive, cognitive, memory, social, affective, etc. It permits the learner to increase its responsibility setting goals and to act autonomously. The role of the teacher is to plan to foster these and allow space to the students. It is preferred to define them as **learner strategies** rather than learning strategies.

- *Styles*: **styles** are the way people tend to prefer doing something. So they are a systematic difference in the way individuals prefer to approach learning and problem solving tasks. They cater for the different *sensory* and *cognitive* styles which can be various, holistic or analytic, and inductive or deductive. From a **sensory** point of view, which sees the process of information through sense, there is the **VARK**, which stands for *Visual*, people tend to organize the learning and it helps to consolidate it); *Auditory*, people prefer to listen, produce oral language and also speaking out loud; *Reading/Writing*, people prefer words written down; and *Kinesthetic*, people prefer experiential learning, meaning they prefer basing their learning on experience on concrete actions. From a **social** point of view, styles can be differed as *Individual style* or *Group style*. Therefore, styles are the way people prefer doing things, without being aware of it and they can influence the type of strategy they intend to use. Moreover, it is important to nurture them along the continuum.

- *Aptitude*: **language aptitude** is referred to those verbal abilities that help L2 learning. Achievement in a L2 is positively related to language aptitude. It must be supported and stretched within the curriculum choices through differentiated objectives, exercises, tasks, projects, etc. Carroll & Sapon (1959) [8], identified a series of phases of empirical research that devise the **Modern Language Aptitude Test** (MLAT). It is a test that examines four underlying factors that are important in language aptitude: *phonemic encoding*; *grammatical sensitivity*; *inductive language learning* and *mnemonic learning*. These are considered fundamental in order to identify aptitude toward language. Another important development in the study of aptitude is by Pimsleur (1966) [45], who devised the so-called **Language Aptitude Battery** (LAB) in which he explained that aptitude is not fixed and it has two important aspects: *inductive language* skills and *auditory* abilities.

- *Processing*: the processing view of the learning structure involves the **input** which is important for the comprehension and for noticing form and will be explained better in Chapter 2; **short term memory** and **long term memory** in order to develop the lexical store; and the **output** which can be both oral or/and written and increases awareness. **Short Term Memory** (also known as *Working Memory*) is responsible for the attention that is paid to language forms and essential for learning and noticing (attentional and noticing metaprocesses), moreover it has a limited capacity. **Long Term Memory** instead, has an unlimited capacity and is divided in three different storages: *Rule-based storage*, for the grammar; *Memory-based* storage, for words or expressions; *Knowledge-based* storage, for cultural knowledge. Lastly, the **output** is the production of the language and it includes some *syntactic processing* that come

into play when the individual notices the gap in its competence.

Conserning these last two feature, Aptitude and Processing, Skehan (2002, [54]) worked on the field of Processing and brought together the *processing operation* of language with *aptitude factors*, showing the connection between them. He devised a model structured by three aptitude factor: **Phonemic encoding ability**; **Language analytic ability** (LAA); and **Memory**. For each of these factors corresponds a stage and a process operation, respectively these are: **Input** and **Noticing** for the Phonemic Encoding; **Central processing** and **Organization** for the LAA; and **Output** and **Retrieval** for the Memory. Following this model, it is possible to create different "combinations" of aptitude; as a matter of fact, he was able to observe and conclude that the psychological development is related to Memory functioning rather than cognitive abilities.

1.2 Second language learning

Second language learning (SLL) is about the process and the study of how people acquire a second language, often denote to as L2 or target language, as opposed to L1 (the mother tongue). In most cases, the expression "second language" can refer to any language learned in addition to and after the mother tongue. Second language learning is in contrast with a bilingual learning situation, where a child acquires two languages simultaneously and this is why it is important to highlight the "chronological" structure of learning of the languages. The terms **"learning"** and **"acquisition"** are often dealt as synonyms in the literature but as a matter of fact, some researchers distinguish the two notions from each other: one of them is Stephen D. Krashen (1982).

In his book *"Principles and Practices in Second Language Acquisition"* Stephen D. Krashen [34] explains his view about second language learning through his **Five Hypotheses About Second Language Acquisition**: the acquisition-learning distinction, the natural order hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis. He explains that these five concepts regards the *"natural order"*, that is the order of acquisition of linguistic structures.

In the following lines we will focus on three out of five of his hypotheses, which are the ones that are more coherent and important to introduce our case study: the acquisition-learning distinction, the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis. The five hypothesis referred to are:

- THE ACQUISITION-LEARNING DISTINCTION
  The acquisition-learning distinction is probably the most important of all Krashen's hypotheses. He assumes that adults have two distinguished and separated ways of developing competence in a second language. The first way is **language acquisition**, a process comparable to the way children develop skills in their first language. *Language acquisition* is a subconscious process, as a matter of fact language acquirers are not aware that they are acquiring language, but are only aware that they are using the language for communication matters. The outcome of *language acquisition* (acquired competence that is) is also subconscious. The second way to develop competence in a second language is by **language learning**. Krashen uses the term "learning" hereafter to refer to conscious knowledge of a second language, that means: the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them (use of metalanguage, meaning using the language to talk about the language). In other words, learning is

"knowing about" a language, also known as "grammar", or "rules".

- THE MONITOR HYPOTHESIS

  The *Monitor hypothesis* explains the relationship between acquisition and learning; in particular it specifies the influence of the latter on the former. The so-called "monitor function" is the result of the grammar learned and according to Krashen, the acquisition system is the promoter of the expression, while the system of learning has the role of the "*monitor*". This monitor in fact, operates in planning, editing, and correcting the function when are encountered three conditions: 1) the second language learner has sufficient time at their disposal; 2) they focus on form or think about correctness; and 3) they know the rule. It seems though that conscious learning's role is limited in L2 performances; Krashen about this explains that the monitor's role in small and suggests that there are three different individual variations in language learners: those that use the "monitor" constantly (over-users); those who prefer not to use it (under-users); and finally those who use it properly (optimal users).

- THE INPUT HYPOTHESIS

  This hypothesis explains that students advance in their knowledge of the language when they understand linguistic *input* slightly more superior than their current level. As a matter of fact the learning occurs when the student focuses the attention on the meaning of the input instead of on its form. There are some conditions for the input to be learned, the most important is that the input must be immediately after the input learned so far in the natural order. Krashen identifies the input level with the "**i + 1**" formula, where "**i**" is the linguistic knowledge that the student already has and "**+1**" is the next stage of language acquisition, or the so-called "area of potential development". This

can happen only when the acquirer obtains comprehensible input.

- THE AFFECTIVE FILTER HYPOTHESIS

  Research over the last decade has confirmed the existence of a variety of affective variables related to success in second language acquisition (reviewed in Krashen, 1981). Most of those studied can be placed into one of these three categories:

  1. **Motivation**: Performers with high motivation generally do better in second language acquisition [see Chapter 3].

  2. **Self-confidence**: Performers with self-confidence and a good self-image tend to do better in second language acquisition.

  3. **Anxiety**: Low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition, whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety.

  The Affective Filter hypothesis claims that the effect of affect is "outside" the language acquisition device. It still maintains input as the primary causative variable in second language acquisition, and introduces some affective variables acting to stop or facilitate the conveying of input to the language acquisition device. The filter hypothesis explains why it is possible for an acquirer to obtain a great amount of *comprehensible input*, and yet stop at the native speaker level.

  Nevertheless, this whole concept will be better explained in depth in Chapter 2.

- THE NATURAL ORDER HYPOTHESIS

  The *Natural Order hypothesis* is based on suggestions that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a 'natural order' which is also predictable. That

means that in a given language, some grammatical rules are acquired earlier than others. This order seemed to be independent of the learners' features such as age, L1 background, conditions of exposure, and there seems to be significant elements that reinforce the existence of an actual Natural Order of language acquisition. Krashen though, rejects grammatical sequencing when the final aim regards language acquisition.

Thus, in order to learn a language the input (stimulus) was seen as necessary. In particular, it is interesting to add that the stimulus undergoes a process of evaluation, that is a biological response to an external stimulus; this is referred to as **_Theory of evaluation of the stimulus_** and the assessment itself occurs through emotions that play an important role in transforming the *input* into *learning*.

Scherer (1984, [50]) developed *five parameters* to evaluate the **stimulus**:

- **Innovation**: Innovation is a good strategy to raise emotions. Although it has some values (e.g. it hold the attention and activates the brain), innovation alone does not last long and is not enough.

- **Pleasure**: Pleasure is a parameter on which it is possible to work on different levels such as contents, materials, variety, etc., but it has to be done involving the student which is at the centre of the didactic process.

- **Relevance**: Relevance is to be intended referred to one's own desires and needs. With this parameter, the work has to be done on the *interests*, the *needs* and on the *objectives* of the students; thus, the motivation that is being nurtured is the intrinsic one. As a matter of fact, our brain only captures the stimulus that are retained interesting or useful to the individual.

- **Competence**: Competence can be developed by giving real opportunities of succeeding, that is increasing the self-efficacy (in other words believing of being able to reach a determined objective). To do so, the work has to be focused on goal-setting, feedback and expectations.

- **Consistency**: Consistency is to be intended referred to the self and to the social image with others. This parameter can be connected to what will be seen in 2.1 about self-confidence.

These five parameters will be useful in the progress of this research and will be considered in order to evaluate the stimulus in the data collected.

1.3 Second language teaching environments

In the context which our research applies, the focus was on two different types of lesson environments: online and front lessons. However, for this thesis it is important to know their differences and how they can be blended together in a so-called "blended course"; that is because, as previously anticipated, this research regards the observation and the study of a blended environment due to the COVID-19 circumstance.

Some classroom-related factors are relevant due to the fact that they are also situation-specific factors and thus they contribute to motivation in an L2 context. Indeed, nowadays teachers aim to develop students' communicative skills by promoting interactions between peers as they participate to the lesson (Clement, 1994 [14]).

Before moving on to explaining the general features of these contexts of teaching, it

is also necessary to consider two types of methodology of language teaching that will be considered in this study. The first method is referred to as **inductive**: Mallia (2014) [37] describes it is an ascending approach in which students have greater responsibility for their own learning. Here the rules are to be illustrated by selecting carefully the materials for the use of the second language. Therefore, learners have to understand the rules from the experience of the language itself and those same rules are *induced* by the teachers through examples. Shaffer (1989) [53], explains that the *inductive approach* is one in which students' attention is focused on the structure and they are supposed to draw up and express the language pattern. The second method considered, as the counterpart of the previous one, is the **deductive** one. *Deductive* teaching uses meta-linguistic information that are explicitly explained by the teacher during the lesson. This includes supplying specific language rules, showing the new structures and illustrating the context of use (Mallia, 2014 [37]). Hence, the language input comes from the teacher and learners are presented examples that demonstrate the use of the grammar structures asking them to replicate those sentences later. In the *deductive approach*, students are given an explanation.

The environment considered in this work are the on-site and the online ones, therefore in 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 they will be explained in order to understand the scenarios of this case study. Being this a particular case of mixed environment though, in 1.3.3 it will also be seen the case of Blended Learning.

However, before proceeding in their description, it is also fundamental to acknowledge the importance of a positive classroom environment.
First of all, among the elements that appear in the classroom and are influential there is also the *social climate* that the teacher establishes. As a matter of fact, teachers,

generally speaking, have a big influence on students emotions and behaviour; in particular, the atmosphere created has a great aftermath on the learners.

It is important to understand that the classroom setting must be **functional** and **appropriate** in order to promote and maximize the engagement and the achievement of the students. Talking about **achievement**, Faerch and Kaspar [23] make a distinction between this concept and the one of **avoidance**. They explain that *avoidance* refers to *abandon strategies* which happen when the students' difficulties are such that they decide to abandon the communication; on the other hand they relate to the *achievement* the determination to *continue* the conversation, or learning, even if the student is having a degree of difficulty in carrying it forward.

On the matter of classroom environments, Cheryan (2014, [12]) described some influences that can be present in the classroom and have an impact on students achievement. She explains that, as already stated, the classroom should be a place in which the achievement of the students is maximized; in particular she also addresses the environment of the Virtual Classrooms saying that "*as the use of virtual classroom environments continues to grow, care should be taken in how these spaces are designed to create a virtual classroom culture that is welcoming to all students*". Moreover, she also states that classrooms with greater external noise have more potential lowering students achievement and this can be applied in the online environment too; for example during a conversation between a student and the teacher, both having the microphone on, there may be some delay in the audio causing an echo, or even some other weird noises caused by the interference between the devices, All of these external noises thwart learning.

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1.3.1 On-site Lessons

An on-site lesson for a second language learning environment can take place in a particular setting (e.g. a school or a classroom) and they normally consist of identifiable type of activities. As well explained by Crookes and Schmit (1991) [15], in a typical L2 lesson there is an initial stage that is likely to have some framing observations, but usually they only concern the teaching objectives or the material. Indeed, mainly in high school classes, students tend to demonstrate less motivation and teachers do not try enough to motivate.

As a matter of fact, lessons should follow a recognizable structure: they begin in a particular way, proceed through a series of teaching and learning activities and they reach a conclusion. This pattern of structure or organization is a result of the teacher's attempts to regulate the process in a way which will optimize the amount of learning that can take place in the time available. As described by Richards and Lockhart (1994) [46], it is possible to generalize the structure of a language lesson as follows:

- Opening

- Sequencing

- Pacing

- Closure

All of these concepts can be connected to the notion of dividing the lesson into teaching units. Given a curriculum with determined contents and general objectives, it will be necessary to prepare the lesson or as it is called by Danesi (1988): *Unità Didattica*

(Learning Unit) [17]. Danesi explains that what we refer to as *Unità Didattica* is the development of a series of operating phases along a nucleus formed by given items.

Among the various models of *Unità Didattica* (UD) that were developed and suggested, the one by Freddi (e.g. 1970, 1979: 127-137) stands out because it offers a scheme where different scientific reflections complement each other.
The main steps are: *Motivazione, Globalità, Analisi, Sintesi* (motivation, globality, analysis, synthesis).

It is important for us to consider these aspects because it will be given particular attention to the Motivation phase, whether it is present or not, since the single phases are not all necessarily manifested.

1.3.2   Online Lessons/E-learning

Front and online lessons are superficially identical, both of them can be structured in the same way throughout different means and contexts. However, it is through the means and the contexts that the output changes, or at least this is what will be demonstrated within this thesis [see Chapter 3].

In order to understand the differences between the two types of lessons, it must be acknowledged what it is meant by *online lessons* and *E-Learning*.
A *Virtual Classroom* (VC or generally speaking "online lesson"), as defined by Hiltz (1990) [31] is a "teaching and learning environment located within a computer-mediated communication system". It is a set of "spaces" and group communication work structures built into the software. Some of its communication layout resemble

structures or procedures used in traditional classrooms; other instead support forms of interaction that would be difficult or impossible in the "face-to-face" environment of the traditional classroom.

The aims of a Virtual Classroom are (Hiltz, 1990 [31]):

- The improvement of access to elaborated educational experiences through allowing students and teachers to participate in "remote-learning" groups at times and places suitable to them, using personal computers at home, on a campus or at work.

- The improvement of the quality and effectiveness of education by using the device to support a cooperative learning process.

- Collaborative learning is defined as learning that emphasizes group or cooperative efforts among faculty and students.

It stresses active participation and interaction by both students and instructors. Knowledge is gained through an active dialogue that enables the sharing of ideas and information.

Electronical Learning (E-learning), is a system of continue formation where what is important is the process where the single forming activity/task is included. The main characteristics are explained by Eletti (2002) [56] and are: **Interaction** (learn by doing); **Dynamicity** and **Modularity** (course modulated by the user).

In the research by Lin (2017) [36], several studies have shown the positive impacts of learning strategies in traditional language-learning courses (general language skills

and vocabulary acquisition too) and for a positive relationship between the achievement of a second language and the application of active *Self-Regulated Learning* (SRL). It was also examined this kind of learning strategies (SRL) by measuring students' self-regulatory skills in online learning by generalizing two elements relating to their use of strategies: study skills and goal-setting. Several recent articles, have shown that Self-Regulated Learning can have positive influence in technology-based learning contexts, including online collaborative learning.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) consists of the cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral, motivational, and emotional/affective traits of learning. The notion of SRL was explained by Zimmerman (2001) as: "how learners control their thoughts, feelings, and actions in order to achieve academically" [62]. He also adds that the aim of SRL is explaining how people enhance their use of systematic or regular method of learning. Even within this thesis, the aim is very similar to SRL researchers', who attempt to understand the manner in which learners are able to adapt to dynamic contexts by ceaselessly improving their skills. Online learning researches also tend to focus on domain-general strategies, and to report that students' use of SRL strategies is critical to their success.

Compared with face-to-face classrooms, online learning requires students to exercise more autonomously over their learning behavior, and keeping in mind the *natural order of acquisition* explained previously in 1.2 and the various elements of psycho-teaching, the planning of online activities must follow the same principles as the planning of face-to-face activities. For that matter, Saladino (2020, [49]) proposes the planning of didactic activities on the basis of "5 steps" which include five phases of development of the lesson.

FIRST STEP: The first step concerns the "*selection of the work*", which consists in activating interest and motivation for the task. As also happens in face-to-face teaching, this phase involves the recovery of foreknowledge to "maximize what already exists on the subject of the lesson". For this phase it is advisable to propose the reading of textbooks (in order to continue including face-to-face teaching tools with which the students are more familiar), or watching videos, to be followed by a short verification phase.

SECOND STEP: The second step is nothing more than the *actual lesson*, in synchronous mode with video conference: through the "online video lesson" the aim is to recover the didactic-interactive relationship. Thanks to real-time contact with students, the teacher can introduce the topic of the lesson, encourage participation and provide moments of reflection with the students. These, however limited, are certainly indispensable for communicating with them in a period in which they particularly need to understand and feel listened to. Therefore, during the video lesson it will be important to prefer a more discussion-oriented mode in which it is possible to encourage the exchange of ideas and experiences. In this case the teacher alternates a brief presentation with questions or some problems to be solved. In this way the students at home will not only be listeners but active protagonists in the development of contents.

THIRD STEP: The third steps involves the "*comprehension questions*", useful for verifying the progress of the class in terms of learning and understanding of the topics addressed. It becomes useful in order to select and focus the theme of the questions according to the salient points of the topic being discussed. Based on the

answers received, the teacher will be able to develop the load of study and revise what was not fully understood.

FOURTH STEP: The fourth step focuses on "*group work*" which helps students to resume and cultivate relationships with their peers as well as to strengthen learning and internalization of the topic discussed in class. In practice, it is advisable to create groups of two or three students based on the personalities presented, trying to create the most balanced groups possible. To give meaning to the work carried out by the various groups, it is also suggested to "find a way to enhance the product of the work of the groups".

FIFTH STEP: Fifth and final step: the "*erepository consolidation*". This phase allows to consolidate, in fact, the concepts studied thanks to the concrete support of an archive, the *repository*, which collects all the material already viewed or integrated to enhance what is addressed in class. If organized in a clear way, "the path and the material (can) become a continuous, constant and very precious resource for learning and relationships at all levels". The didactic action allows both to proceed according to the sequence of the natural acquisition process and to make the study dynamic and interactive.

Overall, it was seen how the online lessons should be structured and some of its main features, but does the structure of online learning increase students' motivation? This will be discussed in Chapter 3.

1.3.3 Blended Courses

Blended learning or hybrid learning, in educational research refers to a mix of different learning environments. It combines the traditional frontal method in the classroom with activities mediated by the computer (eg e-learning, use of DVDs, etc.) and / or by mobile systems (such as smartphones and tablets).

There are different forms through which a bldended course can be handed and among them there are the **Enriched Virtual** model and the **Flipped Classroom** model. As Arnett explains [2], in an *Enriched Virtual* classing, students complete most part of the activities online, but attend school for required "face-to-face" learning sessions with a teacher a few times a week. In *Flipped Classroom* format, students learn at home through online tasks and video-recorded lectures, and teachers use class time for the practice or other projects. Normally, the *Flipped Classroom* model is used by teachers whose students come to class every day, whereas the *Enriched Virtual* model is generally set-up to increase support for students in virtual schooling who normally would never attend the school.

