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A Sudden Pedagogical Shift Amid COVID-19: A Case Study of TEFL Students Experiences

Transitioning to Online Learning

A thesis submitted in

partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By

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## Abstract

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19), a global pandemic, evolved in 2020, transformed humans' lives and educational systems abruptly. The unforeseen outbreak forced educational institutions to shift from the conventional face-to-face setting to an online learning mode as a solution to maintain access to learning. Thus, the current research study attempted to investigate the impact of the imposed transition to online learning on students enrolled in the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) program at a private university in Armenia. The participants of the study were first and second-year Master's degree and Certificate program students. The researcher implemented a case study approach with a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. While the quantitative data was gathered through an online survey administered to TEFL students ( $n=43$ ), the qualitative data was obtained through one-on-one interviews with three TEFL professors and 18 TEFL students. The data were analyzed concurrently, revealing the overall experiences and an in-depth understanding of multiple cases in the TEFL community. The results elucidated a mix of positive and negative attitudes and perceptions towards online learning and fieldwork (practicum and internship). Additionally, the findings demonstrated the challenges learners encountered (accessibility, motivation, participation, responsibility, communication, and mental health) and the coping strategies they employed to overcome the barriers. The results shed light on the practicality of online learning during COVID-19 and the pedagogical choices to consider for future online pedagogy practice.

*Keywords:* E-learning, COVID-19, Emergency remote teaching, Forced transition

## Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

With the cognitive potential that human beings possess, new inventions emerge every day, leading to endless possibilities in the world including the educational sphere. The advent of technology gave rise to an educational delivery mode that goes beyond the traditional, face-to-face practice and surpasses classroom walls. This mode unfolded centuries ago, and is known as Distance education, which Simonson described as: “Institution-based formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors” (Simonson & Schlosser, 2009, p. 1). This pedagogical mode provides access to education for those who would rather learn from afar (Holmberd, 2005, p.1). Thus, it is a setting that does not require learners to constantly attend classes in person (Sadeghi, 2019).

Throughout generations, scholars have been redesigning distance education to stay in harmony with the developing world. Distance education started with print-based independent learning, proceeded with learning through broadcasting, and finally offered the opportunity to learn through the internet (Bates & Bates, 2005, pp. 6-7). In accordance with the advanced technological era, today, distance education is known as online learning: “Online education informally defined as the delivery of education using computers and the internet, is a mode for instructional methodology in distance education” (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005, p. 2). There are different terminologies for online learning, such as e-learning, distance-learning, distributed learning, and computer-mediated learning (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2009).

In 2020, an unexpected turn of events, a universal mortal virus, forcibly transformed the conventional educational setting into digital learning mode. Coronavirus (COVID-19), a newly arrived virus that affects the human race, was detected in China on December 20th, 2019, which

circulated swiftly around the world. COVID-19 attacks individuals in different degrees of severity and grows rapidly among the population, making it “The defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we have faced since World War Two” (“Coronavirus Disease COVID-19 Pandemic,” 2020). Therefore, to minimize the dispersion of the virus and overcome its threatening condition, educational institutions ceased operating; thus, being forced to resort to online learning mode as the sole plan to resume classes. The fear of being contaminated by the virus, sudden lifestyle changes, and unforeseen pedagogical transformation brought about several challenges to educational stakeholders, especially teachers and students (Almazova et al., 2020; Klapproth et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020; and Chirikov et al., 2020).

However, a specific target group in this field has experienced a dual impact of COVID-19. Student-teachers, learners pursuing a teaching degree and practicing their skills in the field at the same time, as any other element of the educational system as well as the society, have been impacted by the pandemic, but it is not clear to what extent and in what direction. Student-teachers are important study targets, because they are both students of the present and teachers of the future. Thus, the experiences they gain and the conditions in which they acquire knowledge in their academic years is crucial for future generations, and they were equally impacted by the consequences of COVID-19 as anyone else.

Research studies have been focusing on students and teachers whereas this link is missing. As it is a recent issue, there is a gap in existing literature regarding this exact topic; therefore, the current study will shed light on understanding the impact of COVID-19 from the perspectives of student-teachers. Like other geographical contexts, education in Armenia has been impacted by COVID-19 and the forced transition. Thus, identifying a need to examine the experiences of student-teachers in the Armenian context.