As described by Valiathan (2002, [57]), the National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT) classifies the blended learning into three models:

- **skill-driven learning**: merges self-driven learning with teacher or facilitator support to develop particular knowledge and skills. It is based on learning specific knowledge and skills that requires regular feedback and support from the teacher;

- **attitude-driven learning**: combines various events and media to develop certain behaviors. It has content that regards developing new attitudes and

behaviors and needs peer-to-peer interaction and a "risk-free" environment;

- **competency-driven learning**: blends performance support tools with knowledge management means and mentoring to develop workplace abilities. It is useful to capture and transfer implicit knowledge, learners interact with experts and observe their job.

For the matter, it is evident that all of these are increasingly being used in the modern teaching and learning field and it is possible to summarize the development of these methods through time by looking at Figure 1.1 taken from *The Handbook of Blended Learning, Blended Learning Systems* by Graham (2006, [29]).
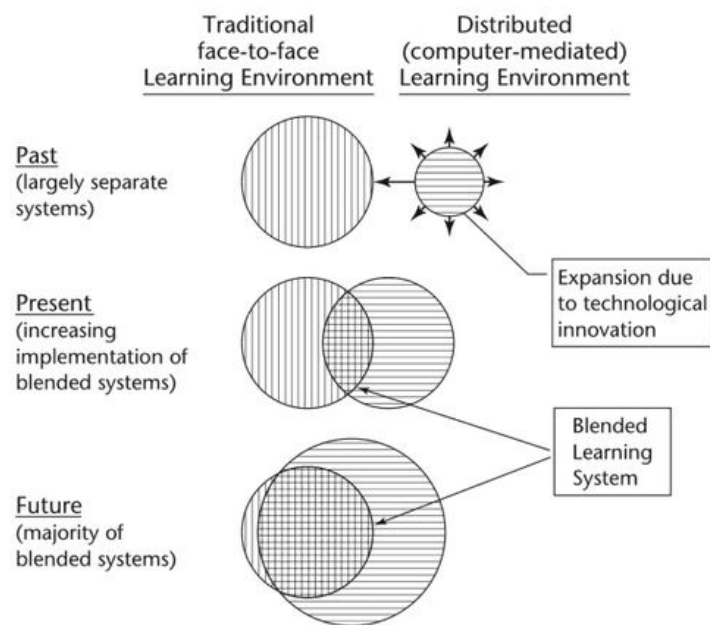

Figure 1.1: Graham's progressive convergence of traditional face-to-face and distributed environments allowing development of blended learning systems ([29] *Blended Learning Systems*, page 6)

As it is possible to see, Graham with this image summarizes the perception that

he has on the development of online learning in the future. Analysing Figure 1.1, in the *past* face-to-face learning and online learning were two separated concepts of learning, probably due to the fact that the latter was still in development and was not as much widespread as it is at the moment. For what concerns *present* day, it introduces the blended learning and now the size of the two environment is the same and start to be approached together in Blended Learning Systems. Finally, there is his vision of the future relationship between face-to-face and online learning: he believes that the majority of the learning will be blended, thus meaning that the computer-mediated or online environment will prevail over the face-to-face one.

In his writing however, he not only describes the blended learning itself but also reports six major issues that he refers to as "*relevant to designing blended learning systems*". These are: (1) the role of *live interaction*, (2) the role of *learner choice* and *self-regulation*, (3) models for *support* and *training*, (4) finding *balance* between *innovation* and *production*, (5) cultural *adaptation*, and (6) dealing with the *digital split*. These six issues are directly connected to this study and can be found throughout the forthcoming chapters, however as it is true that this system may be better because it combines the positive features of both the environments, it is also true that it may not be so much better if it is not structured appropriately and thus it may combine their poorest elements.

Chapter 2

Motivation's influence on L2 learning

Languages involve both personal and social aspects: learning a language is a personal concern that reflects one's identity and ethnolinguistic attitudes, and also a matter of opening to social and cultural means in target-language communities. Social factors such as perceptions of the status or power of a particular language can affect individuals' willingness to learn it (Lin, 2017 [36]). This combination of cognitive and social aspects rose many theories in the language learning field. It is possible to suppose that the most important motor driving success in learning is *motivation* and that it still is a massive problem in the field of L2 learning. It is one of the affective components of L2 learning and as such it provides the essential motor of the cognitive skills that come into play (Schumann 1986 [51]).

Even nowadays, motivation remains one of the most discussed notion among linguistic studies and many researchers tried to define it in various ways: Crookes and

Schmidt (1991) [15] define it as the learner's orientation towards the goal of learning a second language; according to Elliot and Covington (2001) [22], motivation provides the reasons for people's actions, wants and needs. Motivation can also be defined as one's direction towards the behavior or what causes a person to want to repeat an action and vice versa. Oxford and Shearin (1994) [41] explained motivation as a longing to reach an objective, together with the energy to work towards it, so motivation is the reasons at the basis of behavior. Broussard and Garrison (2004) [6] defined motivation instead as the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something.

Therefore, it can be stated that *Motivation* is a key factor for explaining the success or failure of any difficult activity. It is assumed that success in a task is due to someone's motivation. It is easy in second language learning to state that a learner (commonly known as the Good Language Learner) will be successful with the right motivation. Such claims are supported by numerous studies and experiments in human learning.

Over the years, the aspect of motivation has been developed and discussed in deep. Researchers started to estimate some models referring to motivation and its influence; the first of them was Gardner (1972) [25], who explains that motivation is the result of attempt and desire to obtain the objective of learning the language together with favorable attitudes toward learning the language. In 1959, Gardner and Lambert [24] devised the so-called **Socio-Psychological Model** which has been the only model for over thirty years. From their work, we obtained the division of motivation that has influenced all research in second language learning:

- **Integrative motivation**: it involves the personality of the learners, who have external reasons, and can thus reach a better learning level. It occurs when the learner's goals for learning a L2 come from positive attitudes toward the target language group and the possibility of integrating into that group;

- **Instrumental motivation**: it involves self-promotion and motives linked to personal development, motivation slowly disappears causing a lower learning level. It concerns more functional motives for learning a language.

Brown (2000) as well supports this division and he also adds that among the theories of motivation that were developed during the decades, we can see three different perspectives (H. D. Brown, 2000, pp. 152-153) [7]:

- *behavioural* perspective, in which motivation is mostly seen as a matter of fact term and it is placed at the centre of the theories. We act in order to achieve our objectives motivated by previous experiences;.

- *cognitive* perspective, where motivation highlights individual's decisions because those influence what goal we will approach or avoid;

- *constructivist* perspective, in which motivation situates on social context the same emphasis as individual personal choices.

Only later, Gardner and Lambert (1972) [25] revised their model and stated that motivation is defined by effort, goals, desire to reach the goal and positive attitude (which is now at the end and not the focus) because attitudes are often not sufficient. Indeed, as sustained by Alizadeh (2016) [1], motivation is about "the union of attempt, desire to obtain the goal of learning the language and desirable attitudes towards learning the language". Which means that it concerns the degree to which

the learner works or tries to learn the language driven by the desire to do so and the pleasure experienced in the activity. Effort alone is not enough to denote motivation.

However, which are the conditions that increase motivation? In 1972, Gardner and Lambert [25] added that learners tend to be more motivated if they consider themselves *competent* persons, see goals and significance in tasks, are in a safe environment, think that the learning is for themselves and not for the teachers' pleasure, have opportunity to make decisions and feel responsibility for participating.

From a cognitive point of view, Deci and Ryan's (1985) [18] *Self-Determination theory* in the field of language learning, was developed in order to reach the concept of *motivational orientation*, generally defined as a person's motive for learning a new language, and based on the different purposes or goals that outset to an action.. The employment of *self-determination theory* to language-learning research has distinguished two types of motivation: **intrinsic** and **extrinsic**. In 2000, Deci and Ryan [48] defined these two terms as follows: *"intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation, refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome"*. Therefore, extrinsic motivation is an assemble that applies to whenever a task is done in order to obtain some outcome and thus diverges from intrinsic motivation which instead refers to act in order to enjoy the task itself. Furthermore, it can be classified in different type of regulation, based on the level of autonomy that the learner manifests:

- close to the concept of what they call *"amotivation"*, there is the least autonomous type of extrinsic motivation identified as **external regulation**. This emerges to satisfy an external reward; this behaviour is typical when there is

an external perceived locus of causality (e.g. for example, learning a language to get a better job);

- the second category is the **introjected regulation**. It is a kind of "internal regulation" that is rather regulated due to the actions performed in order to avoid anxiety or to obtain ego-improvements (e.g. studying a language because feelings of guilt would stick to the not knowing, or knowing only one language). Deci and Ryan state that a typical form of introjection is ego involvement, in which a person behaves in order to improve or maintain self-esteem and the feeling of being worth;

- a slightly more autonomous category is the motivation regulation through identification, **identified regulation**. The individuals here have identified the importance of behaviour and has accepted the regulation as their own (e.g. when a language learner realizes that learning a language is good for them);

- lastly, the ultimate category is the most autonomous form, **integrated regulation**. It occurs when the previous category has been fully adapted to the self, this can happen through self-examination. Motivations' forms of integrated regulation share some features with intrinsic motivation given that both are autonomous. However, they are still considered extrinsic due to their behavior done for its instrumental evaluation with respect to the outcome that is split from the behavior.

Another important model, influenced by Gardner's one, that had an impact on the following researches, was the **Acculturation Model** by Schumann (1986) [51]. It mainly applies to second language learning and highlights the importance of integrative motivation, which is seen as one among other social and psychological factors

that participate in the development of acculturation. This model is based on the social-psychology of *acculturation* and maintains that certain social and psychological variables cluster into a single variable, that is, acculturation. The model supposes that learners acquire the target language at the same degree they acculturate to the target language group.

Now it can be seen that Schumann's model can be linked to Krashen's *Input* hypothesis, that was explained in the previous chapter, even though Krashen does not give to motivation a primary role but rather sees it as an element of the affective filter. As a matter of fact, in his second language acquisition theory he introduces the *Affective Filter* hypothesis [34] which was stated to also concern and include three major notions that are linked one another among which there is *Motivation* (as just seen and explained) together with *Self-Confidence* and *Anxiety* (see respectively 2.1 and 2.2). He states that: "The filter is that part of the internal processing system that subconsciously screens incoming language based on ... the learner's motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states" (H. C. Dulay, M. K. Burt, and S. Krashen, 1982, p. 46) [21]. With Krashen's introduction of these two new concepts, what is taken in consideration right now is the *process of learning*.

In spite of all of these frameworks, Oxford and Sherin (1994 [41]) conceive that there are four conditions that prevent the full understanding of learners' motivation for language learning and these are:

1. l*ack of agreement on the definition of language learning motivation*, due to the fact that it can not be checked or easily agreed by other researchers;

2. *confusion about motivation in second vs. foreign language contexts*, a second

language is learned in a context where the language is usually used as the main vehicle of communication for most of the people, whereas foreign language refers to a language that is not widely used in that country;

3. *negligence of some important motivational and developmental theories* taken from psychology fields, for example outgrowing the image of the learner in the context of a group;

4. *instructor's absence of knowledge about the reason behind students' wish for learning a language*, Oxford and Sherin believe that few teachers are aware of their students' real motivation for L2 learning and moreover, few teachers consider the changes in students' motivation over the years.

To expand the view of motivation, they explore and discuss four classes of motivation theories taken from general psychology: 1) *need theories*, 2) *instrumentality theories*, 3) *equity theories* and 4) *reinforcement theories*. Thus, they expand the third point seen in the previous paragraph.

1) *NEED THEORIES*

There are two considerable **need theories**: *hierarchies of need* and *need-achievement*. Hierarchies of need is a theory that concerns individuals direct activity in order to fulfill specific needs, hierarchical in nature, that follow five levels: physiological; safety and security; belongingness and love; esteem; and self-actualization. This implicates that learners who have high needs will be internally-motivated to learn, while those who are externally-motivated will need more specific help from the teacher. Need-Achievement based theory instead is connected *fear of failure* and *fear of success*. This theory is based on some observations about a possible correlation between per-

formance and pleasure with learners that have high need for achievement.

2) *INSTRUMENTALITY THEORIES*

These theories imply that learners are involved in tasks instrumental in achieving a valid outcome. The concept of "valid" here is related to answering the question "Should I spend the energy?". This class focuses on the expectation of gaining a vague-nature reward and this is why they can also be called *"Expectancy-value theories"*.

Among them they consider the following:

- *Atkinson's Expectancy-Value Theory*: in which achievement-oriented behaviours are functional not only to the probability of succeeding but also to the motivation for success and the value of it;

- *VIE Theory*: in Valence, instrumentality, expectancy theory, people ask themselves three questions: "Does the outcome have some *valence*?", "Will it bring other positive results (*instrumentality*)?", Do my actions lead me to success (*expectancy*)?"

- *Goal-setting Theory*: it proposes performances strictly related to the goals. Through this theory was observed that goal-setting and performance are related by the focus on the action, and having specific goals permit to reach higher levels of performance which also need feedback in order to be obtained.

All of these theories, highlights that the expectancy of success or failure of the student is actually very crucial in the learning of a language.

3) *EQUITY THEORIES*

These are related to the mathematical ratio between *inputs* and *outcomes.*

Inputs in this context are experience, skills, etc., while outcomes include anything that is perceived by the learner to have personal value.

Equity theories are related to language learning motivation because if the learner believes that the results are worth the effort, then it will be more motivated to continue.

4) *REINFORCEMENT THEORIES*

The fourth class of theories attributes behaviour to *Stimulus, Response, Reward.* This is the approach mostly used by teachers in school and in particular language teachers use extrinsic rewards and can help students to see the intrinsic rewards.

Oxford and Schmit, moreover, consider also the *Cognitive Developmental Theory* by citing Piaget (1977, [44]) and Vygotsky (1978, [59]) who are the main contributors to the development of this point of view. Piaget explained that the motivation behind the cognitive abilities is developed in a predictable order of steps: sensimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. Therefore, motivation is an embedded and unconscious effort toward more complicated development of the mental structures. Vygotsky on the other hand, denoted that students need help from the teacher in order to outgrow their current stage towards the next one. What he talks about is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what it can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner. This distance between *actual development* and the level of *potential development* is called **Zone of Proximal Development** (ZPD). There are three steps of progress: 1) help by someone more qualified, 2) help by oneself, and 3) no need of assistance.

2.1 Self-Confidence

Self-Confidence is the result of many other aspects such as the view that the student has of itself, it is the duty of the teacher to protect that "self-image", mainly in language classes where the learner is often exposed to others. This is conceptually related to that of language anxiety, as it was mentioned, except that it emphasizes a positive as opposed to a negative component (Gardner, Tremblay, Masgoret, 1985 [35]). As suggested by Clement (1980) [13], Self-Confidence is a major factor of motivation to learn a L2, and that it developed in multicultural settings as a function of the frequency and quality of contact with members of the other group. Moreover, "self-confidence includes two components: anxiety as the affective aspect and self-evaluation of proficiency as the cognitive component" (Clement, Dornyei, and Noels (1994) [14] p.443).

During the so-called "Renaissance of motivation" in the nineties, another interesting aspect was added to the concept previously introduced by Krashen. Dornyei (2005, 2009) developed an intriguing view taken from works in psychology and devised the **Self-motivating system** based on three accessible intimate sites that form the three levels of the system itself ([16]&[20]):

1. *Ideal L2 Self*: which is the L2-specific aspect of one's 'ideal self'. If the person wants to turn into speaking an L2, the *'ideal L2 self'* is a strong incentive in order to learn the L2 because it is connected to the **desire** to reach that ideal self moving on from our actual self.

2. *Ought-to L2 Self*: concerns the properties that the learner believes to ought to own in order to reach expectations and to elude negative outcomes. This

dimension corresponds a more extrinsic kind of instrumental motives.

3. *L2 Learning Experience*: refers to situated, 'executive' motives related to the direct learning environment and experience.

An important notion introduced in this paragraph is "*desire*". Motivation, and emotions in general, are grounded by three notions that can thus define the type of motivation that the student is going to have (e.g. instrumental or integrative motivation). These are: *duty*, *need* and *pleasure/desire*. These are the concepts behind Dornyei's view of motivation which he defines as dynamic and temporal (Dornyei, 2000 [19]).

Dornyei's research moves from a macro-perspective (such as Gardner and Lambert's work) to a micro-perspective in which he focuses on the actual situation of learning and the impact that the context of learning has on motivation. That is why he introduces the concept of **Situated motivation**. He creates a new model which is now "*process oriented*" and explains the dynamics of motivational change during time and synthesises some important motivational notions. His model states that it is important to separate three sets of motivational components (motives and motivational conditions):

1. **Course-specific motivational components**: there are four factors to describe L2 classroom motivation: interest (intrinsic motivation), relevance (personal needs), expectancy (likelihood of success), and satisfaction (out-come of an activity). This is something achieved/spread through the first two activities proposed later;

2. **Teacher-specific motivational components**: the most important motive re-

lated to teachers is identified as "*affiliative drive*" (students require to do well to please the teacher); then we have the teacher's authority type and his or her role in the systematic socialization (through three main channels: modelling, task presentation, feedback). That is another important feature considered, because the teacher's role can be very affective on the students;

3. **Group-specific motivational components**: in this motive, four aspects are relevant: *goal-orientedness*, *norm* and *reward system*, *group cohesion*, and *classroom goal structures*. From this point of view, the work-in-group activities proposed aim to the group cohesion in particular.

Dornyei's (2000, [19]) process view of motivation is based on the idea that motivation changes over time and that it needs to be generated and sustained. This can be seen both from the point of view of the student and of the teacher. He divides the process of motivation from the student's point of view in three block and talks about:

- **Choice Motivation**: first block of the process of motivation from the point of view of the student, indeed the student chooses something in which he or she has to be prepared to want to learn. There are some *motivational functions* such as setting goals, forming intentions and launching into action; there also are some feature (*motivational influences*) that have an impact on the students, and these are: the proximity and the relevance of the goal; the values associated with the learning process and outcome; the attitude towards the L2; the expectancy of success; the coping potential; and the environmental support and hindrance.

- **Executive Motivation**: it belongs to the second block of the process of moti-

vation and it regards the moment in which the students actually do the learning. The *motivational functions* here regard carrying out tasks, continually appraising their achievement and feeling that they are in control (self-regulation). On the other side, the *motivational influences* are: the quality of the learning experience itself; the sense of autonomy; the teachers and parents' influence; the classroom style (cooperative or competitive); the influence of the learner group; and the knowledge of the self-regulating strategies.

- **Retrospective Motivation**: third and last block of the process of motivation, the students look back and tell how well did the process go. Here the *motivational functions* regards forming causal attributions, elaborating standards and planning forward. Indeed, the *motivational influences* are connected to these and are: attributional factors; self-concepts (the degree of self-confidence); and the received feedback (the type).

Each one of them is related to the teacher's point of view, which has four phases:

- **Create the basic conditions**: it is the moment in which the teacher is supposed to: have an appropriate behaviour, create a pleasant and supportive atmosphere.

- **Generate initial motivation**: it is connected to *Choice Motivation* because it is when the teacher makes sure that basic conditions are made up and will continue to be so by: enhancing attitudes, increasing expectancy of success, increasing goal orientedness, making material relevant, creating realistic beliefs.

- **Maintain and protects motivation**: it is not enough to only generate motivation, it also has to be sustained by: making the learning stimulating, enjoyable and pleasant, presenting the work n a motivating way, protecting students

self-esteem, creating autonomy. It is related to the moment of delivering activities and thus to the *Executive Motivation* of the student.

- **Encourage positive retrospection**: it is equivalent to the third step of the students and thus to the *Retrospective Motivation*. The teacher has to: promote motivational attributions, provide motivational feedback, increase learner satisfaction (that is a basic condition in order for the student to which to keep learning).

It will be possible to see in Chapter 3 that this is the approach that was followed during the research for this thesis, focusing in particular on the teacher-specific motivational component for each lesson, whether online or on-site.

2.2 Anxiety

Once it is clear how motivation can be supported and generated, it is important to also acknowledge how it can be damaged in order to avoid these kind of circumstances. Apparently, in second language learning can occur a degree of **Anxiety**. Anxiety on language learning occurs when a student has a feeling of fear or apprehension about an incoming test or even about language class itself. It is necessary to understand that there are two different types on anxiety, as Horwitz (2001) [32] explains: on the one hand there is the ***trait anxiety*** which is conceived as a relatively personality trait; on the other hand can be found the ***state anxiety*** which is a consequence to a certain anxiety-provoking stimulus.