This thesis aims to study the impact of the forced transition to online learning at a private higher educational institution, the American University of Armenia, located in Yerevan, Armenia. The researcher will carry out a case study in the department of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) to investigate students' academic and affective circumstances during the shift to online classes. The TEFL department offers a two-year Master's degree education and a shorter-term certificate program for potential educators. This department seeks to prepare students to become professional and effective teachers through face-to-face interactive lectures and hands-on experiences in the field.

COVID-19 inspired online learning to become a worldwide adopted pedagogy. Therefore, it is essential to collect evidence-based data to guarantee that students obtain excellent academic and fieldwork expertise. The findings will benefit the institution and faculty members by having quality information about student-teachers' experiences and challenges, which will have potential impact for course design and pedagogical approaches when deciding to offer online learning after COVID-19. Also, relevant and applicable solutions will be recommended. This research study will attempt to answer the following questions:

**RQ1** *What were TEFL students' attitudes and perceptions towards the forced transition initially, and how might it have changed throughout the semesters?*

**RQ2** *What possible challenges TEFL students might have experienced during the forced online learning, and how might they have coped with the situation?*

**RQ3** *What are TEFL students' perceptions regarding online practical learning and future career development?*

## Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

First, this chapter discusses online learning and its basic foundations. It proceeds with an explanation of COVID-19 and its impact on the education system throughout the whole world. Then, it narrows down by providing information about existing studies that discuss the impact of the virus on students and teachers. Finally, it concludes with student-teachers and the importance of collecting data concerning this particular group.

### 2.1 Online Learning

Before exploring the impact of COVID-19 and the act of forcefully transitioning to online learning all over the world, it is essential to be informed about the laying foundation of online learning. In general, online learning represents all kinds of computer-based learning (Carliner, 2004). Students use computer networks by engaging with individuals and available resources on the internet for intentional learning (Means et al., 2014). Online learning occurs in different ways; it could be “synchronous” with simultaneous interaction among participants and “asynchronous” where communication does not occur at the same time (Mick & Middlebrook, 2015). In other words, learners could connect with their instructors and peers instantaneously or at their individual, convenient times. Online synchronous classes have become a preferred choice (Kowk Chi Ng, 2007) because it provides immediate communication opportunities and offers traditional classroom features (Steeple et al., 2002, as cited in Kwok Chi Ng 2007). Real-time communication is not a barrier; The communicative aspect of face-to-face classes is replicated by instant teacher-student and student-student interaction through the web (Sam, 2020).

According to an article posted on Education.com, anyone could participate in virtual learning, especially since many institutions adopted online pedagogy and made their services available worldwide, which provides easier access to satisfactory education and a reason for students to switch to distance education (2020). However, establishing virtual classes is not an

effortless procedure, there is a course of action to be mindful of, for it takes more than digitizing traditional classroom strategies and content. According to many studies, this learning model requires careful planning and design, which is different from what is appropriate for traditional classrooms.

First of all, before administering an internet-based program, it is essential to question the reason for this decision: “A successful real-time, online learning experience begins with a clear and confident answer to the question: why live?” (Finkelstein, 2006, p.5). Unless the online platform results in valuable learning that cannot be attained through a traditional setting, lessons should persist in being offline (Finkelstein, 2006, p.4). That is to say, the possibility of offering e-learning should not be a hurried decision, there should be a worthy rationale behind it. The effectiveness does not rely only on the adopted technology but also on the successful development of the “instructional design” (Horton, p.3, 2011). Thus, great importance is given to the design before implementing the online curriculum. A committed team follows several steps to ensure having the right base and equipment for successful learning, which involves understanding the program’s goals, assessing learners’ needs, developing materials and methods for pedagogical success (Davis et al., 2008).

Just like any other educational setting, online learning follows similar steps in terms of assessment, meeting learners’ needs, and adapting materials while differing in characteristics such as time, location, technology, and multimodal learning factors (Anderson, 2008). Essential team members constitute of instructional designers, subject matter experts, web developers, and technical support specialists (Rome, 2011). Certainly, this would vary according to different necessities, but generally, arranging the program requires collaboration among members of

different expertise in the field. Undoubtedly, the designing process requires a lot of effort and devotion to reach a desirable outcome (“Designing an Online Course”, n.d.).

In addition to demanding distinct conditions, online education places a great emphasis on training instructors to meet the needs of the virtual model. As the authors stated, “The key to well-developed classes is training instructors not only in the use of technology but also in the art of online teaching” (Palloff & Pratt, 2013, Chapter 2). Hence, an online class is not a replication of a conventional classroom; it demands distinct methodologies. Therefore, it requires teacher preparation to practice and build professional expertise ahead of time and be equipped with the necessary skills for this unconventional context (Roddy et al., 2017). For instance, teachers must put a greater effort when building the online community. While creating an atmosphere where participants share a feeling of belonging and respect, instructors should also form educational principles for maximal technology use for inclusive learning opportunities (McDaniels et al., 2016).

According to the North American Council for Online Learning, several institutions provide coaching programs for educators to get acquainted with e-learning. For example, the "Alabama ACCESS Distance Learning" school supports novice teachers through professional guidance for a whole year (Wortmann et al., 2008, p. 6). Similarly, the "Florida Virtual School (FLVS)" demands instructors to go through virtual and traditional training, and gain support from experts as they make their way during their first year (Wortmann et al., 2008, p. 10). However, readiness does not mainly refer to teachers; both instructors and students require preparation for the new environment (Palloff & Pratt, 2013). The online learning mode is a different environment that asks for distinctive strategies and practice. Therefore, to implement online courses effectively, institutions, teachers, and students must be prepared ahead of time.

Furthermore, it is vital to mention that online learning is not imposed on anyone; the choice lies in teachers and students who willingly participate in this context for a variety of reasons. For instance, online classes provide students with a comfortable setting, making it a convenient option for many due to interruptions in their daily lives, such as career responsibilities and community activities (Watts, 2016). This is consistent with the findings of Harris and Martin, who stated that students decide to take distance education because its suitable and adjustable factors make it a great option to receive an education despite time limitations and life obligations (Harris & Martin, 2012; Levitz, 2009). Likewise, teachers can opt for their preferred learning mode. Some of the motives for instructors to choose the online environment are: 1) life circumstances, 2) accommodation, 3) interest, 4) worldwide interaction, 5) motivation, and 6) suitable timing / additional salary (Allen, 2021).

To conclude, in terms of achievement, both offline and online learning could promote successful outcomes (Francescucci, & Rohani, 2019); however, to achieve these results, there are several steps and factors to take into consideration before implementing the online pedagogy.

## **2.2 COVID-19 and the Global Education System**

COVID-19, the new deadly and quickly spread virus, has flu-like symptoms; thus, it has been advised to keep a distance from those showing signs, including other precautions, such as staying sanitized and not transmitting saliva. The older population and those with health issues are at higher risk of dealing with grave conditions caused by the virus (United Nations Armenia, n.d.). It has now reached every continent and affected everyone's life with an upsurge in mortality surpassing one million of the world's population. This virus has been recognized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (2020), which is defined as, "An epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a vast area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people" (Last, 2001, p.131).



Countries worldwide took immediate measures to mitigate the impact of the disease mostly by imposing quarantine, lockdown, and social distancing. According to UNESCO, during this time, online learning has become a solution to keep providing education for students (2020).

As for Armenia, the government accelerated the spring break to prevent the quick spread of the virus. However, with the increase of COVID-19 cases, schools were cancelled and starting March 24, citizens were allowed to leave their homes only when necessary. Later, some educational institutions transitioned to online classes, while others remained at home with no education until further notice. After a while, these protocols became less firm, and classes were permitted to return face-to-face; however, until today, everyone is still required to wear a mask and keep their distance. As for the American University of Armenia (AUA), the president followed the rules set by the government from the very beginning, declaring spring break earlier than expected. Following that, classes were obliged to transition to online learning. At AUA, even when higher institutions had the choice to go back to the traditional mode of learning, courses resumed online.