Scovel (1978) [52] explains that anxiety is specific to the language learning context, as a matter of fact *state anxiety* in the language learning field can be addition-

ally divided into two partitions: When the anxiety related to academic activities is *inhibiting* it is defined as *Debilitating*, on the contrary when it is *enhancing* is is defined as *Facilitating* (Moyer, Katherine 2008 [39]). In 1986 Horwitz [33] devised a situation-specific anxiety called **Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)** which was often observed to cause students a negative emotional reaction to language learning, mainly in oral forms of language application.

Thus, it is possible to state that FLA frequently appears in testing situations (Horwitz, Horwitz, Cope 1986 [33]). Considering its emerging in academic and social context Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) depict three related performance anxieties:

1. *Communication apprehension*: it is a type of timidness that is distinguished by fear of communicating with people (e.g having to stand up in front of someone and communicate in the foreign language). This is one of the numerous features that can be considered as an expression of social anxiety. Communication apprehension has an important role as far as foreign language anxiety is concerned, because people who find it difficult to speak or interact with others are more likely to struggle speaking in front of an entire foreign language class where they feel constantly observed and monitored by other students and the teacher. This state of strong shyness leads the student to value the negative or positive reaction of the teacher or the other students. These considerations will be later on very important in this study as it will be seen in chapter 3;

2. *Test anxiety*: it refers to a type of production originating from the fear of failure (oral tests can provoke both test and communication anxiety): it is possible to define it as a type of performance anxiety originating from the fear of the

student to fail. Since it is a physiological condition in which students experience extreme stress and discomfort; this anxiety creates significant barriers to learning and performance. Students with this type of anxiety may worry about the consequences of failing their foreign language class, or may panic when they are going to be called in language class, or get nervous when the teacher asks questions which they haven't prepared in advance;

3. *Fear of negative evaluation*: (not only being afraid of using the language but also not wanting others to look at you) they define it also as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" ([33] p. 128). Therefore, it is strictly bound to the first performance anxiety since the personal communication apprehension of the students may be accentuated by their fear of making mistakes in front of other people, making it difficult to speak fluently. The same result can be obtained if they are afraid that the other students would laugh at them when they speak in the foreign language or, again, if they fear that their language teacher is ready to correct every mistake that they make.

Even though these three anxiety types provide a structure for describing language anxiety, they state that it is not only a union of fears, rather a complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to the classroom context.

All of these evidences, suggest that anxiety specific to the language learning context is badly related to achievement in the second language. Gardner, Trembley and Masgoret (1997)[26], believe that it is related to lack in listening comprehension, vocabulary, lower word production, low results on tests, low grades in language courses, or a combination of all these elements.

Furthermore, anxiety has a cognitive impact. Students tend to be extremely gripped by anxiety that they are unable to process the language resulting in a decrease in processing abilities. Thus, in the language learning process anxiety impacts on processes of encoding, storage and retrieval, it damages effectiveness.

Nevertheless, anxiety has other key concepts related to foreign language learning. Firstly, on the one side anxiety can produce a state of *defensiveness*, that means a closure regards learning; the idea of learning itself is perceived as a threatening for identity. On the other side, it can enhance *receptiveness* and thus the individual is open and receptive to the idea of being a language speaker. Therefore, in a foreign language class, the openness is towards language and culture but also towards the learning experience itself. These two concepts are pivotal for *attention*: the greater is the receptivity, the greater the attention will be and the student will have a better learning; the greater is the defensiveness, the less the attention and the learning will be.

Some types of classroom tasks can promote language anxiety and mainly those that expose students to evaluations both by teachers and companions. Since the 1970s, researchers studied the relationship between writing apprehension and personality traits providing reasoning for referring to writing apprehension as a separate form of anxiety. **Writing anxiety** indeed, is negatively correlated with the quality of the message and with one's real writing behaviour.It has also been found to influence individuals' job and academic choices (Cheng, Horwitz, Elaine and Schallert, 1999 [10]).

Teachers usually think that L2 anxiety prevails among students in different edu-

cational contexts, as supported in a number of studies. Gardner's (1985) [35] and Horwitz et al.'s (1986) [33] definition of anxiety as situation-specific to second language learning has been maintained by studies mainly designed for testing second language anxiety. Therefore, a conceptual link between second language writing anxiety and second language classroom anxiety is to be highlighted.

However, second language classroom anxiety is more in general about learning a second language with a strong speaking anxiety prevailing, while second language writing anxiety is a "language-skill-specific" anxiety.

2.3 The teacher

Balboni (2002, [3]) states that there are three constituent elements: the *student*, the *teacher* and the *content to be learned*; these three form the so-called "*space for the didactic action*". In particular the teacher is the one that holds up the "space" and keeps it balanced. The interaction between the students and the teacher seen from the communicative point of view, shows that the language must be chosen based on the purposes that the communicative act proposes. On this topic, it is introduced the notion of **Teacher's Talking Time** (TTT), which is the percentage of time used by the teacher, during the whole lesson, and it is a useful variable to observe the teaching style, as it will be explained during this section. Therefore, the general relationship between the students and the teacher plays a very important role in the experience of each student. Teachers have a series of functions with a clear relational value: they are responsible for *regulating activities*, for *transmitting school rules*, for *communicating* in the classroom and for *organizing and managing contacts between classmates*. In the relationship between pupils and teachers in primary and lower secondary school, it is believed that the relational dimension helps learners to acquire

a good awareness of their scholastic skills and allows them to develop a representation of themselves that includes their own grade of competence in learning. A good relationship affects motivation, indeed. [43]

A central aspect concerns the area of "communication in the classroom": it is not possible to not communicate when in presence of others because they will attribute meaning to any behavior. Hence, teachers' daily practices are powerful tools of communication. Considering the teacher-student relationship in terms of communication highlights how the qualitative connotation of the interaction cannot be traced back only to one or the other of the protagonists of communication. The openness and availability behaviors of the children, as well as the provocative ones, are aspects that crucially intervene in in regulating the daily interactive dynamic. Teachers can decide whether to isolate and reject them, or whether to work to accept them by showing themselves available to listen: this also has repercussions on teaching activities. The teacher can take a dual interactive orientation: she/he can keep control of the interaction firmly, limiting the interventions, or she/he can act as a facilitator of thought processes by encouraging the expression of opinions and the originality of the interventions. Verbal exchanges in the classroom, therefore, have a lot of power in building interactive systems with students.

Wells (1999, [60]) introduces the distinction between **dialogic** and **monologic** forms of classroom discourse. A *monologic approach* (1) is a form of exchange functional to maintaining a role of interaction control on the part of the teacher; in a *dialogic approach* (2), the teacher offers the pupil a space to deepen or extend the speech, but also to retort or relaunch new statements. In the first case, the teacher conveys the idea that there is only one valid and right perspective, in the second, he introduces

the pupils to a vision of the discourse that values "multivocal" and critical examination of the different perspectives.

The *model of teacher behavior and interaction with students* of Wubbels, Créton and Hooymayers (1985, [61]) explains that the interactions between students and teachers are built around two relational dimensions between them orthogonal and bipolar:

- *influence*: articulated dominance and submission, it measures the degree to which the teacher exercises a certain power;

- *proximity*: degree to which the teacher is able to establish links on cooperation, played on the continuum between opposition and cooperation.

From the combination of the levels of *influence* and *proximity* it is possible to identify different types of teachers:

- *managerial*: self-confident and guides students;

- *friendly*: interested in students and generates a relaxed atmosphere;

- *understanding*: nice, patient, ready to explain several times;

- *lax*: lets himself/herself be influenced by students;

- *insecure*: indecisive and allows himself/herself to be overwhelmed by students;

- *dissatisfied*: humiliates students;

- *punitive*: gets angry easily and for no apparent reason;

- *severe*: demanding, rigid and fear-provoking.

The association between the quality of interaction and academic outcomes seems better when teachers use practices with a high degree of influence, but medium-low proximity. High rates of cooperation and submission are associated with poor results instead. The analysis of the connections between interactive orientations and motivational outcomes reveal a positive association between the dimensions of dominance and cooperation and motivation to study the subject taught by the teacher in question. The association between the perceived friendliness of teachers and the degree of self-confidence and commitment to study declared by students is also relevant.

The ideal teacher varies according to the time of the teaching activity: Tartwijk (1998, [58]) says that children prefer a "leader" teacher during the lessons, dominant and managerial; while in group work activities, the teacher preferred is the one able to leave freedom and responsibility to the children. The students also require that adults are close to them, interact with relational methods based on openness and listening, being capable of collaboration on an educational level; the strict teacher is seen as far from their requests, a figure who fails to motivate them in the commitment and effort to achieve good results.

2.4 Motivation in an online environment of language learning: previous studies

It is indeed clear that the technological innovations allowed some innovative methods of learning and teaching by fulfilling the function of "catalysts", meaning that they are elements that do not regard the "major field" of teaching but that are essential in order to achieve those methods. As a matter of fact, technology allowed two dif-

ferent types of contribution to the development of interaction: synchronous language exchanges and videotaped performances. [3]

As Beldarrain (2008) [5] explains, online learning and the importance of interaction within that environment is rapidly broadening, so teachers will need to be better prepared to fulfil the specific needs of students. This can be achieved by creating a learner-centered environment that can incorporate student interaction in line with their specific needs and preferences.

Examining the phenomenon of student interaction and the relationship it has with achievement, enables to understand and facilitate the development of a learning environment that can encourage learners achievement. Furthermore, the outcome of her study was a practical advice regarding the reason and the way these preferences lead students to participate in particular interactions.

Virtual schools are generally seen as the only way for many of these students to access courses that they may otherwise not be able to take, such as it happened during the academic year 2020/2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions.

As a matter of fact, teacher interaction has proven to be a considerable factor for the student success in a distance education setting (Hawkins, 2011 [30]). Many perspectives on interaction occur in online education and they may have an impact on the motivation of the learner.

Moore (1989) [38] identified three types of interactions:

1. **learner-content interactions**: it is the first type of interaction that he de-

vises. It regards the interaction between the student and the content of learning. He explains that this as a matter of fact is an essential feature of education since it is the process of cognitively interacting (i.e., exchanges directly with the subject matter).

2. **learner-instructor interactions**: this is the second type considered as crucial by teachers. It is the interaction between the student and the teacher; the teachers in online environment try to achieve objectives that are common to all the other teachers (i.e., exchanges serve to motivate, teach, clarify, support, and encourage). "*To stimulate or at least maintain the student's interest in what is to be taught, to motivate the student to learn, to enhance and maintain the learner's interest, including self-direction and self-motivation*"([38] p.2). The influence of the instructor on the student is greater than in the previous type of interaction;

3. **learner-learner interactions**: the third form of interaction is the one among members of the class or group. This is "inter-learner interaction" whether the teacher is present or not. This is a highly valuable ore even essential resource for learning.

There is few understandings about how the teaching occurs in online environments, and, particularly, how instructors and learners interact in them. Hawkings (2011) [30] propose that a fruitful way to explore teacher interaction and its role in an online context is the **Community of Inquiry** (COI) *framework* by Garrison and Arbaugh in 2007 [27]. COI is a *"Comprehensive Framework to guide the research and practice Online learning"*([27] p.2) and was elaborated in order to develop deep and meaningful learning experiences in online education.

Community of Inquiry

SOCIAL PRESENCE

COGNITIVE PRESENCE

Supporting Discourse

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Setting Climate

Selecting Content

TEACHING PRESENCE (Structure/Process)
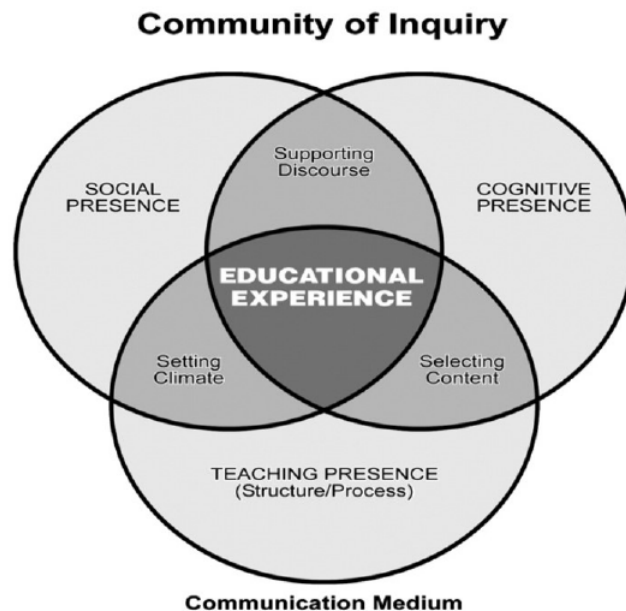
Communication Medium

Figure 2.1: Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison & Arbaugh 2007 [27])

As it can be seen in the figure above [Figure 2.1], the framework is formed by three elements: **social presence**, **teaching presence** and **cognitive presence**.

- *Social presence*: in an online learning environment it has been defined as the capability of learners to perceive themselves socially and emotionally, hence being also considered "real people".

- *Cognitive presence*: it is defined as the degree to which students are capable to develop and confirm meaning through sustained thinking and speech. It has long been viewed as a defining feature of higher education and for what concerns a practical survey model that led to a four-stage project: 1) a **motivating event**, where issues are identified for further study; 2) **exploration**, where students explore the issue both individually and collectively through critical thinking and discourse; 3) **integration**, in which students frame meaning from

their reflection during the previous phase; 4) **resolution**, where they apply the new knowledge to academical contexts or settings. It is possible to see that this approach is slightly similar to the UD that was explained at the beginning of this thesis (see Chapter 1).

- *Teaching presence*: they describe this element as the *"design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes"* ([27] p.7). It is furthermore divided in three components that are: 1) instructional design and organization; 2) facilitating discourse; 3) direct instruction.

The role of interaction can be found in the *social presence* and *teacher presence* structures, highlighting the importance of the *learner-instructor interaction* through expectations, group collaboration, productive discourse, and meaningful feedback. All of these features together permit to achieve a motivated student in an online environment of learning.

Chapter 3

Case Study

At the beginning of this research, the research question that was chosen to investigate was: *Does the environment of the lesson have an effect on students' motivation during second language learning?*. However, as the study moved forward, other questions emerged such as *Does the change of environment influence the time available?*, or *The deductive method application is increased in the online setting?* As a matter of fact, all of these questions and the relative hypotheses are related one another and thus the last two questions could be considered as the main research question divided in others based on the feature considered. This can be seen as stated due to the fact that elements such as *time* and *teaching method* are influential over the motivation of the students as it was seen before. Furthermore, the data collected in this thesis are intended to be a source of inspiration for both *students*: in order to increase their awareness of learning opportunities; and *foreign language teachers*: so that they can try to adapt and improve their teaching method.

Many studies before the current one, dealt with this topic and compared the achieve-

ment levels of learners in the two contexts with different levels and courses. As Pacetti-Tune (2009) [42] explains, these type of studies represent concerns of how online learning environments are constructed behaviorally and structurally. As a matter of fact the intention of this study was to provide information for further improvement of online learning environments and to investigate whether the online lessons can be as much motivating as the front ones. Furthermore, during the research it was possible to observe something interesting about the method applied to evaluate students and how it influenced their performance (see 3.3).

The context during which the observation and data collection took place was not fixed due to COVID-19 virus restrictions applied to the national territory of Italy. The pandemic itself had a great influence over the national organization of the schools of all levels, universities too. Starting from March 2020, the educational activities were suspended as far as it concerned the on-site lessons and started to be delivered through online ones instead, until the end of the academic year. However, schools re-opened by September 2020 in order to start the academic year 2020/2021 with front lessons. This period of time coincides with the beginning of the observation, which started with an internship of three months at an Italian high school in Mirano (VE). Although schools seemed to remain open, the pandemic persisted and more restriction were applied by the government. Consequently, due to the measures and restrictions, the amount of online and on-site lessons changed during the months. At the beginning the course was supposed to be organized in a blended structure composed by 50% of both face-to-face and distance lessons; however starting from October 2020 the situation changed and the structure transitioned to 75% of online lessons and 25% of front lessons. To deliver the online lessons, the school adopted the platforms *Classroom*, *Google Meet* and *Google Calendar*. This new arrangement

though changed once again by the time of November 2020 and it became a full online learning environment until the end of the four-month first period, when also the observation ended with a total amount of 213 hours of data collection.

Another important matter that influenced the amount of lessons and how they were structured, is the fact that some students have been tested positive for the virus. This situation brought, sometimes, the whole class to attend the lesson online due to inspections or even miss the lecture because subject to the testing. Indeed, it will be seen in 3.1.3 that the amount of lectures and the type of these will differ from class to class.

3.1 Methodology of research

The method applied for this research was chosen based on the results that it was assumed to be obtained and the setting in which the observation took place. Indeed, the research was carried out through the direct observation of the English language and culture lessons of 141 students from 14 to 19 years old from the same school, *Liceo Majorana - Corner* and one English teacher. They belonged to six different classes (all from an high school Classic curriculum) but shared the same English teacher (the one observed). For what concerns the teacher, she has been teaching for more than forty years and this academic year was her last one before retiring.

Considering that the purpose behind this study was not that of globally generalise a result but rather to study a small community and see if some theoretical principles were applicable, the data were collected by a combination of both qualitative and quantitative researches and mainly through direct observation of all the six

classes. The quantitative method regards data collected in a numerical form and involve statistical methods and its peculiarity is indeed providing an accurate measurement of the phenomenon being investigated, while the qualitative method collects non-numerical data and thus involves non-statistical methods. This considered, the method had to be mixed because the observation and the analysis of the data in this study used both numerical data explained through graphics, percentages etc., and qualitative data obtained through instruments such as the diary. This research is defined as a "*classroom research*" which is typical for the examination of learning environments, and as such it requires a combination of methods both structured and unstructured.

3.1.1   Materials

The direct observation was elaborated by using a *diary*, implemented with also a rather unstructured *interview*, and a *checklist* (see Appendix); it was also applied a questionnaire (see Appendix) in order to collect the students point of view.

CHECKLIST
The *Checklist* used for this observation was developed and structured in consideration of the data that were willed to be collected. It was decided to use a checklist built by the researcher itself in order to be as much specific as possible, so that it could suit the purpose of the research. It was mainly aimed to assess whether some features and events happened or were present during the lesson, therefore most of the items concerns answering to questions with *yes* or *no*. The filling of this instrument was conducted by the researcher (meaning that the assessment was carried by an external subject) because if done by the teacher and the students for each lesson, the

amount of data would have been too big to be handed and it could have been answered less seriously and strictly than the researcher would have instead; moreover, the questions and areas investigated regarded both the students and the teacher, as it was made up for both of them, but the majority of attention was given to the teacher because for the students there was also the questionnaire. The checklist was completed each day, a new one for each hour, and in the end the total amount collected was divided for each class in order to observe the features in interest for each of them and with the same parameters.

DIARY

The *Diary* was mainly used in order to collect the teacher's behaviour and thinking. It was useful to collect detailed information about some aspects of the observation that could clarify the results of the other instruments. It was kept daily and it was mainly used to take notes about the details of the online lessons that may have been neglected but turned out to be important and other external variables, but most importantly it was useful in order to note some clarifications about the reason behind an answer in the checklist that may be not clear enough as the time passes.

The fact that it was integrated with the *interview* is due to the necessity to collect the teacher's point of view. As a matter of fact, the teacher in consideration was willing to share her feeling and thoughts freely, indeed the interview itself was *unstructured* and very informal, meaning that it was not prepared a priori so that the interviewee could express her opinions without being held back by a specific topic imposed by a question allowing to determine the direction the speech takes as it proceeds.. Implementing the interview as instrument supporting the diary is important in order to explain the diary itself and to check the integrity of the data collected. Be-

ing this a classroom research the diary alone would not have been enough, therefore a concluding interview may be used to check the completeness of the recorded entries.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The *Questionnaire* was chosen as a tool that refers to standardized variables and defined responses, and for its possibility to reach a large amount of people, indeed it was sent to the students by e-mail and the responses collected through *Google Modules*. In addition, it is a well structured list of questions that the participant can answer calmly and independently and is a versatile technique that can be used during any stage of the project.

In particular in this thesis two questionnaires were used. The first one is composed by 21 items, both direct and indirect which means that the questions were asked both with direct reference to the investigated object and in a more transversal manner; some of them were open while other closed questions (3.2.3). The second one instead is composed by 10 items, only of close and multiple choice questions (3.2.4). The questionnaire was developed in order to collect students' point of view, as anticipated before, and it was also drawn up by considering the possible types of responses predicted. All the students were previously informed about the anonymity of the questionnaire itself in order to let them express their thought and answer the questions more freely. Moreover, their personal information were not in the interest of this research.

According to Gaskell (2000, [28]) the interview and the questionnaire perform three main functions: to offer a detailed description of a certain climate or social phenomenon, to provide empirical data on which to elaborate hypotheses for the expla-

nation and, finally, the results obtained with this technique can be used as a starting point for further researches.

3.1.2 Sample participants

In this case, the sample was a convenience one, due to the pandemic there was not much possibilities to choose from and by that it was easier to observe the topic this study is about. Considering the restrictions, it was also not possible to increase the amount of people for the sample, therefore it is random for what concerns other external variables such as age, sex, etc.. What was chosen (and convenient) is the range of age among which the sample was selected (13 - 19 years old), even though later on the sample happen to not include any student of the first year. Students from high school were selected because they are, for the majority of cases, those who need to be motivated the most considering that from a learning point of view they are not "adult" yet. As Balboni (2002) [[3]] states, the concept of "**adult learner**" refers both to a *personal factor*, such as age with the consequent psychological and relational progress, and to *social elements*. The "adult" is outside the obligatory basic educational course (which in Italy ends by the 18th birthday) and is able to decide autonomously, to assume its responsibility and to choose to follow that path because of a motivational driving stimulus.

The six classes observed were all considered as subjects of different subcultures, complexities, behaviours, goals, social relations and values. They were arranged as follows: two classes of second year students (49 in total); two classes of third year students (48 in total); one class of fourth year students of 22 people and one class of fifth year students of 22 people. In order to distinguish two classes of the same year,

one will be referred to as A and the other as B. Moreover, it is important to explain that class "III B" is a particular case scenario due to the presence of one disabled student, which means that the students had more face-to-face lectures because of COVID-19 restrictions that initially decreed a full-front type of lessons for these kind of situations.

3.1.3   Structure of the lessons

Tables 3.1 shows how, overall, the lessons were organized for each class. It is possible to notice that the total amount of the percentage is not 100%, that is due to the fact that some lessons were listed as "Other" since the content was not of interest for this study (e.g. students' meetings or tests).

IIA		IIB		IIIA	
Front	**Online**	**Front**	**Online**	**Front**	**Online**
22%	63%	22,8%	57,2%	30%	53,3%

IIIB		IV		V	
Front	**Online**	**Front**	**Online**	**Front**	**Online**
51,6%	35,5%	23,5%	67,6%	35,4%	58%

Table 3.1: Amount of online and front lessons for each class

IIIB, as already anticipated, is a particular case scenario. Indeed, the 35,5% of online lessons were quite different from the other classes due to the presence of a students which belongs to the so-called **SEN Students** (*Special Educational Needs*)

which refers to students that may have some possible educational-learning difficulties [55] and thus need some special operations. As a matter of fact there are different categories of difficulties and these are:

A. Students with disabilities

B. Students with specific developmental disorders

C. Students with disadvantages

It has been highlighted though, that some SEN students do not need specific adaptation concerning language learning, it obviously depends on the disability seriousness. The student at stake, which from this moment forward will be identified as *Subject B*, belongs to the category A regarding the disability and in particular a motor one. In the next paragraph will be explained why the online lessons of this class were slightly different.

During the observation of the lessons, it was possible to notice that the first difference between them regards the activities proposed to the students and more in general the flow that the lecture itself has. Therefore, the following paragraph describe how both the on-site and online lessons were developed; it is important in this research to understand the structure of the lessons, because it is a starting point from which each step of the research will be based on.

ON-SITE LESSONS

- Class IIA and IIB:
  students of second year were only taught the grammar of the language. The

lessons begun by correcting homework and at the end of it, the teacher would ask if there were questions or doubts about it. Moreover, she would also spend some time asking about the errors asking questions such as: "How many of you got only one/two/three wrong?". Moving on, the teacher followed the order of the school book and continued to explain the theory for each unit. Most of the times, the argument was introduced briefly and then asked to students some considerations; after explaining the rules, the teacher gave some exercises to do individually or in small groups/couples then, once the activity was finished, the task done was corrected all together. Beside that, the teacher may have added other activities to do in class or related to some work done at home. In particular, for what concerns *speaking*, most of the time it was done in small groups within the classmates; instead for *writing* the teacher would give a topic to be developed at home and later on read in class in front of the other students. For both activities, at the end of each the students would receive a feedback from the teacher and eventually some extra points for their work. What just described would be a "standard" lesson, otherwise there would be other extra activities such as watching a movie.

- Class IIIA and IIIB:

  students of third year were taught both the grammar and the literature of the language. The grammar lessons were mostly organized as described in the previous paragraph, though in this case there would not be any extra material. On the other hand, the lessons that regarded literature were arranged differently. The lesson begun with a small and quick oral test of almost five minutes about the content of the lesson before. This was done in order to collect grades for the students and also for summarizing what had been done so far

and to make sure that students followed the lessons. The teacher followed the school book for each unit and after this initial recap, she would continue with the programme. Some extra activities that may be included in the literature lessons are: YouTube videos; images/paintings; songs; movies.

- Class IV:

  students of fourth year were mainly taught the literature of the language. In this case, the grammar lessons were very few and did not include using the school book for activities, though it was indeed followed to study or recap the grammar rules. Most of the task done during the lessons were exercises taken from online sources and very similar to those of the B1 and/or B2 certification, because many of the students in class wanted to take the exam by spring time. For what concerns the majority of the lessons, literature lessons, the structure of the lecture was very similar to that of third year students. Firstly, an oral test about the previous lessons, then some considerations or questions about the topic. In this class, a lot of extra material was used, such as photocopies taken from other books and videos from YouTube to integrate the material present in the book, which was still followed and execute in the exercises proposed in it.

- Class V:

  students of fifth year were only taught the literature of the language. Mainly, the lesson was structured as for the fourth year students, what changes is the amount of interaction that the teacher has with the students. As a matter of fact, the activities done with them are mainly speaking ones. Through materials such as photocopies, the students were asked to elaborate an opinion on the topic and to try to connect it with other matters. For what concerns other

activities, the teacher sometimes gave a *writing* as homework, styled as the so called "terza prova" of the Italian final exam. All of this was done in order to better prepare them to the exam that they are going to take at the end of the year.

ONLINE LESSONS

Online lessons were mainly structured as just described for the on-site lessons. The main differences regards the activity done during the lecture or the methodology used to make them happen; actually, the following lines will highlight these features of the lessons, which are those that make the two settings of teaching different. The teacher wanted to keep the structure of the lessons the same as much as possible. Thus meaning that what changed in the online lessons is due to some other external problems.

- Class IIA and IIB:
  First of all, the vision of any kind of video or movie has been interrupted. As for the speaking activities, the teacher found a way to continue to do the task in small groups thank to a feature of *Google Meet* which permits to divide the call in smaller "rooms" where the students were grouped. The teacher was not present in those groups bet could enter to check on them whenever she wanted. What was noticed though, is that most of the times the teacher entered to check the activity she noticed that students did not work, or did not speak in English among them. Regarding the listening activities, the online setting changed the amount of listening that could be done. Usually the recorder did not work, and when it worked the listening had to be done twice because most of the students could not hear everything due to the bad connection. The

writing activities too changed due to the absence of feedback from the teacher, students were supposed to send her the writing by e-mail and then the teacher read the papers and eventually added a "+" or a "-" in the register.

- Class IIIA and IIIB:
  What changed for the third year students regards mainly the oral tests. The grammar lessons proceeded more or less as for the second year students, but the literature underwent a small change. To begin with, the oral tests were not always possible to be done because of the connection or the camera not working, which impede the test because the teacher wanted to be sure that the student was not cheating by reading from the desktop. On the contrary of the previous classes, third year students were able to keep watching movies. In particular, the teacher each year shows a movie in order to better understand a topic of the English literature; to not change this habit she decided to show the movie anyway by sharing the screen. This permitted the view, but the quality of the activity was not that good. Students reported the audio to be late or the image blurred. This was a problem later on, because the teacher asked the students to make a review on the movie seen as a writing exercise.

  IIIB particular case: As the context developed, some decrees clarified how to proceed with SEN students. They stated that these students and the school, each according to their own level of competence, work to ensure school attendance in the presence of pupils with disabilities with the involvement of support figures (decree of the Minister of Education August 7, 2020 n. 89). Therefore, during online sessions of learning, once per week Subject B had an on-site lesson; this happened because during that day it was possible for him to have the

support teacher's aid during the whole day. At the beginning, Subject B was supposed to stay at school alone and follow the lesson in the same classroom as the one the teacher was delivering the lesson to the other students of the class, but doing so the student reported to feel alone and a bit discriminated in the learning, because the teacher tended to follow the rest of the class the computer rather than him. Thus, it was decided later on that other students at turn may come to school and follow the lesson on-site as Subject B did. As a consequence, the teacher in those days had to deliver the lesson both online and on-site at once.

- Class IV:

  Grammar lessons were almost completely interrupted because of the less time available per lessons, thus the teacher decided to privilege the literature class. Photocopies were now sent by e-mail, sometimes even the same day of the lessons and this situation was lamented by the students to be heavy because they did not have the time to print the sheets and consequently to take notes in the best way. Videos, for the fourth year students, were recommended to be seen at home as extra homework, therefore in class they were not visible anymore.

- Class V:

  With students of fifth year, photocopies were sent by e-mail too; the communication between the teacher and the students remains but changes form because instead of being verbal, most of the time students preferred to interact by writing on the group chat in order not to disturb the lesson, even more considering that the teacher's audio seemed to arrive late. Another change regarded the oral tests here too, basically the teacher tested the students individually while

the remaining ones could delay their participation to the lesson, so the interrogation only happened with the presence of the student, the teacher and at least one witness.

Writings too slightly changed because, although they were still read in class, it was hard for the teacher to correct or give a better feedback because she did not have the text at hand, since it was not sent by e-mail as for the other classes.

3.2   Discussion

The aim of this thesis is to better understand whether there is an alteration in the motivation of students during online lessons compared to on-site lectures, observing also the sub-features that can influence the students' motivation such as the teaching method, the time available, etc..

In this chapter it will be observed and described the data that were collected by integrating the interpretation with what was gathered through the diary. The elements that are taken into consideration are:

- loss of time;

- teaching method;

- stimulus;

- teacher's behaviour

- classroom atmosphere;

- teacher's motivational steps;

- students' interest and participation;

- and in order to have a wider point of view on the situation, students' viewpoint.

It was decided to divide these elements in three different paragraph based on the type of material that was used to collect the data described: in 3.2.1 (time, stimulus, method) and 3.2.2 (behaviour, atmosphere, motivational steps, interest and participation) the data were assembled by the checklist but it was decided to divide them in two parts in order to have a better view of the content; and finally in 3.2.3 (students' opinions) it was employed the questionnaire. All of the three explanations will be further integrated and/or supported by the content of the diary and the interview material.

3.2.1 Time, method and stimulus

Through the use of a checklist, three main factors were studied: the **loss of time**; the **teaching method**; and the **stimulus**. All of the data were collected by participating to the lessons directly and drawing up the same checklist (see Appendix) each time for every single lesson. Each of these factor will also be observed from the students' point of view in 3.2.1.

LOSS OF TIME

The **loss of time** is considered an important factor in this research, due to two main reasons: the first one is that the amount of time available during the lesson determines the amount of information that the teacher can disclose to the students, that means that it has an influence on the development of the programme and thus

how much the students learn during the lesson; and the second one concerns the structure of the lesson: the more time is available, the more complex activities can be done.

The aim of this study includes investigating whether the classroom environment can influence the amount of time available. Considering that both online and on-site lessons can have some kind of interference, the expected result was that both the contexts had a percentage of time-loss exceeding zero. However, acknowledging that online teaching can have more external issues (e.g. related to connection, device malfunctions, etc.), it was also supposed that it would have worsen the loss of time. As a matter of fact, it was possible to track the amount of times that the teacher lost the connection and each time the amount of time lost too; thanks to the *Google Meet* platform it was possible to see when students left the call, thus meaning they had lost the connection. It was not possible though to acknowledge the amount of time lost by the students due to the amount of them, and this is the main reason why it was delivered the questionnaire analysed later on in 3.2.3.

IIA				IIB			
Front		Online		Front		Online	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
50,00%	50,00%	60,86%	39,13%	37,50%	62,50%	65,00%	35,00%

IIIA				IIIB			
Front		Online		Front		Online	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
55,60%	45,40%	62,50%	37,50%	12,50%	87,50%	63,60%	36,40%

IV				V			
Front		Online		Front		Online	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
62,50%	37,50%	43,50%	56,50%	27,30%	72,30%	38,90%	61,10%

Table 3.2: Loss of time during the lesson for each environment: "The lesson proceeds without losing time: yes or no?"

The data collected for each class were analysed and grouped in the chart above (Tables 3.2) in order to compare the percentages of both type of lessons. As it is possible to notice five classes out of six, experienced a worsening of the amount of time lost during the lesson. Thus, it is possible to confirm the hypothesis that was considered at the beginning of this analysis: online lesson setting has an impact on the time lost during the lecture and thus on the amount of information that the teacher may deliver.

It is interesting to observe that one class lost less time during the online lessons. This could be related to a lot of external variables such as the behaviour of the students or the amount of times that the connection was lost. About the latter, it is important to state that during the online lessons of the first half of the period, for each class

the teacher had to change classroom where she then connected to the computer in there. That means that some classrooms may have had a better connection than others, thus consequently reducing the amount of technical issues that may have influenced the loss of time. Moreover, part of the time was also lost when changing the classroom itself: turning on the computer, preparing the connection and the devices for the video-call with the students, etc..
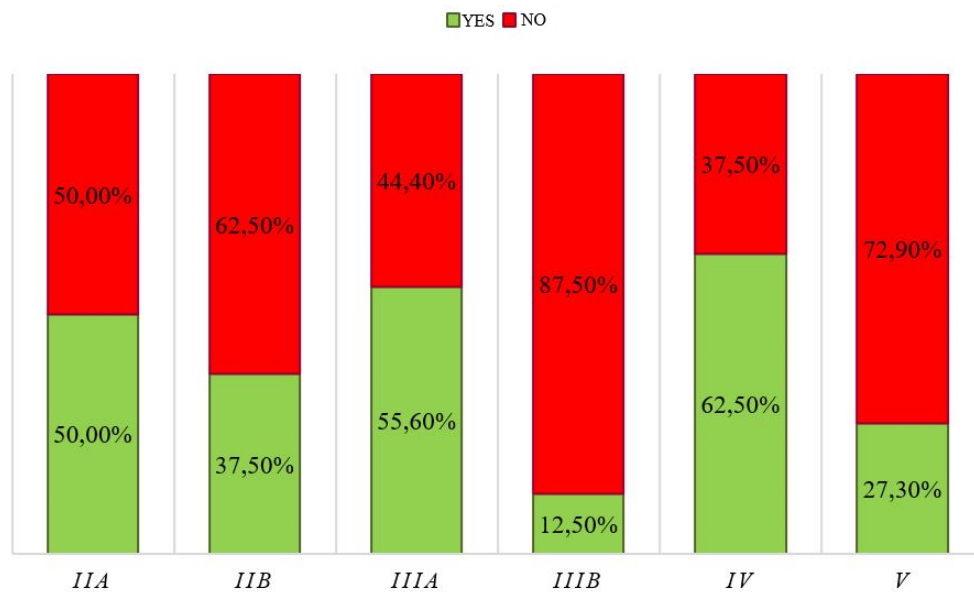

Figure 3.1: Front lessons

The graphs presented (Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2) can clarify the discrepancy that was observed between the two environments.

It is evident to the eye that in the online lesson, as already explained, at the question: "*The lesson proceeds without loosing time?*" there is an increasing in the answer "**no**" in half of the classes observed, meaning an increase in the time lost.

Figure 3.2: Online lessons

As previously anticipated, it was observed even if the loss of time was more associated to the students or to the teacher, and in particular in terms of loss of connection or device issues. The data collected in the diary showed that among the 111 lessons online, the 31,5% of the times the connection was lost by the teacher, among which 8,1% regards also device issues such as the microphone not working or the camera switched off. A variable that may be influential for this issue, might be the age of the teacher herself and her personal approach to technology. The problem starts with plural elements that the teacher shared during the interview: first of all, as explained at the beginning of the chapter, the academic year being observed was her last year of teaching before retiring, which from her point of view meant that she did not need to learn the new technology used and necessary for the online teaching; secondly, she was neither capable nor interested in the technology itself, which meant that even when she tried to understand and learn how to use the devices, she took a lot of time

before fully being able to use them. Students instead appeared to have had problems with the connection the 11,7% of times.

About the connection of the teacher, it has to be opened a parenthesis on it. The teacher went to school each day and therefore used the connection of the school together with the rest of the teachers. The amount of people connected had an impact on the quality of the connection itself, which anly at the beginning of December 2020 (almost at the end of the first period) has been improved. The slow response from the school about the problem is surely another issue that contributed in the worsening of the situation at the moment.

For what concerns the device issues of the students, it was not possible to obtain a percentage due to the fact that most of the time, they kept their cameras off and it was not clear if it was by choice or some other issues. What was possible to understand though, was that each time the students left the "room", there was most probably a connection issue. However, it is possible to state that the most time loss was due to teacher's problems, or to better explain it a mixture of school inefficiency and teacher's lack of knowledge.

TEACHING METHOD

The **teaching method** was observed due to an interest in confirming or denying the hypothesis that an online environment would have increased the application of the deductive method because of the decreasing of available time. What is expected here is certainly a higher percentage of deductive method teaching in both the environment, because it is known that the inductive method requires more time than the deductive one, meaning that it is less used in schools with such bug classes of

twenty-five or thirty students each.

IIA				IIB			
Front		Online		Front		Online	
Ind.	Ded.	Ind.	Ded.	Ind.	Ded.	Ind.	Ded.
25,0%	75,0%	8,7%	91,3%	50,0%	50,0%	0%	100%

IIIA				IIIB			
Front		Online		Front		Online	
Ind.	Ded.	Ind.	Ded.	Ind.	Ded.	Ind.	Ded.
55,5%	44,5%	37,5%	62,5%	43,75%	56,25%	45,5%	54,5%

IV				V			
Front		Online		Front		Online	
Ind.	Ded.	Ind.	Ded.	Ind.	Ded.	Ind.	Ded.
37,5%	62,5%	39,1%	60,9%	72,7%	27,3%	72,2%	27,8%

Table 3.3: Inductive (Ind.) and Deductive (Ded.) method

Tables 3.3 above summarize the collection of data about the method used in the two types of lessons. It is possible to see that the classes that maintained the same amount and those that increased in the deductive method are both three out of six. In order to better understand and interpret these data, it has to be made clear that second year students only study the grammar of the language, third year students started to approach the literature and for fourth and fifth year students prevail the teaching

of the literature over the grammar. As a matter of fact, the classes that presented an increase in deductive teaching are IIA, IIB and IIIA, where the grammar is highly present during the lesson. IIIB is excluded from this increasing, probably due to the presence of a disabled student who requires a particular attention during the explaining of the lesson, this can also be connected to the fact that IIIB is the only class that has almost the same percentage of teaching methods in both environment.
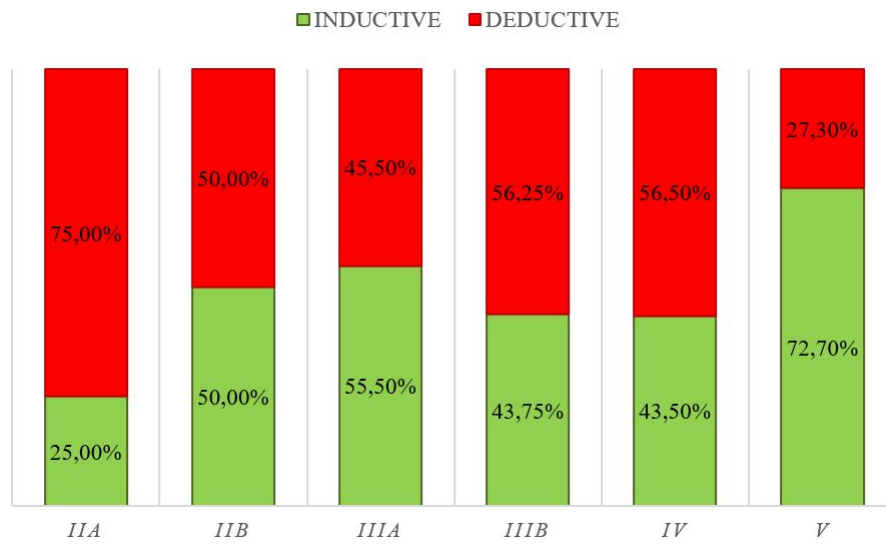
Figure 3.3: Teaching method used in a front lesson
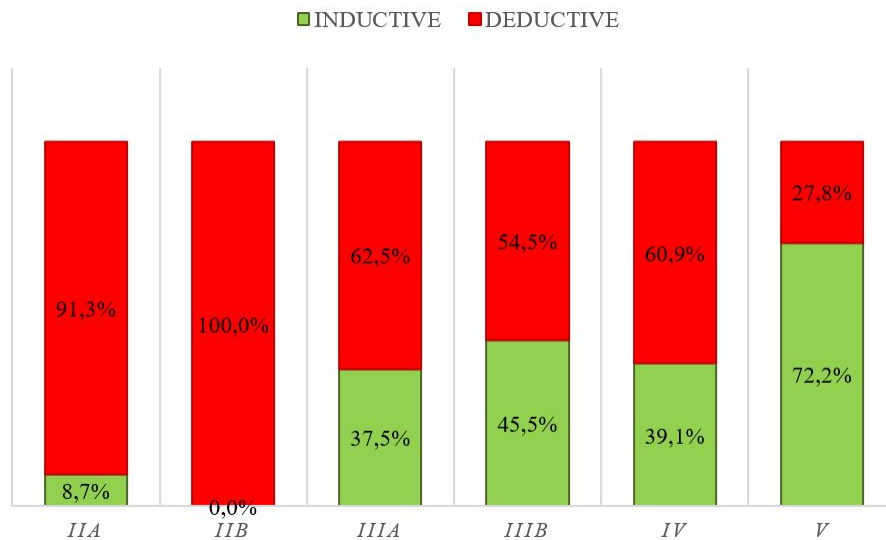
Figure 3.4: Teaching method used in an online lesson

However, these data split in half can neither confirm nor deny the starting hypothesis, as Figures 3.3 and 3.4 above show, one half of the graphs is very similar, but it is possible to suppose that the deductive teaching method increases mostly in "grammar-focused" lessons. Another possible variable could be the amount of students per class: indeed the three classes where the deductive method increased were composed by 27 students, while the other three 22. Even though it is not a considerable difference it may be enough to make the online lesson more difficult to convey due to the problems that the number of people can provoke.