Furthermore, AUA reached out to students to gather information about their experiences during the transition through an online survey. On April 14, AUA's president informed the staff, faculty, and learners about the results through an email. The president stated that 79% of the answers indicated that the sudden switch was adaptable; however, some participants felt otherwise. In the president's exact words, *"Some of our students struggled with technology or adjusting to this new format of learning, others had real problems with time management, loneliness, and social isolation"*. This statement shows that everyone has unique

challenges to tackle; some can handle the obstacles successfully while others struggle to find the light during these times.

Unfortunately, we do not know how long this situation will go on and how to best deal with it. In the meantime, as this is not only global health but also a humanitarian crisis, it entered every home and affected every individual one way or another, especially students and teachers. Therefore, it is essential to look more into the situation, understand the transition from learners' perspectives and explore the various factors contributing to different experiences.

### **2.3 COVID-19 and Emergency Remote Teaching**

As mentioned in the previous section, educational institutions stopped operating due to Covid-19. Thus, this caused a forced transition to online learning instantaneously without any warning and preparation. It is crucial to emphasize that this is distinct from the typical online learning mode; this new pedagogy is referred to as Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). The following is a description of ERT:

In contrast to experiences that are planned from the beginning and designed to be online, emergency remote teaching (ERT) is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. It involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face or as blended or hybrid courses and that will return to that format once the crisis or emergency has abated (Hodges et al., 2020, para. 13).

Surprisingly, Implementing ERT is not the first time in the history of education. In the 1900's, an infectious and serious illness, Polio, spread among the population in different parts of the world and affected especially children. Thus, in 1937, many schools closed and faculty

provided education through radio, newspapers, and telephones (Loyola Academy, n.d.; Raman, 2020; and Abraham, 2020). Today, in the 21st century, global education has taken similar precaution by offering education through current technology.

Additionally, it should be noted that ERT is not a choice. According to Bozkurt and Sharma, “While distance education has always been an alternative and flexible option for learners, emergency remote teaching is an obligation” (2020, p.ii). A similar explanation of the difference between e-learning and ERT is given by Lewison (2020); Unlike e-learning, emergency remote teaching is a reaction to a catastrophic event; thus, it is not supposed to be a long-term plan. Thus, it is not supported by all participants, students do not have an option, and the required sources to implement ERT might not be available (“Emergency Remote Teaching Vs. Online Learning: A Comparison,” 2020). Therefore, all of these factors, including the lack of choice and readiness may exhibit challenges and different responses among students and teachers that could maintain, enhance, or reduce the quality and effectiveness of their education.

#### **2.4 COVID-19 and its Impact on Students**

The pandemic disturbed students’ lives in every aspect by interrupting life routines, activities, and education. Life took a new turn, and willing or not, students had to conform to the rules and new ways of living. Since this event has never occurred before, it demands an investigation of its effect on students from various aspects.

First of all, COVID-19 concerns and constraints lead to mental health issues (“Mental Health and COVID-19,” 2020). According to Kitrow, “Psychological distress can have a powerful impact on every aspect of students’ physical, cognitive, emotional and interpersonal functioning (2003),” (as cited in Baik et al., 2019, p.675). Therefore, of priority, is exploring the affective factors that influence students' welfare during these challenging events (Caribbean, 2020).

Some research studies have focused on students' psychological well-being during this unforeseen crisis and overnight shift of educational plans. According to Anderson, higher education students argued that the forced transition was not their academic aim. The institution, which they applied to, no longer met their original expectations; thus, they suspended their education and demanded part of their money as they did not choose to study online (Anderson, 2020). One can say that these reactions uncover emotional struggles, which institutions should take into consideration.

Since this pandemic impacted everyone, including education, and brought many disturbances, providing mental health services and guidance to manage emotions and deal with the situation should be prioritized by institutions (Sahu, 2020). For example, due to the extreme and sudden turn of events, a master's degree program professor considered students' psychological welfare, particularly their anxiousness, by facilitating and modifying student requirements for a smoother transition and lesser tension (Quintana & Quintana, 2020).

A closer look at studies shows further evidence for the need to look into students' mental health during this time. A large-scale research consisting of students' responses from 62 different places around the world revealed that learners faced intense mental health issues, specifically anxiety, because of finances, lifestyles, the transformation of educational activities as well as the sense of lack of competence for their future careers (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Additionally, some scholars interested in finding out the effects of the coronavirus on United States college students' mental health proposed a survey and interview to 195 students. The study revealed that the majority of the participants' mental health had declined. More than half of them experienced stressful and apprehensive emotions. Also, they had great concern for different reasons, including their well-being, reduced concentration, change in sleep schedule, academic tension

and achievements, nutrition habits, modified atmosphere, and economic pressure. It is vital to mention that some students have been experiencing depression and suicidal thoughts, with the formal receiving a total of 44% of response and the latter 8% (Son et al., 2020).

Finally, another survey concerning university students in India reported that under the section "problems related to study during the lockdown," students chose "feeling of stress, depression, and anxieties" rather than internet, environment, and instructor (Kapasias et al., 2020, p.4). According to Bozkurt and Sharma, it is vital to pay attention to students' emotional well-being rather than intensely focusing on how they are learning; students have been facing a lot, especially listening to excessive hours of presentations. Our focus should not merely be on teaching students but on understanding and empathizing while educating them (2020, p. iii).

Furthermore, due to the unexpected circumstances, many learners have been facing different challenges that limit their opportunities to receive a promising education. A survey uncovered that many students felt online learning to be less motivating than the traditional context and that achieving the original educational plan would not be feasible (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Brennen explains motivation as the amount of commitment someone undertakes to pursue a target (n.d.). It keeps people fixated on achieving their goals (Cherry, 2010). Thus, Williams-Pierce stated that "Student motivation is an essential element that is necessary for quality education," (2011, p.2) and portrays their devotion in the academic setting (Gopalan et al., 2017). Students who might have been eager to learn could be showing less interest due to the forced transition to remote learning, which could have a negative impact on their education. Additionally, learners experienced frustration due to technological challenges and lack of good internet, which impacted the quality of their learning and productivity (Mpungose, 2020) as well

as their motivation (Krishnapatria, 2020), because they were unable to submit their requirements on time.

Another research done in Ghana showed that students also experienced a lack of motivation and would rather wait for classes to become in-person (Aboagye et al., 2020). Also, according to the results, among factors that could negatively influence online learning experience and availability (internet and devices) ranked the highest, followed by problems concerning the classroom dynamic and the teacher (Aboagye et al., 2020). This indicates that distance education could also impact the classroom atmosphere.

Contrary to these instances, in the following qualitative study, the researcher discovered that despite the challenges that Indonesian university students faced, they remained encouraged and willing to follow their classes online. They had several factors that helped them to keep moving forward with the academic plan: 1) personal, 2) social, and 3) environmental. 1) Regarding personal, students genuinely wanted to do their best to accomplish their educational and professional goals for the future. They viewed this new instructional mode as a way of attaining new skills and challenging their abilities. Also, cultivating joy in their families and adhering to the importance of learning in their religion kept them concentrated on fulfilling their requirements. Additionally, they rewarded themselves with every accomplishment, which encouraged them to keep going. 2) Regarding social, learners were encouraged to stay home to remain healthy and looked up to others who were dealing with the same circumstances. For instance, having a great tie with family members and friends and seeing closed ones studying at home encouraged them to do their university work. 3) As for the environment, students created their own learning atmosphere or area based on their preferences: crowded or calm places.

Interestingly, students were aware of distractions and worked on eliminating them, for instance, by turning off their cell phones (Rahiem, 2021).

The study mentioned above collected a rich data through journals, essays, and interviews from a considerable number of public institution students. Analyzing the results, one can conclude that despite living in a less developed country, if students have resilience and self-regulation skills during ERT, the transition will not bring an undesirable effect. An article on ReachOut Schools states that resilience assists learners, “To approach new situations, people or experiences with confidence and a positive mindset, which will make them more likely to succeed” (n.d., para. 2). Additionally, through self-regulation, learners, “Monitor and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour in order to achieve certain goals” (“The importance of self-regulation for learning”, n.d., para. 1).