STIMULUS

The **stimulus** was investigated as an important factor due to the impact it has on language learning and teaching. It was examined its presence (Figure 3.5), but it was also evaluated through the five parameters explained in Chapter 1 (Scherer, 1984 [50]).

IV				V			
Front		Online		Front		Online	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
37,5%	62,5%	78,2%	21,8%	37,5%	62,5%	80%	20%

IV				V			
Front		Online		Front		Online	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
88,9%	1,10%	87,5%	12,5%	100%	0%	91,0%	9,0%

IV				V			
Front		Online		Front		Online	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
62,5%	37,5%	78,3%	21,7%	100%	0%	94,4%	5,60%

Table 3.4: Presence of the stimulus

For this particular feature, the data were analysed considering the classes individually, or at least separately for each year. Regarding the *increasing* of the stimulus during online lessons, it is possible to notice the following classes. Classes IIA and IIB had the same change from on-site to online lessons: both of them increased the presence of the stimulus during the online lessons. This could be related once more to the content of the lessons which is grammar related only. Usually the stimulus during the on-site lessons came from the book and the teacher did not add other ma-

terials; during the online lessons instead, the book alone appeared not to be sufficient anymore due to the many activities proposed that were no longer feasible such as: pair works, group discussion, etc. Consequently, the teacher increased the amount of stimulus in order for the students to work as much as they were supposed to.

Another class that demonstrated an increase in the stimulus is the one of fourth year students. The reason behind this occurrence could be the fact that the teacher, in order to teach the English literature, used a lot of extra material other than the school-book and the stimulus was increased because it appeared that the more stimulus was present, the more students appeared interested in the lesson and willing to participate. The latter, as a matter of fact, was something which the teacher struggled to obtain in all the classes. In the following graphs it is possible to observe that the increase in online lessons happened indeed and it reached a level of stimulus that is similar for each class (Figures 3.5 and 3.6).
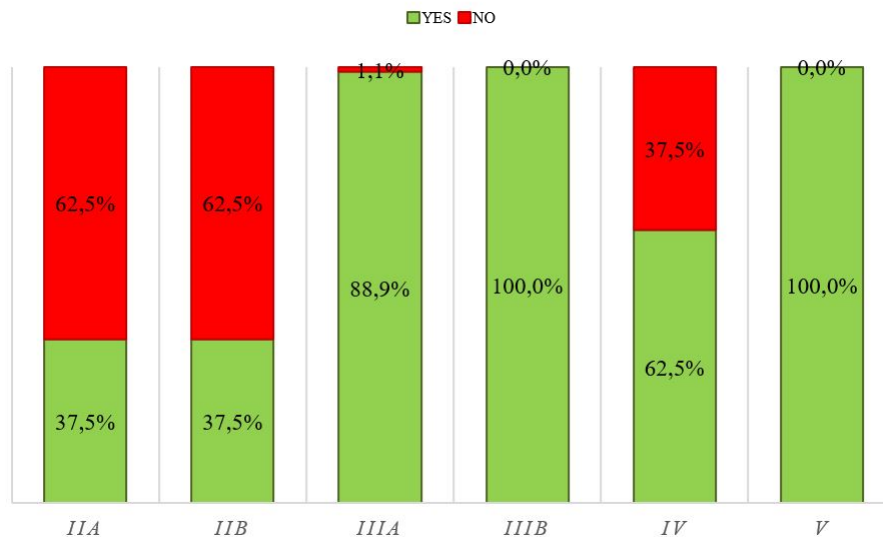
Figure 3.5: Presence of stimulus in a front lesson

Figure 3.6: Presence of stimulus in an online lesson

Regarding the classes that showed a decrease in the stimulus, it is possible to notice the following.

IIIA and IIIB, on the other hand, experienced a slightly decreasing in the stimulus. For what concerns IIIA, the difference is less than 2%, so it is possible to say that it almost was the same. The amount concerning IIIB instead, rises up to almost 10%, which is still very low but moderately important. The change in IIIB could once again be due to the presence of a disable student, due to this the teacher followed only the book stimulus and sometimes she left out some activities instead of replacing them.

Lastly, the fifth year students, presented a lowering that amounts to almost a 6%. As for the other two classes, the change is so small, that it may not be considered. However, its presence might arise a concern about the reason behind the change itself. Therefore, it could be assumed that the setting of teaching was weakened in

the online environment.

As it was previously anticipated, the stimulus was also evaluated following five parameters: Innovation, Pleasure, Relevance, Competence, Consistency. It was done in order to examine whether the stimulus itself could be considered more or less motivating for the students. Tables 3.5 show the results of the observation.

	IIA		IIB		IIIA	
	Front	**Online**	**Front**	**Online**	**Front**	**Online**
Innovation	33,3%	50,0%	33,3%	68,7%	62,5%	35,7%
Pleasure	33,3%	5,5%	100%	6,25%	12,5%	14,3%
Relevance	33,3%	33,3%	33,3%	6,25%	12,5%	7,10%
Competence	0%	44,4%	66,6%	31,5%	37,5%	50%
Consistency	0%	0%	33,3%	0%	0%	0%

	IIIB		IV		V	
	Front	**Online**	**Front**	**Online**	**Front**	**Online**
Innovation	50,0%	80%	60%	61,0%	45,5%	76,5%
Pleasure	6,25%	0%	40%	16,7%	18,2%	5,9%
Relevance	18,75%	0%	40%	0%	18,2%	17,6%
Competence	43,75%	30%	20%	66,7%	45,5%	29,4%
Consistency	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5,9%

Table 3.5: Five parameters of evaluation of the stimulus

It is possible to notice that the parameter that was always present is the *Innovation*, in both the settings. This is something that is very important because it generates motivation in the students which is captured by learning something new, but as explained in Chapter 1, it is not enough due to its endurance. *Competence* too was almost always considered together with *Pleasure*. These two parameters together with *Innovation*, could already seem enough in order to generate an intrinsic motivation during the lesson. The other two parameters, however, are fundamental in the stimulus evaluation for the students. *Relevance*, indeed, is very important due to the fact that if the student retain the stimulus relevant, it will be more participating and interested. An irrelevant stimulus is directly not enjoyable enough.

Something else that is evident is that the parameter of *Consistency* was almost never taken into consideration in the stimulus given. This can be considered a massive lack that consequently does not generate an intrinsic motivation and moreover makes it more easily disappear because the student will not think that the stimulus received is useful for itself.
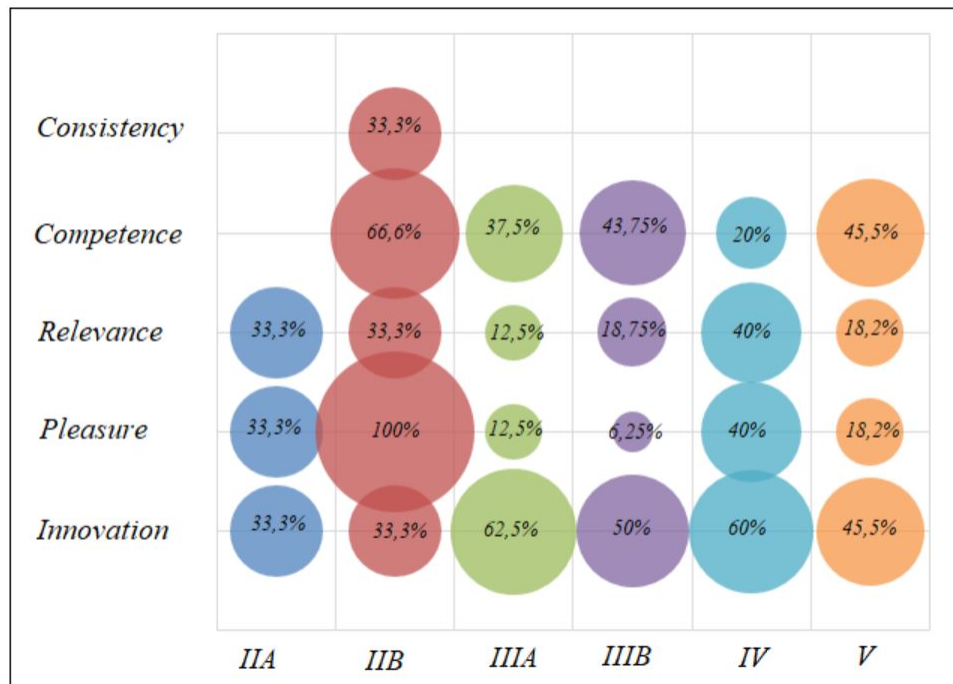
Figure 3.7: Five parameters of evaluation of the stimulus for on-site lessons

In order to gain a clearer view of the data and to sum them up, Figures 3.7 and 3.8 show the percentages collected in the Table 3.5. It is indeed very explicit that the parameter mostly considered was *Innovation* during on-site lessons as for online ones, though in the latter was also very considered the *Competence.* In both case scenarios, *Consistency* parameter is not present (for the most part), however other parameters seems to disappear during online lectures, such as *Relevance* and *Pleasure.*
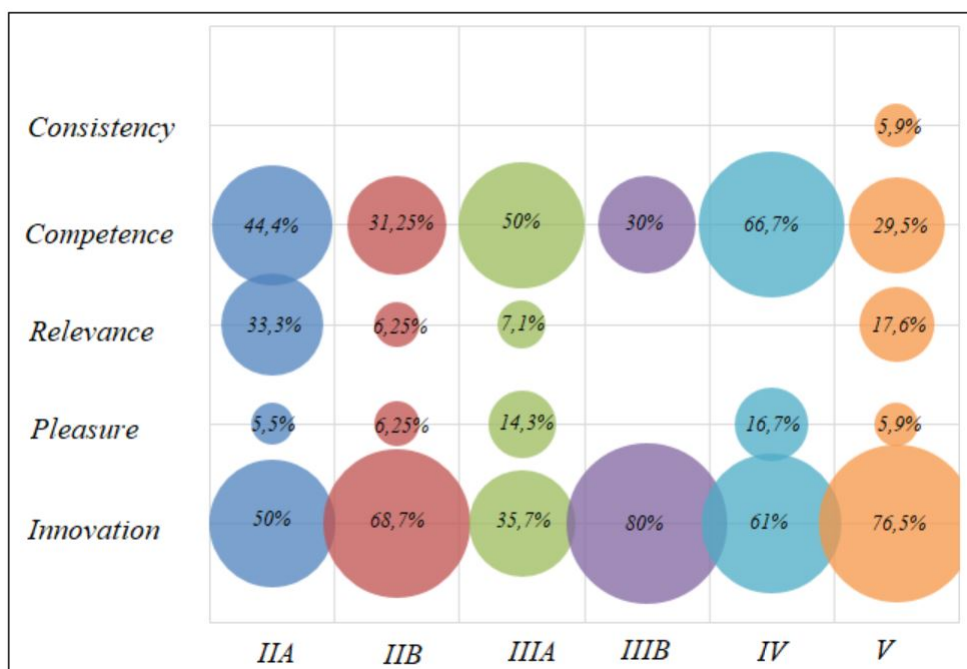
Figure 3.8: Five parameters of evaluation of the stimulus for online lessons

Overall, it is possible to surmise that during the on-site lessons and the online ones, the evaluation of the stimulus is more or less the same. Therefore, the stimulus feature that changes is mainly its presence and the parameters of Innovation and Relevance.

3.2.2 Teacher's behaviour

Moving forward, it will be now examined the last part of the checklist regarding the teacher's **behaviour**; the **atmosphere**; the **motivational steps** applied; and in addition *interest* and *participation* which were included in this paragraph because they are partly influenced and determined to be more or less present based on the way the teacher presents herself. To briefly resume, the steps that were considered are four: *Creates the basic conditions; Generates initial motivation; Maintains and*

protects motivation; Encourages positive retrospection. Each one of these phases is very important in order to guide the student in the learning and to help him be motivated in the process.

Among all the data collected, first of all it was observed the atmosphere present in class and the general behaviour of the teacher. In this case, the data reported are not considered divided per class due to the fact that the teacher was the same for all of them. Both of the factors were evaluated either as positive (e.g. when the students were collaborative and the teacher guided them) or as negative (e.g. when the students were tired, the atmosphere was heavy or the teacher was not in a good mood). The results obtained were startling.

ATMOSPHERE

Starting from the atmosphere in class, it was observed both for the two environments what here will be called "*mood*" that is set in the classroom. At the beginning of the observation it was supposed that, as said previously in the framework, it would have an impact on the motivation and supposing from the hypothesis that something would change, atmosphere maybe changed too. While filling in the diary, the hypothesis seemed slowly to be confirmed, but once the data were collected and analysed, the result appeared to be very different.

It was decided to classify the atmosphere as *positive* or *negative*, basing the choice on the situation happening before the researcher's eyes. Thus meaning that it was based on the students responses, meaning that when students, for example, seemed to be relaxed or there were moments of laughter etc., the item was considered as positive. On the contrary, when for example the teacher was angry or generally in

a bad mood, or either the students did not collaborate or seemed bored, the item was marked as negative. In other words, the atmosphere was evaluated by observing students mood and behaviour, and the teacher's mood.

It was pointed out that the *atmosphere* in both the on-site and online lessons was positive for the 58,2% of the time, as it can be seen below (Table 3.10).

ON-SITE		ONLINE	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
58,20%	41,80%	58,20%	41,80%

Table 3.6: Atmosphere

The reason behind this "no-change" may be that the emotions of the people considered in this case scenario are outside and independent from the context of the moment.

TEACHER'S BEHAVIOUR
The same happened for the teacher's *behaviour* (Table 3.7) with a positive perception in the 80% of times.

ON-SITE		ONLINE	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
80,00%	20,00%	80,90%	19,10%

Table 3.7: Teacher's behaviour

Although the general procedure here is the same, what is taken into consideration

this time is only focused on the teacher's behaviour. So the main difference is that in this data there is no influence of students manner.

Of course, this element is directly connected with the atmosphere, but the teacher was able to manage her behaviour independently from her mood, thus the percentages obtained are different.

It is possible to say then, that the environment where the lesson is broadcast does not have any influence on these two factors. In addition, it is interesting to notice that even if the atmosphere is negative, the behaviour of the teacher can be positive and thus the two elements can be seen as independent from each other. This means, for instance, that if the atmosphere in class is heavy due to the tiredness of the students or a gloomy moment after a verification, the teacher can either way have a positive behaviour. This concept is very important because it is the first step in order to influence students' motivation and thus their learning.

MOTIVATIONAL STEPS

As regards the four phases of motivation construction from the teacher, it was possible to observe that the first phase, *creating the general conditions*, has almost always been implemented at the beginning of the lesson and it is strictly connected to what was just examined, the atmosphere and the behaviour.

Nevertheless, the other three phases were not as much present as the first one. Among them, the *encouraging of positive retrospection* is the one that the teacher mostly applied, but either way it was a very small amount of time. Moreover, it was noticed that the majority of those times were with the fifth year student which could mean that the teacher considered the phase necessary only for them, probably due to the

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fact that at the end of the academic year they will have to attend the final exam. The fact that the phases of *generating the motivation* and *maintaining* it were approximately never employed, can bring to a lack of motivation in the students. However, among the data, it was possible to ascertain that each phase (even if low) decreased its presence during the online setting, in particular the phase of **creating the general conditions** appears always in both the scenarios, while the other three changed:

- **generating the motivation**: the medium amount of this parameter changed from 4 in the on-site lessons to 2 times per class in the online lessons;

- **maintaining the motivation**: the medium amount of this parameter changed from 1 in the on-site lessons to 0 times per class in the online lessons;

- **encouraging retrospection**: the medium amount of this parameter changed from 9 in the on-site lessons to 5 times per class in the online lessons.

These data were obtained observing the lessons and checking in the checklist whether they appeared or not, the amount of times reported above regards those lessons in which the phases occurred. This lowering happened because of all the elements that were examined so far, as it was already highlighted, have an impact on the delivery of the lesson and consequently affect all of the phases of the lesson.

To support the hypothesis about the decreasing of students' motivation in online lessons, it was also observed the interest and the participation of the students during the lessons. This was conducted because it was supposed that a motivated student would also be participating and interested in the lesson. In this case, once again, the data were examined without dividing them for each class because it can be linked to

the way the teacher acts, and it was seen that it is the same for all of the classes.

INTEREST and PARTICIPATION

It is important to consider these two factor in the process of this study because as stated previously in the theoretical framework, the *interaction* and thus the **partici-pation** is pivotal for the students in order to be successful in distant education. As a matter of fact, recalling the Community of Inquiry framework (Figure 2.1, Chapter 2) stated before, also the so-called *social presence* is a feature in the educational experience and this can be achieved through *participation*. For what concerns **inter-est** instead, it is crucial too due to its influence in the type of *motivation* that the students will develop and thus it has an impact on their learning too.

Regarding *interest*, Table 3.8 shows the percentages of both the settings.

ON-SITE		ONLINE	
Yes	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
86,70%	13,30%	70,00%	30,00%

Table 3.8: Percentages of interest

It is possible to notice that in the online environment the percentage has diminished. Considering what has been said so far, it was already supposed as outcome; however, the amount of interesting is still high and that means that the impact is not so heavy taking into account that the impact was only a 10%. In terms of *participation*, as well, the change is portrayed in the chart below (Table 3.9).

ON-SITE		ONLINE	
Positive	**Negative**	**Positive**	**Negative**
85,00%	15,00%	74,60%	26,40%

Table 3.9: Students' participation in the lessons

As for the *interest*, here too the percentage is decreased by 10%. It could be a coincidence that the amount of each element is the same (more or less), however it could also be described as one connected to the other. It is correct to suppose indeed, that when the interest is high, the participation will be too, and vice versa.

Once it has been considered these two elements and shown thus that they decreased in the online setting, it is possible to state that the *motivation* is *reduced* due to the impact that the two aspects have on it.

3.2.3 Students' point of view

So far, it was examined the checklist results and outcome. Now, it will be seen if it is possible to find some matches between the students' point of view and what has been said hitherto.

Student's point of view was observed by submitting them to a questionnaire (see Appendices) of 21 questions among which the most interesting elements will be shown in the following. It has been possible to interview a heterogeneous group of 141 students, to which the questionnaire was sent, 84 answered it and among them 76 unveiled the class of belonging: 29 were second year students, 18 were third year students, 16 were fourth year students, 13 were fifth year students. The remaining 8

were not defined. It is quite usual for researchers to expect a part of the sample not answering to the questionnaire, this is due to the fact that the main problem with questionnaires completed in the absence of the researcher (e.g. sent by post as in this case) is that only a small percentage of them are filled in and returned to the sender; normally, only 25% of the questionnaires sent are returned to the researcher's hands.

Observing the answers to the questionnaire, it was possible to notice some interesting outcomes. First of all, when asked which environment they preferred generally specking, the 57.1% of the students chose *on-site lessons* (Figure 3.9).
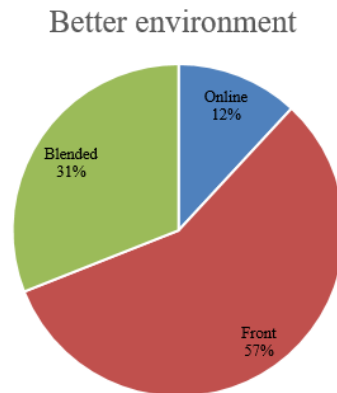
Figure 3.9: Preferred environment in general

As well as their preference, it was important to understand the reason behind their choices, thus it was asked to motivate the answer. Due to the amount of responses, it is not possible to list them all here, therefore it will be reported the most common reasons that were shared among the students. For what concerns the students that chose *front lessons* the most common given reasons are:

- relationships/human contact;

- feedback/exams;

- attention/concentration;

- anxiety;

- motivation;

- learning difficulties.

Among the students that chose *online lessons*, the main given reasons are:

- more free time;

- less stress;

- organization.

Lastly, the students who chose the *blended* environment confirmed what previously stated by the other companions, both regarding online and front lessons. Motivating their answers they referred to *front lessons* in matter of: socialization/human relationships; feedback; and they find it more educative and irreplaceable. For the counter part instead, they referred to *online lessons* in matters of: rest; organization; less stress; more free time. As it is possible to see, these motivations match with the other students, showing that the general thought is shared by most of them.

The following question, concerned the difference between the two environments and how much the students feel it. The results can be seen in Figure 3.10 below.

DIFFERENCE FELT BETWEEN ONLINE AND FRONT LESSONS
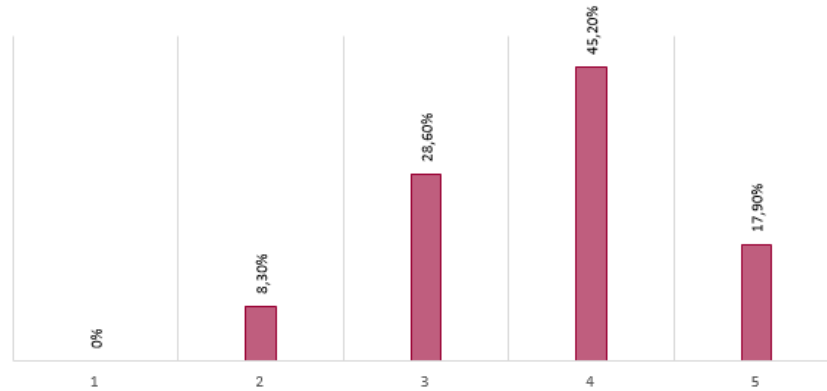
Figure 3.10: Students' point of view on the different environments

The scale was ranked as: 1 = nothing; 2 = minimum; 3 = enough; 4 = a lot; 5 = everything changes.It is possible to notice that none of the students stated that nothing changes. Indeed, each student feels some kind of difference in the two environments and most of them affirmed to feel a lot of difference (45.2%). It is important to consider that the highest rates are all between 3 and 5. This could be due to what students declared in the previous questions, their feeling **less motivated**, **stressed** and **lacking attention**, can have an impact on how they perceive the two environment and consequently this has also an impact on the learning if we consider the role of the *affective filter* by Krashen [34], as it was explained previously in Chapter 1.2.

All of the above can be sustained by the results of another question regarding motivation itself. This is a crucial question for the study because it is at the base of this research. Therefore, from a students point of view, does the learning environment influence their motivation? Analyzing their answers, it definitely seems true. Figure

3.11 demonstrates that the students feel more motivated in a *face-to-face* environment rather than in an *online* one. Despite the majority of students chose the *front lessons* (77%), there is also another 20% that does not feel any difference. This is interesting because it could be linked to whether the students are more autonomous or no, thus their need to be motivated could be less than other students. However, this assumption might be addressed in future studies.
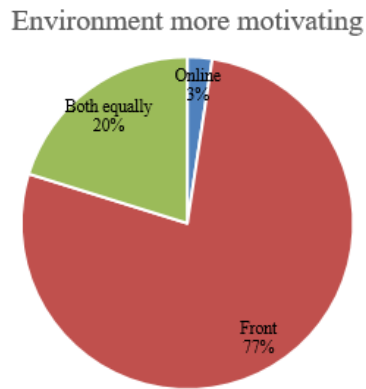

Figure 3.11: Students' more motivating environment

For that matter, it was also asked to students how much they feel the teacher is paying attention the them individually. In order to ascertain if this can differ depending on the environment, it was asked the same question for both the two types of lessons. The two following images show the results of the answers given, Figure 3.12 for the *face-to-face* environment and Figure 3.13 for the *online* environment.

FACE-TO-FACE ENVIRONMENT
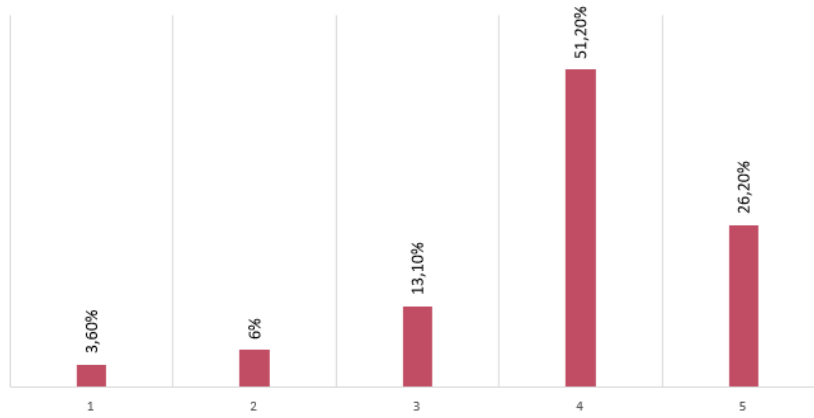
Figure 3.12

ONLINE ENVIRONMENT
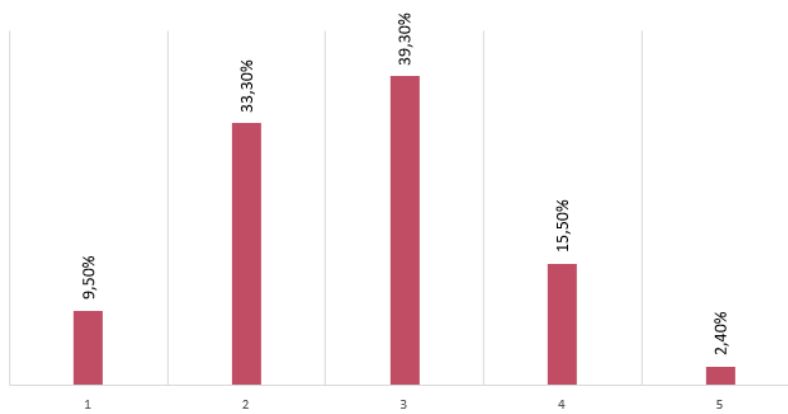
Figure 3.13

To begin with, the first difference that attracts attention is that in the *face-to-face* environment the highest percentages are included between 4 and 5; in the *online* environment instead they are contained between 2 and 3. It is clear that a great deal of difference can be observed, so it is possible to point out that the feeling of the teacher's attention to the individual student, changes as the environment does. This

can be a consequence to the amount of time that the teacher has during a lecture. It is important to remember that the lesson itself, when delivered online, changes the duration from one hour to 45 minutes due to organization issues that require some time to be managed between one lesson and the other. In addition to what just stated, it was seen that the amount of available time in a lesson decreases due to some technical inconveniences (e.g. loss of connection). In order to further confirm the previously explained hypothesis that the teacher has less time to dedicate to students individually in an online environment, it was asked to students whether the loss of time due to technological problems were moreover the teacher or for themselves, or both equally.

TECHNICAL ISSUES
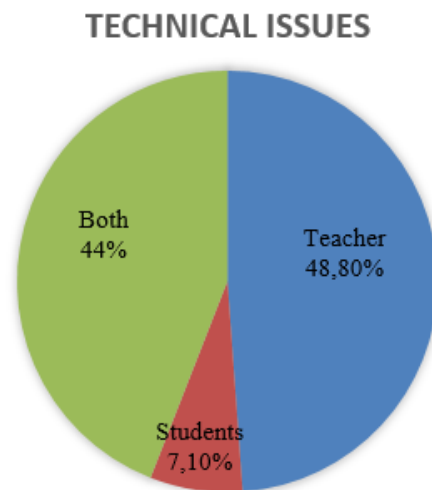
Figure 3.14

To confirm the assumption, students retain most of the issues connected with the teacher (48,8%); this shows a congruence with the data shown before. Despite this result, another half (44%) of the students state that the problem is both connected to students and the teacher. This could mean that the amount of time lost in a lecture,

is almost never due to the students only. About the technical issues, it was of interest to understand if they had an impact of the students attention and if it consequently dropped compared to on-site lessons. Therefore, it was asked, regarding technical issues, how much they impede the students to follow the lesson fluently in a scale from one to five.
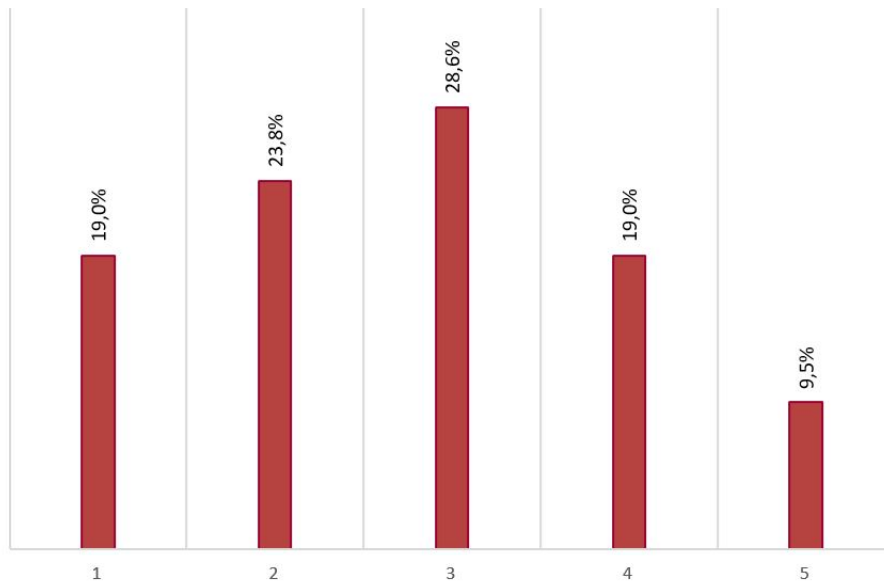

Figure 3.15: Technical issues influence on students attention

It is possible to notice that the majority of the answers variate from one to three, but the higher percentage lays on three which stands for *enough*. Indeed, it may seem a low amount but it is high enough to consider it a distraction for the students and a difficulty in addition to the overall situation. Moreover, if it is considered the presence of possible students with some lacks of attention or other deficits, the problems are increased.

To have a broader view of this loss, it was investigated *how much* time it is being

lost in order to understand if it is a valuable amount that could actually have an impact on the lecture itself. 48 students out of 84 answered and the results can be seen in the graph below (Figure 3.16).
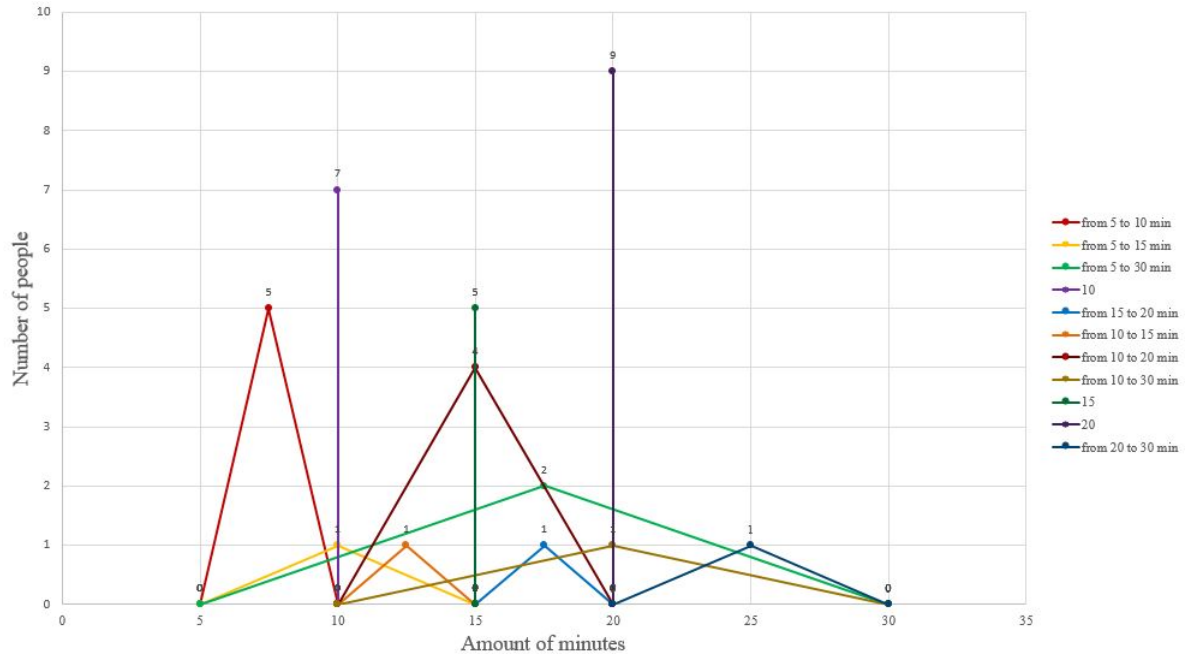

Figure 3.16: Amount of time that is lost during an online lesson from a student's point of view

The graphic shows the amount of time that each student expressed to be lost, however these data are only a part of the 48 answers due to the fact that many students did not answer in a numerical way. As a matter of fact, 5 students stated that the amount of time changes depending on the trigger; 4 expressed that sometimes it can be lost even the entire lesson itself and other 2 limited to say that the amount of time is "a lot". Beside this, focusing on the amount of minutes that can be seen in the graphic, it is possible to notice that the amount of time that is mostly included in the answers is between 10 to 15 minutes. Considering that the whole online lesson

is about 45 minutes, losing 10 to 15 minutes is almost half of the lesson, which is a considerable amount of time. This evidence finds a congruence to what was collected through the diary, which shows that the medium amount of time loss is around 10 minutes. It is plausible to say that the students may retain the amount of time lost greater because of the amount of time they loose during the lessons.

It was then assumed that this waste of time could also be connected to the teacher's lack of knowledge in the technology field. Thus, once more it was asked to the students what they thought about it.
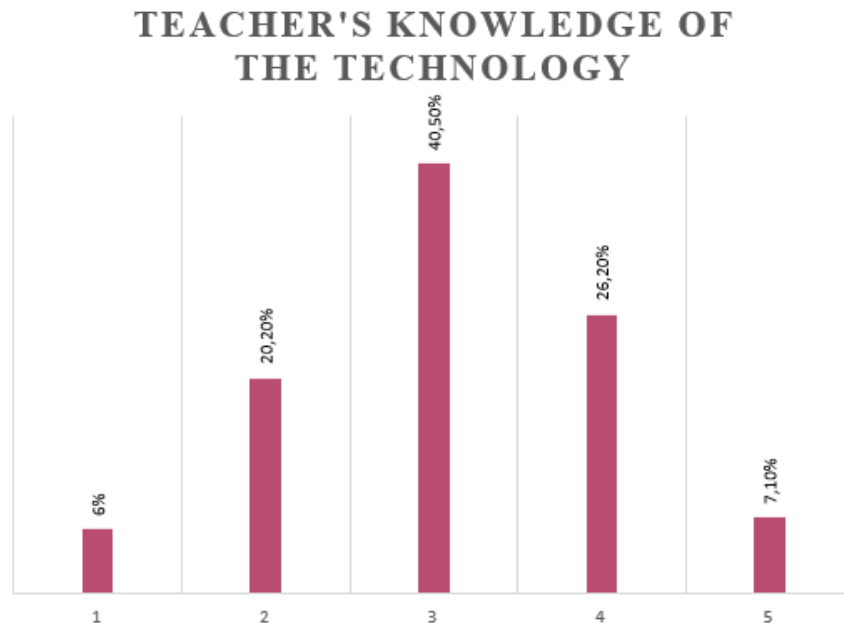
Figure 3.17

Figure 3.17 shows that after all the teacher is fairly prepared, however not enough considering that the majority of the values are between 2 and 4. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge of the teacher has an effect time available. According to the re-

sults, the 80,6% stated that it does with only the 19,4% as counterpart. Therefore, does it mean that the amount of time loss could be reduced if teachers were better prepared from a high-tech point of view? It is possible that this could help reducing the time loss during the lesson.

To conclude this paragraph, and to summarize what has been said so far, it was also asked students two more questions that envisage to the future development of this topic where it is supposed to better understand what students believe and prefer. The first question is directly connected to the topic itself; it was asked them, whether in the future may continue the practice of blended setting of language learning, what they would prefer it to be organized. The data demonstrate that 10,7% of the students would prefer the course to be structured mostly by online lessons; 29,8% would prefer both online and on-site lessons in equal measure; and 59,5% on-site lessons, which is the majority of the students. As supposed, these data correspond with the data obtained in the first question (Figure 3.1) where the percentages were respectively 12% online, 31% both settings, and 57% on-site lessons.

The second question can be considered indirectly connected to the topic of this study, even so it still may have an impact on the online learning. The item submitted to the students in the questionnaire regards whether there is the necessity of subjecting the teachers to some refresher courses on the topic of online learning or more in general on, at least, the platforms that the school wants to use to deliver the online lessons. Students answered the questions expressing their thoughts and among them the 84,5% think that they should attend some refresher courses indeed (Figure 3.18).
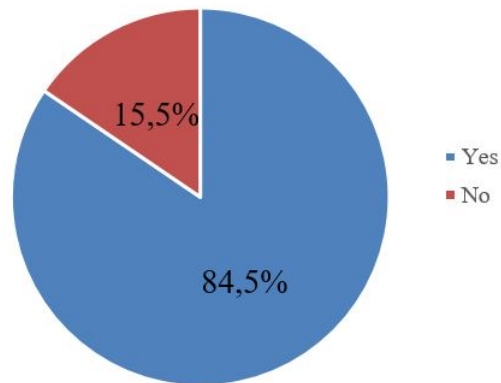
Figure 3.18: Necessity of refresher courses for teacher from students' point of view

Furthermore, it is interesting to report some of the most interesting answers to the last item of the questionnaire which permitted the students to add anything they wanted to share for this study. Some of the answers summarize more or less what is the common sense among those who answered:

"I believe that 5/6 hours per day in front of the computer, even though reduced from 60 to 45 minutes, are excessive. I also consider any technical difficulties and moments of doubt very stressful. For example, if I have to be orally tested and the teacher does not connect or is not available, my psyche is affected in a not negligible way, thus affecting my performance during the verification."

"I think that the biggest mistake that can be made in this circumstance is, both on the part of the professors and on the part of the students, to transfer all the habits and methods of lessons to the distance learning likewise, thinking that they work equally in both scenarios."

"After 5/6 hours a day in video lessons it would be better not to load the students

with further tasks to be done in front of the computer."

"[...], if the Ministry could give more new means and devices to schools, it would be possible to attend lessons with less problems and in a quieter way; the only problem is precisely the cost, [...]."

These considerations are more or less on the same line of thought of this study. It is possible to understand, overall, that as the on-site lesson is based on the student being at the centre of the lesson and the learning, so it should be for the online learning. This is the main reason why it should be developed and teachers should be prepared to follow the theoretical frameworks about this topic so far.

"Subject B" particular case scenario

As already anticipated in 3.1.3, class IIIB is considered a particular case scenario in this thesis due to the presence of Subject B, a SEN student. It was decided to report the finding of this case in a separate section due to the importance of the statements and the fact that the situation concerned is outside the general study of this thesis and could thus be considered and outcome that was not supposed to be further investigated.

The general outcome that is reported in these lines was collected by an interview which was not planned a priori, being the argument not supposed to be included in the study. The interview indeed was implemented during the pauses between one lesson and the other and it was Subject B who decided spontaneously to deliver these feeling and information, meaning that the interview may be considered unstructured. First of all, Subject B explained that his main issue regarded the literature part of

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the lessons. He said that the day he came to school for the on-site lesson was not the day the teacher held the literature class, meaning that it was instead delivered online. It was thus asked why the majority of the problems were about the online lessons; in particular, he states, the problem is the method followed for the lessons: the teacher does not always follow the book and sometimes adds important notes about the topic, meaning that students are supposed to note down what she explains. During an on-site class, the problem would not exist because the support teacher would take the notes for him, but at home he was not able to do so, therefore using the same method for the online environment becomes an issue. Being this acknowledged, Subject B also added how he was keeping up with the lessons despite his problems: the teacher recorded the lessons with her phone and once it was over, she delivered the recording to the student by e-mail. Once he received the file, the mother of the student listened to the lesson and took notes for her son.

There are some considerations worth stating. Subject B explained that his mother luckily was able to understand English language and thus writing the notes from the recording, however he also adds that when it was not possible for her to do so due to other commitments, he was obliged to ask other classmates for their notes. It this scenario it is possible to understand two main problems: the first one is about Subject B feelings and the second one is about the notes themselves. Subject B explains that being obliged to ask other students for their notes, makes him feel less autonomous and therefore it highlights its disability which is something that demotivates him; as for the notes instead, the problem regards the styles and strategies for the learning. Subject B in this case has to study and learn from notes taken from other students, which means that the styles used for the writing may not be the same as for Subject B; for example, it may be possible that the student uses schemes or arrows while

Subject B prefers to study from a text without figures, or otherwise he may not understand the meaning of those figures. It is obvious then that online learning has an impact also on SEN students, and therefore it may also influence their motivation and their final achievement.

3.2.4 Second term data analysis

It was decided to develop a second questionnaire to submit to the 141 sample students four months later, for two main reasons: the first one regards the study itself, as a matter of fact it is of interest to understand whether the situation has improved or worsened; the second reason instead, concerns more the validity of the data. The latter means that it wants to understand if the students may have been influenced by the presence of the observant in class. Thus it is supposed that, in some questions, if the situation has gotten worse, then it is legitimate to suppose that the teacher could have been influenced by the feeling of being judged.

As previously briefly explained in 3.1.1, the questionnaire submitted is composed by 10 items mainly structured as closed questions and multiple choice ones. The questions are fewer due to the fact that, being now the researcher outside of the direct observation, it was retained more useful to diminish them in order not to tire the students and thus obtain data not very valid. The questions presented and the emerged data are here described; for this questionnaire too, it was used *Google Forms* and then sent by e-mail to the students.

The first item asked students to answer: *"How has your situation evolved with online education?"*. It was presented to them a series of short sentences and they had to

choose between "more", "less" or "equal" for each of them. The results obtained are shown in Table 3.10 below.

	MORE	EQUAL	LESS
I understand the lesson	13,11%	**70,49%**	16,39%
I am interested in the lesson	3,33%	**53,33%**	43,33%
Level of attention	4,92%	21,31%	**73,77%**
Level of tiredness	**77,59%**	13,79%	8.62%
Interaction and Participation	17,31%	**48,08%**	34,62%
Level of Anxiety	26,42%	**56,60%**	16,98%
Group projects	30,77%	**38,46%**	30,77%
Test difficulties	26,42%	**54,72%**	18,87%

Table 3.10: Answers to the first question

It is possible to observe from the data presented, that most of the elements taken into consideration for the change, seem to be remained as they were prevailing the "equal". On the contrary, two elements seem to be changed: *level of attention* and *level of tiredness.* This is something that here it is not considered a good development, but a worsening in the situation instead. As a matter of fact, the two concepts of "attention" and "tiredness" are very influential on the motivation of the students. It has to be remarked that those majorities of students who answered "equal" on the other elements, are to be referred to the previous questionnaire, where the general view of the context was not very flourishing. Concerning **attention** in particular, in the first term questionnaire most of them stated that their attention already changed "enough" in the online environment (Figure 3.16). That means that while on the first term students reported their attention to have changed mainly between 1 to

3, now there is a worsening for the 73,77% of them, meaning that their value has increased. About **tiredness**, the 77,59% said that it has increased: this has a great impact on students' motivation too, and in particular the feature that resents this the most is their study and thus the final achievement. Even though most of the outcomes, as stated, remained unvaried, it is to be highlighted that these values do not surpass (or barely do) the half of the students. Excluded from this argument are the two elements previously mentioned, and the understanding of the lesson (70,49% remained the same). All of this means that, the majority of the students actually experienced a change in time between the two terms.

Moving on to the second item, it was asked to students their personal satisfaction with the online lessons of the whole year in order to draw some conclusions about it.
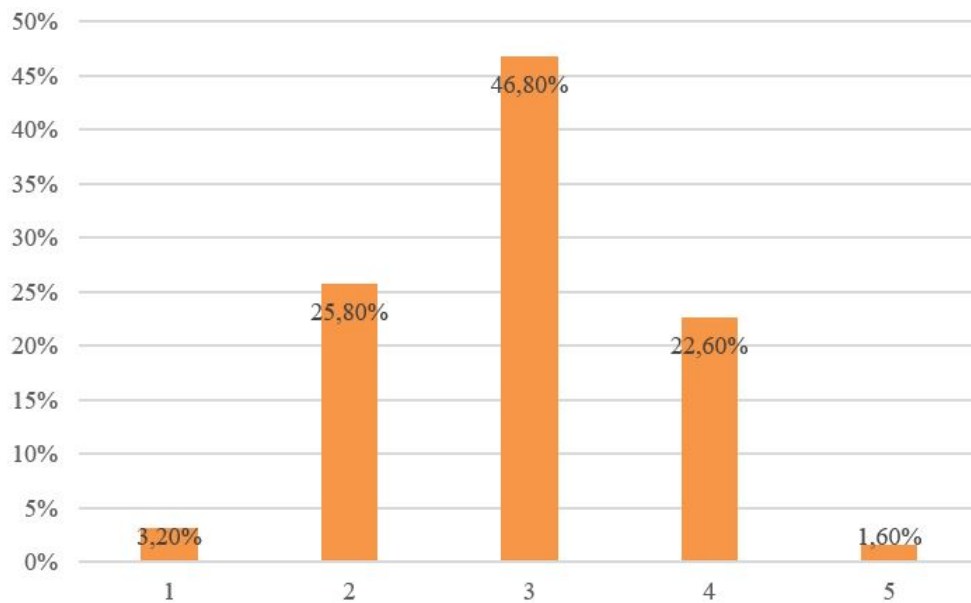

Figure 3.19: Amount of students' satisfaction on the online environment

Figure 3.19 shows that the general satisfaction of the students is sufficient, with

46,80% of the students answers as 3. It is bracing to acknowledge that overall students understand the effort that teachers, and not only them, employ in order to guarantee an appropriate learning to them. It is not to be forgotten though that it was seen that students do feel the difference between the two settings and they still prefer the on-site one.

Following, the third item was about the platform of support to online learning and teaching; it was asked them which of the proposed ones were used. The options were chosen based on what it was supposed to be used during the lesson and also considering what was observed to be used. As expected (Figure 3.20), the live lessons are agreed by all the students to be used. On the other hand, it was not expected so little responses on the assignments via e-mail or in the electronic register because these were platforms used by the teacher in the first term.
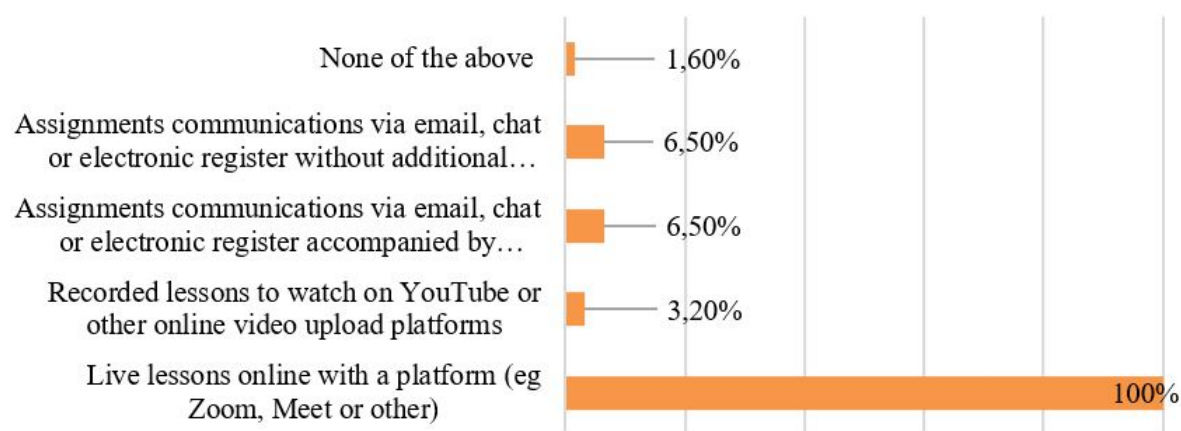

Figure 3.20: Answers to the third item

This could mean that the teacher changed her method in delivering the homework, or she probably just uses the live lesson to assign the activities, whether to be done in the moment or at home, as she would do in an on-site environment.

Questions four and five regarded the commitment of the students, and in particular the amount of hours dedicated to studying: question four asked them *"Did the commitment you have been asked to have in Distance Learning increase or decrease?"*; while question five was slightly more precise and asked them *"Have the hours of self-study increased or decreased?"*. The fourth item did not include the amount of study, but indeed concerned the amount of homework, difficulties during tests/lessons, amount of free time, etc.
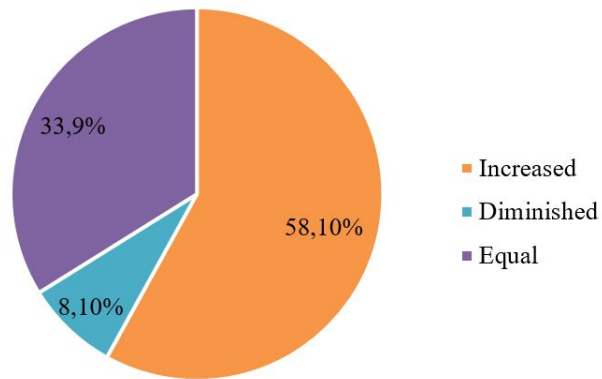

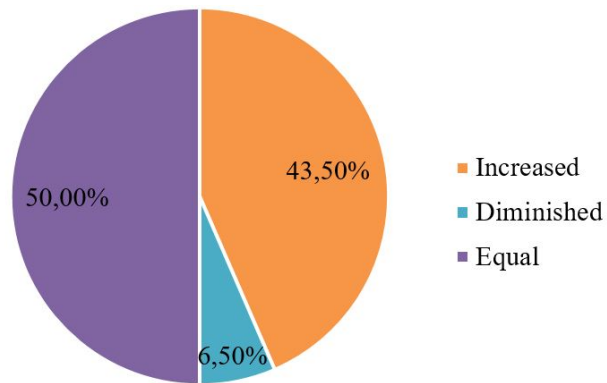Figure 3.21: Answers to question four

Figure 3.22: Answers to question five

While Figure 3.21 shows that the amount of commitment has increased, Figure 3.22 shows that mainly the amount of study is unchanged. That means that overall, the amount of homework has increased and alongside the amount of free time has probably diminished. This is another element that may be considered influential on the motivation of the students, and also connected with the previous statement about their tiredness: the less free time available, the less retrieval. Tired students do not have the basis to be active students during the lessons, and thus they supposedly achieve less during the lesson, meaning that the majority of the work has to be done later on at home. That is why another great amount of students state that the quantity of time dedicated to studying has increased (43.50%).

To this topic of "tiredness", it was asked to students, in the ninth item, if they were tired of the online lessons, or if they got used to them.
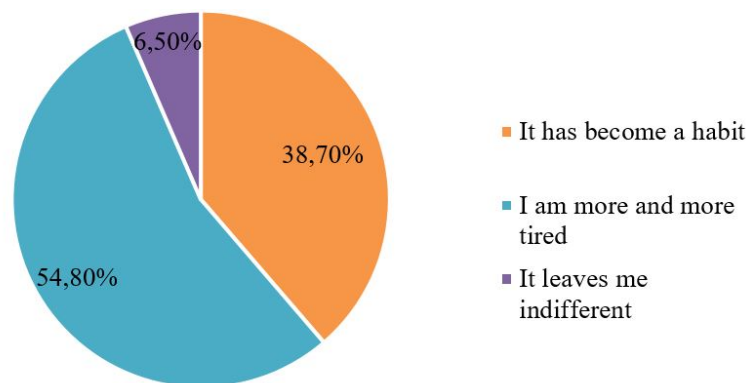

Figure 3.23: Answers to ninth question

As it can be observed (Figure 3.23), most of the student are more and more tired of this mode of learning. As it was supposed though, another great amount of student are either used to it now or totally indifferent about it. That means that the sample is split in half between not being able to get used to online learning, and being able

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to accept it as a new tool.

Moving on to the other questions, it was also asked students if the program of the subject has changed. This was of interest due to the fact that in the interview with the teacher developed during the first term, this changed was claimed to be necessary because of the less time available.
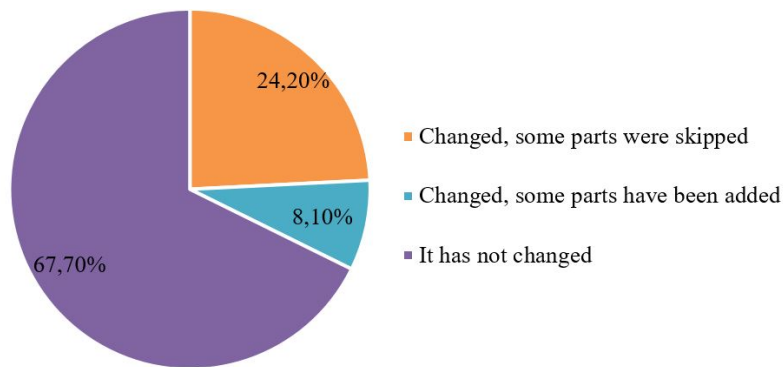

Figure 3.24: Answers to sixth question

Students report that the program determined at the beginning of the year has not changed (Figure 3.24). Due to the great amount of students reporting this (67,70%), it may be that the other small percentages, and thus changing, may be related to the adjustments that the teachers normally do during the course of time. That means that the amount of study that the students have to do, is the same as it would have been on-site (as reported before). But it was seen though, that the amount of time was diminished, therefore it may be that the topics that the teacher is not able to cover during the lesson, may be given to the students as homework or extra activities at home. This could explain why the students report that their amount of commitment has increased.

Next, it has been decided to report questions seven, eight and ten together as all concerning some difficulties that the students have.

Starting from question seven, it was asked students more about the evaluation. Indeed, this topic has been figured to be quite important in the matter of online learning (see 3.3); the question was *"Did the method of verification in Distance Learning remain exclusively oral?"*. It was asked because, as it will be seen in the next section, the teacher during the first term reported to be willing to use only oral tests for the evaluation.
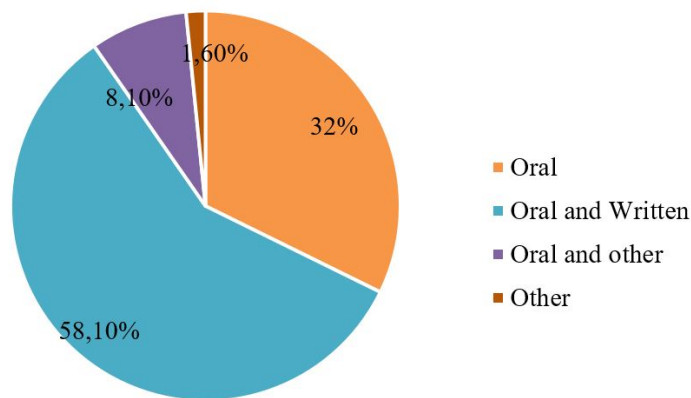

Figure 3.25: Answers to seventh question

Remarkably, the teacher seems to have changed her method of evaluation. Indeed, the majority of answers demonstrate that the main method now includes both oral and written evaluations (Figure 3.25). This may or may not be a good development, but for sure it is for those students who reported to feel more anxious during the oral tests because they now can also be evaluated in the writing.

Concerning question eight, another type of issue that was very frequent during the first term regards the connection. It was therefore asked them how this topic devel-

oped in time and the results are shown in the following figure (Figure 3.26).

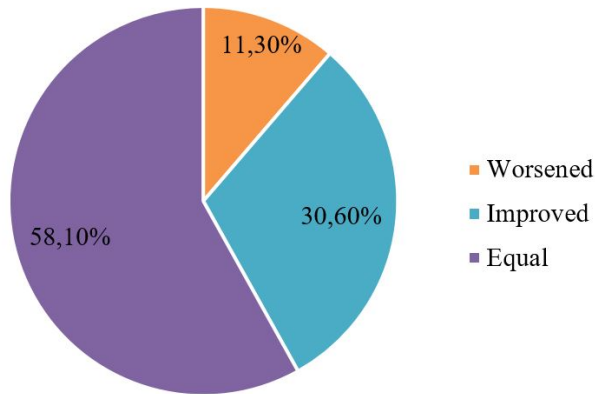Figure 3.26: Answers to eight question

Mainly, the issue has not been solved (58,10% Equal).This may be connected once again to the feature of time loss, because the persistence of the issue implies the persistence of the time loss that was reported in 3.2.2 and 3.2.2.

Lastly, the concluding item is a general, overall, report of the scenario concerned. *"In general, the difficulties presented in the first term, now are:"* (Figure 3.27).
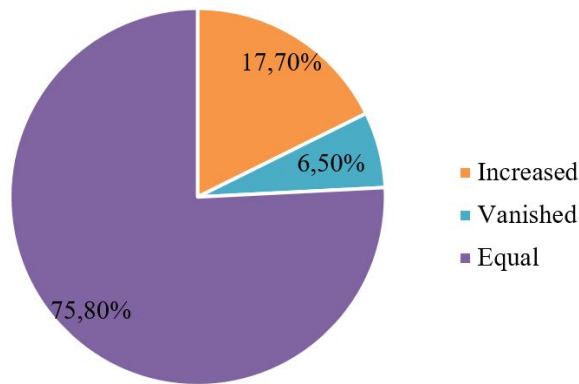

Figure 3.27: Answers to tenth question

Once again, the situation has not changed. Even though some students report to have become accustomed to online learning, the 75,80% of them (more that those who said that are still not used to it) state to have the same difficulties as in the first term.

3.3   Something more: evaluation in online learning

During the developing of this study and its direct observation, it was discovered something more about the evaluation of the students during the online lessons and the way the feedback is delivered from the teacher. This variables appears in this study as an unexpected feature because it was not previously considered at the beginning of the research. The reason behind this negligence concerns the prejudice consisting in believing that the evaluation process itself did not have a different impact in the two environments. Nevertheless, though it could appear that this feature of language learning is not strictly connected to motivation, it this thesis it was later assumed that it actually could have an impact on the language learning and probably on motivation too. Being this a variable that was not initially considered for this study it has some limitations and thus this possible connection warrants further investigation. In this paragraph what will be exposed are the phenomenon observed and the data collected, thus it will only be a description of the observation with some possible considerations.

Generally speaking, the notions of *verification* and *evaluation* refer to two different concepts: the first one refers to the collection of data, while the second one refers to the results of the learning, and thus an evaluation of all the aspects of the students. Therefore, it is possible to say that the verification refers to the achievement of the

aims; while the evaluation is the judgement that the teacher gives to the performance of each student. What may be useful in the second language learning is the analysis of mistakes and the feedback [3].

In the field of Distance Learning, the theme of evaluation is acquiring an increasing importance. It becomes an essential need to build models and tools that allow us to make the leap in quality in this direction, in order to ascertain whether the supposed advantages of this didactic approach are real and productive (Ballor, 2002 [4]). In this study, it was possible to witness the way the teacher evaluated the students and how she managed the whole process of the feedback. It has to be expressed that the *process of evaluation* is useful both for the students and for the teacher in order to:

1) provide **feedback to parents**, which is important in the process because it creates realistic expectations of the language process and product;

2) **self-evaluation**, because self-assessment is increasing success in schools and it is optimal in order to involve students and making them aware;

3) **create a target-curriculum**, the evaluation checks the quality of the curricular planning that depending on the outcome may be altered accordingly, and moreover to verify if the activities chosen have had positive results (Novello, 2014 [40]).

That means that the verification must be appropriate and structured accurately. Generally, the "classic" evaluation (meaning those used in on-site lectures) method regards the performance, but in online teaching it cannot be the only aspect evaluated, as it is vitiate both by reasonable doubts about its sincere authenticity and by

the impossibility of setting fair conditions for the realization of that performance. As a matter of fact, the teacher assisted during this study chose to avoid the evaluation of the students through written verification due to this issue. That means that the classic method used in on-site lessons is inadequate.

Roehrssen (2020 [47]), tried to propose a reflection on evaluation in distance learning. He said that there should be some steps to follow:

- A first approach may be to free the evaluation of the documents from the assignment of a mere grade;

- The second step may be to evaluate the process, not the performance;

- Finally, the third step concerns the indispensability of self-assessment.

He also adds that with the impossibility of directly evaluating performance, the evaluation dimension can be carried out on three different levels: *relational and interactive*, *cognitive* and *meta-cognitive*:

• on the **relational and interactive level**, it is possible to monitor the way in which each stimulus is linked to the previous ones and generates others in turn. This level also includes messages of simple assent, request for information, simple answers. By itself this level does not construct knowledge, unless the level of interaction does not involve cognitive or metacognitive processes, but it paves the way for the construction of knowledge;

• on the **cognitive level**, the elaboration shows the characteristics of critical reflection, of stimulus that enriches the dialogue and writes to the construction of knowledge in a direct way. The formulation of hypotheses, the answer to questions, the use of personal experiences are indicators of cognitive processes;

- on the **metacognitive level**, the knowledge already acquired is restructured and allows reflection on the path followed, on the objectives and purposes that each one has set for himself. Attitudes that show the planning of one's work, the formulation of a synthesis and an inter-disciplinary or intra-disciplinary comparison, critical evaluation of one's own work or that of others, are indicators of a meta cognitive process.

Indeed, the online process of evaluation generates some issues if the method used is the same as for the on-site lessons. Considering that the first part of our observation was a blended learning, the teacher used the on-site lectures to evaluate the students through a written test, meaning that in the on-site environment she used what was called the "classic" method, but the issue was generated later on when she had to do the correction or give students the feedback on the test during the online lecture: it was not possible to do so, due to the long procedure that was necessary. Indeed, the teacher should have scanned all the tests and then, individually, send them by e-mail to each student with the individual feedback written. The teacher that participated to this study though, decided to do so only with the students that achieved a negative mark in the test, because she did not have enough time to do the same for all students, but retained it necessary for those that had some lacks in the knowledge. Although part of the students received their feedback, the majority of them only acknowledged their final evaluation and could not see their test and thus their errors. This method, if used for too long, induce the students to only matter about the final evaluation and not to improve and understand their errors. Moreover, this procedure gives little attention to more capable students, which are still supposed to be accompanied in their path or else they may obtain a downgrading in their performances.

Once the lectures were totally delivered online, from mid-term until the end of it, the process of evaluation was not written anymore. That means that the only evaluating method was oral. Considering Roehrssen process explained before, on the one hand, the teacher was able to evaluate the process, in addition to the performance, and thus freeing the evaluation from the mere grade obtained in the test, because while deciding the evaluation she considered more than the current performance; on the other hand though, using only oral evaluation may have caused some issues for the students.

The hypothesis that grew from this method, is that oral test may have caused a lot of anxiety as it was explained before in 2.2. The teacher herself admitted to have noticed that some students are very anxious and that this has an impact on the final performance. Observing the classes it was possible to notice that some students increased their grades, probably due to the fact that explaining concepts orally may be easier for them to be understood; other students instead decreased their grades, and this is supposed to be due to the anxiety provoked by this method.

Finally, as Crookes and Schmit (91, [15]) state, **feedback** is primarily informative and has to be efficiently utilized and delivered to the students because their expectation of self and self-evaluation is very important and influential in motivational effects. Engaging low-achievement students in a sort of modification of attitudes is indeed correct because it has to be reminded that the aim is not only to *teach the language* but also to teach *how to learn the language*; nonetheless, not doing so with high-achievement students may be wrong and could lead to an aversive situation. As Balboni [3] explains, both for lack of time and because "excellent" student are seen as privileged, having positive results, these students are often left to tend for them-

selves. This impoverishes the classroom and the society, depriving them of potential high-level skills, but also undermines the motivation of the best students.

To retrieve and include the SEN students situation, in the topic of evaluation Subject B seems to not be influenced. As a matter of fact, he stated that as for the online lessons, during on-site lessons too he was evaluated by being orally tested, therefore there appear not to be any differences in the evaluation for him. It does not change even the written works give as homework to practice the written language, because he explained that due to its disability he always had to do the task by using the computer. On the contrary, this type of task in the online context of learning may be damaging for its classmates and students in general: having to do the activity on the computer may be damaging their learning of the spelling, due to the many auto-corrections that the device is able to do on behalf of the students. This means that also the grammar is probably corrected and students do not have to think about the rules anymore.

Chapter 4

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to investigate whether there was a difference between students' motivation in an online and on-site environment of teaching by studying a small community and observing if the theoretical principles explained in the first two chapters were applicable. From the research conducted through the surveys and questionnaire carried out at an Italian high school, emerged the following main results.

4.1 Results

First of all it was observed and study the **loss of time**, the **teaching method** and the **stimulus**. What has been pointed out is that the online environment suffers a bigger loss of time than the on-site setting and most of it is due to the teacher's issues for a total of 31,5% of the lessons, compared to 11,7% of students', due to connection problems and to device misuse or issues. It also shows an increasing in the deductive method for the grammar-focused scenarios, which are more or less half of the classes;

the other classes instead show no change in the amount of inductive and deductive method used in the settings. Lastly, the stimulus was observed to be increased in half of the classes in order to make the students work more, and slightly decreased in the other half because of the weakening of the teaching method in the environment thus meaning that there happen to be a change in the presence of the stimulus. Concerning its evaluation instead, it was seen that beside the increasing of the Innovation and the decreasing of the Relevance, the other parameters remain the same.

Following it was analysed the features of **atmosphere**, **teacher's behaviour** and **motivational steps**. The outcome shows that in the first two features there is no change at all between the two settings, while from the motivational steps it was seen that there is a slight decrease in the application of all of them even though, beside *setting the general conditions* which is always present, none were particularly applied.

Moving on to the sphere of students, it was seen that both **interest** and **participation** decreased, probably due to the overall just described above. Regarding the results obtained through the questionnaire overall it was seen the following: on-site lessons are preferred due to mostly social and practical reasons, as a matter of fact 45,2% of the students feel the difference between the two environments and 77% of them refer to be more motivated in face-to-face lessons rather than online; in the same way, the attention from the teacher is higher in the on-site lessons with a majority evaluation of four out of five, in respect to three out of five of the online setting. Concerning the amount of issues presented during online lessons, the 48,8% of them are teacher's issues, as also reported in the data before; moreover, all of these problems are considered to be depriving students from their attention, being the issues' influence on it reported to be "enough". All of these factors together,

answer the students, steal time from the lessons and approximately it amounts to 10 to 15 minutes per lesson. On the same point, another influence is the teacher's lack of knowledge for the 80,6% of the students and this data finds a response in the 84,51% of students that believe teachers' should attend refresher courses on the topic.

Lastly, it was asked students to look forward and image the lessons to be always organized in a blended learning. Their preference is for the 59,5% about having blended learning organized mostly with lessons on-site. Nearly at the end of the second term, it was observed that not much changed, but some salient point such as attention and tiredness which seem to have respectively decreased and increased.

Therefore, the outcomes connect in a process composed by a sequence of cause-effect events that give birth to a cycle that can be seen as follows: during online lessons the time available is less than in on-site lessons, this can be due to connection issues or device-related issues such as microphones not working or the fact that students keep their cameras turned off; this then causes the increasing of the deductive method usage that caused skipping some of the phases of the structure of the lesson, such as the generation and maintaining of motivation. Obviously this causes a lack of motivation for the students that are less interested and do not participate (which can also be connected to device issues); their "absence" in the lesson makes the teacher's mood change (annoyed or tired) because of the difficult situation that she/he has to deal with. Even though it was seen that the teacher in this case was able to keep a positive atmosphere and behaviour, it is inevitable that for a certain part of the lesson this causes a loss of time. The latter, is therefore the step that permits the cycle to continue in a loop (Figure 4.1).
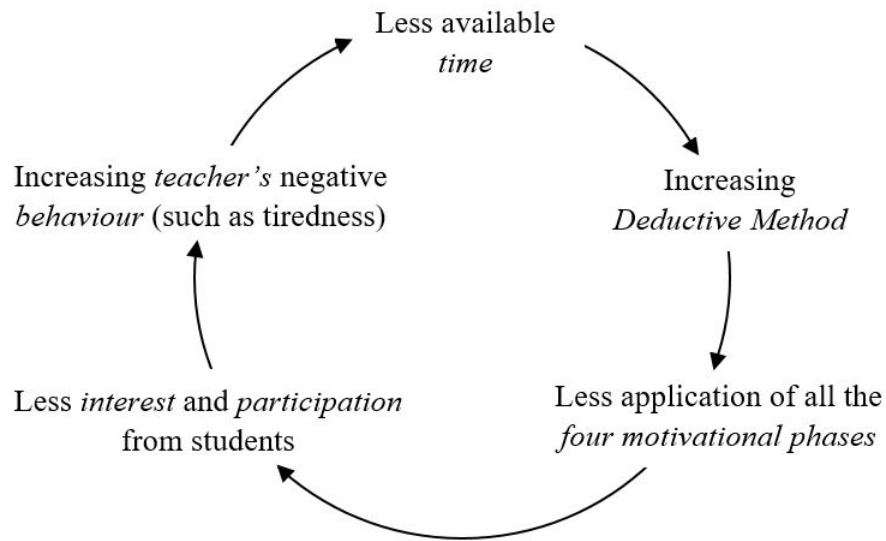
Figure 4.1

The outcome of this study is important to be acknowledged in order to better understand the field discussed and thus the issues related to it. As for the future, the implementation of online education will probably improve and it is very important to be prepared with appropriate teaching methods, in order to understand the needs of the students that learn in this environment.

UNEXPECTED OUTCOME OBSERVED

Something that was not considered at the beginning of the research, but that resulted interesting and influential is the **evaluation** in the online setting. It was seen through the use of a diary and the interview, that students appear to be more anxious due to the oral-only tests. Moreover, being not possible to look directly at the verification done, the **feedback** is not done in the right way, or at least not right for the environment at stake. As a matter of fact, it was seen that the so-called

"excellent students" are left without any feedback apart from their grade and are more supposed to be self-assessed. This could be damaging the future performances of the students, in long terms, because the importance is only given to the grade. Interesting is that the teacher after a few months decided to slightly change her method of evaluation integrating it with other assessment such as also the writing test.

4.2 Research Limitations

SAMPLE LIMITATIONS

The sample used for this study, as explained, was chosen for convenience due to the fact that the high school concerned only permitted to assist on a single teacher. It could have been more exhaustive if the sample regarded the entire school, in order to see if the differences that were observed, changed from one curriculum to another. Another important matter is the lack of students of the first year: due to the teacher in context, the study revolves around the six classes where she was teaching English and among them there was any of it. Moreover, the sample considered was submitted to a questionnaire and thus there may be some doubt in the lack of some answers from the students. This turns out to be a problem not only because of the waste of time and resources that the researcher has to put into the budget, but because the personality traits and motivations that push a person to answer differ from those of those who do not care to fill in the questionnaire. Usually, those who return the completed questionnaire are people who wish to strongly communicate their position, so that the data might mainly present extreme responses. However, it has also to be considered that differently from the usual response (about 25% of the total sample), in this study the amount of people that answered to the questionnaire are about 60%

of the total.

METHOD LIMITATIONS

It has to be further acknowledged that the method chosen for this research, may have influenced part of the outcome obtained. Being the data collected party through the use of a diary, thus they were self-reported data. This means that there is not a way to independently verify the content of the diary itself. The same concept may be applied to the results obtained from the questionnaire: students may or may not have been completely honest answering the questions due to some variables that may have influenced their judgement. For instance, there might have been students that chose to see the whole situation from a negative point of view due to their adverse bond with the teacher or on the contrary, because of their high respect for her. That means that they were not objective because they did not want to harm or praise the teacher. On the other hand, some students may have answered randomly because they did not care about the research at all. Therefore, it must be considered the possible presence of potential sources of bias such as: *selective memory*: to remember or not experiences or events that happened at a certain time in the past; *telescoping*: remembering events that occurred at one time as if they had occurred at another instead; *attribution*: attributes positive events and results to one's purpose, but attribute negative events and results to external forces; and *exaggeration*: represent the outcome as more significant than it actually is.

4.3 Future works

It has to be pointed out that this thesis case study was applied to high school students, and thus the conclusions figured out concerned only this frame of school

years. However, the students belonging does not limit to that academic range: indeed in future work, investigating other ranges of students (e.g. university) might prove important. In addition, as stated in the previous paragraph, further attempts could prove quite beneficial to the literature concerning the issue of online evaluation.

The limits imposed for this study, might have excluded some important features. For example, it could be possible that university students do not present such differences in motivation due to their higher level of autonomy. In addition, it could also be interesting focusing on a case scenario including more than one teacher: the context could be regarding the comparison with other languages or even between teachers that are more capable or prepared about the topic of online teaching, in order to observe and have the control group. Other topics for future works, could comprehend investigating what teachers think about how online teaching will develop. Also applying the theoretical framework described in this thesis, in order to better understand if they are actually useful and have a response in the motivation of the students, causing it to remain the same as in the on-site lessons or even improve, could be of interest. Finally, it could be really interesting to understand and focus the attention on the online learning from a SEN point of view, considering all those categories of students with deficit of attention or other issues, which could be worsened during the setting of distance education. It could also be interesting further investigating the online environment from a SEN point of view. As introduced in this thesis, only superficially, SEN students seem to suffer the most the environment online and require it to be adapted for their use. Especially, it would be interesting to study the impact that this has on SEN students with problems of attention starting from considering that not all the students have their own room to stay during the lessons, and thus they may be attending class from their kitchen. If it is considered

this scenario, the students have to deal with different types of input such as, for example, their mother doing housework or the sibling going around the house, other than the teacher keeping the lesson.

Appendices

CHECKLIST

CLASS: _____   DATE: _____

Teaching environment: □ Front lesson   □ Online lesson

Teaching method: □ Inductive □ Deductive

Motivation phase in the lesson: □ Yes □ No

Input characteristics:
□ Originality
□ Pleasantness
□ Relevance
□ Competence
□ Compatibility

The lectures are developed in a creative way: □ Yes □ No

Materials used by the teacher:
_____

Extra material: □ Yes □ No
Type of extra material, if present:
_____

Class atmosphere:
_____
_____

Motivational step carried out by the teacher:
□ Create basic conditions
□ Generate motivation
□ Maintain motivation
□ Support retrospection

Teacher behaviour with the students:
_____
_____

Student-teacher interaction occurs in an efficient way: □ Yes □ No

The lesson proceeds without wasting time: □ Yes □ No

Students are interested in the content of the lesson: □ Yes □ No

Group activities during the lesson: □ Yes □ No

Students participate in the lesson: □ Yes □ No

FEEDBACK ONLINE LESSONS

Evaluation questionnaire for Online and On-Site Learning in the blended course of ENGLISH a.y. 2020/2021.
The questionnaire is organized in 20 questions and keeps the identity of the sample anonymous.

*Required field.

1. Class
   (Enter your membership class)
     o First year
     o Second year
     o Third year
     o Fourth year
     o Fifth year

2. Do you prefer online or on-site teaching? *
     o Online
     o On-site
     o Blended

3. Motive your answer *
   _____
   _____

4. In a scale from 1 to 5, how much do you feel the difference between Online and On-site lessons? *
   (1= nothing changes; 5=everything changes)

5. How much do you retain the teacher prepared for the Online teaching on a scale from 1 (= not much) to 5 (= A lot)?*

6. If you retain it insufficient, do you think this could influence the time available?
     o Yes
     o No

7. If yes, how much time is lost?
   _____

8. Do you think teachers should attend some updating courses? *
     o Yes
     o No

9. Do you think you are more stimulated online or on-site? *
     o Online
     o On-site
     o Both equally

10. On a scale from 1 to 5, how much do you retain that the school is equipped in order to make the online lessons work? *(1 = not at all; 2 = little; 3 = enough; 4 = more than enough and 5 = a lot)

11. For what concerns language learning, how would you upgrade the online teaching?*

12. From 1 to 5, how much do you feel the teacher gives you attention during an online lesson?*
    (1 = not at all; 2 = little; 3 = enough; 4 = more than enough and 5 = a lot)

13. From 1 to 5, how much do you feel the teacher gives you attention during an on-site lesson?* (1 = not at all; 2 = little; 3 = enough; 4 = more than enough and 5 = a lot)

14. Do you believe there could be better technologies that the school is not using yet? If so, list them. *
_____

15. If the teaching is going to be blended forever, how would you like it to be? *
    o More online lessons
    o More on-site lessons
    o Both at 50%

16. During online lessons, how many times have you lost the connection? *
    o At least once per lesson
    o More than once per lesson
    o Less than once per lesson

17. Technical issue, in a scale from 1 to 5, how much impede you to follow the lesson? * (1 = not at all; 2 = little; 3 = enough; 4 = more than enough and 5 = a lot)

18. Technical issue happen to be mostly of: *
    o The teacher
    o The students
    o Both equally

19. For each element, choose how much it influences the lesson delivery: *

	1	2	3	4	5
Teacher's microphone					
Student's microphone					
Teacher's camera					
Student's camera					
Screen sharing					
Dividing the meeting in more rooms					
Wi-Fi connection					
E-mail communication					

20. Other personal additions:
_____
_____

FEEDBACK DAD

Evaluation questionnaire for Distance Learning of the subject ENGLISH LANGUAGE a.s. 2020/2021 SECOND TERM.

The questionnaire is organized in 10 questions, for an employment of less than 5 minutes.

This questionnaire keeps the identity of the sample anonymous.

Thanks in advance for your cooperation to all participants!

*Required field

_____

1. How has your situation evolved with online education?*

For each column choose ONE option. Define the answer based on how the activity or ability under consideration in the row has changed or not, comparing it with the first quarter.

	MORE	EQUAL	LESS
I understand the lesson			
I am interested in the lesson			
Level of attention			
Level of tiredness			
Interaction and Participation			
Level of Anxiety			
Group projects			
Test difficulties			

2. How satisfied are you overall with the Distance Learning carried out, referring to the whole school year?*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	A lot

3. Which of the following lesson modes were used most?*

You may choose more than one option.

☐ Live lessons online with a platform (e.g. Zoom, Meet or other).

☐ Recorded lessons to watch on YouTube or other online video upload platforms.

☐ Assignments communications via email, chat or electronic register accompanied by written explanations (prepared by the teacher).

☐ Assignments communications via email, chat or electronic register without additional explanations.

☐ None of the above.

4. Did the commitment you have been asked to have in Distance Learning increase or decrease?*

Consider "commitment" as: amount of homework, difficulties during tests / lessons, free time, etc.

○ Increased
○ Decreased
○ Equal

5. Have the hours of self-study increased or decreased?*

○ Increased
○ Decreased
○ Equal

6. Has the subject program remained the same as it was defined at the beginning of the year or has it changed?*

○ Changed, some parts were skipped
○ Changed, some parts have been added (therefore done more)
○ It hasn't changed

7. Did the method of verification in Distance Learning remain exclusively oral?*

○ Oral only
○ Oral and written
○ Oral and other assessments
○ Other

8. Have the teacher's technical and / or connection problems worsened or improved? *

○ Worsened
○ Improved
○ Remained the same

9. Are you tired of online lessons? *

○ It has now become a habit
○ I am more and more tired
○ Their presence or not leaves me indifferent

10. In general, the difficulties presented in the first term now are: *

○ Remained the same
○ Disappeared
○ Increased

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