Likewise, Radha et al. examined 175 students' points of view through an online study, gathering responses from various institutions across many countries. The data revealed that many students held an optimistic attitude; although some did not advocate the new mode, many of the respondents exhibited a high interest in virtual learning as it was successful and gave rise to new knowledge and learning strategies. Their response could also be due to the lack of technical challenges, since half of them did not face any, contributing to a smooth and satisfactory transformation (2020). Finally, in a survey addressing university students in Bulgaria, there was an agreement among most learners that online learning quality was not inferior to the conventional learning setting; They were satisfied with following their education in a comfortable and less stressful environment (Angelova, 2020).

Research studies were reported by several investigators illustrating the successful adjustment of institutions as a result of gearing up for the disastrous event. A case study

assessing the response of a university program in the United States presented that the faculty provided a more relaxing transition to learners by catering flexible communicative opportunities, extensions of deadlines, office hour meetings, and being mindful of their judgements after each class (Quezada et al., 2020). This data was not collected through students' standpoint and it only included one teacher participant, but it could be considered as a sign that faculty plays an essential part in making the transition more serene.

Similarly, in Pakistan, although students lacked the necessary technical skills and faced different challenges, the ease of communication and immediate response of teachers contributed to positive attitudes, in addition to the absence of commuting and time convenience (Shahzad et al., 2020). In his research, Baber collected South Korean and Indian university learners' thoughts about the circumstances that led to positive online learning outcomes, which involved both the instructors' and learners' contribution. The instructors' awareness and ability to create a communicative and intellectual atmosphere and learners' motivation and approval of the conditions affected the results (2020). Through these different studies, it is apparent that despite facing a pandemic and an unforeseen transformation in global education, some conditions could turn this turbulence into a more peaceful event anywhere in the world.

In other studies, students shared both favorable and unfavorable opinions of ERT. For instance, college students who favored the traditional setting noticed that their motivation, engagement, effort, and focus decreased, which adversely affected their self-efficacy, contrary to the more pleased participants. They had to deal with mental issues, increased assignments, and home distractions. On the bright side, they had more time to be with family and perform other tasks, such as new hobbies, that they would not otherwise (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). This is in accordance with Rahiem's findings in which students stated to have more family and leisure



time. Additionally, while some took delight in virtual education and the comfortableness of studying at home, others found it to be exhausting and distracting. Also, they mentioned the increase in academic demands was rough for many, meanwhile others could manage the load more effectively with additional spare time (Rahiem, 2020).

Lastly, a qualitative study, intended for university students in the United Arab Emirates, which included a survey and essays to analyze Students' reaction, pointed out that online learning was more affordable; Students no longer needed to pay for transportation and worry about being on time at the institution. This new model made it convenient especially for parents with children at home. Also, learners were content about being distant and not risking their state of health. On the other hand, they were displeased with the workload, their inability to concentrate, the ineffective technology, and the poor cooperation among teachers and classmates (Husseina et al., 2020).

These studies confirm that there is diversity among students; while some might be experiencing a detrimental effect due to Covid-19 and the forced transition to online learning, others might be thriving and enjoying the process. Students' satisfaction and acceptance of the situation are critical to their mental well-being and academic experience. Thus, this section could imply that it is crucial to investigate and understand the different effects that COVID-19 and the forced transition to online learning have brought on students.

## **2.5 COVID-19 and its Impact on Teachers**

As mentioned throughout this chapter, teachers belong in the group of educational stakeholders to whom the unexpected global crisis exerted influence on. COVID-19 enforced instructors to shift to online teaching mode, for it was the only solution to continue providing students' access to education (Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020). According to different studies, some teachers found the transformation satisfying and handled it successfully while others were

negatively affected. The difference lies in external (level of support, training, skills, and experience) and internal factors (attitude and coping skills).

To start with, a qualitative study involving twenty-four instructors discovered that teachers in England were frustrated and worried about the situation COVID-19 imposed, especially because they were secluded from their students. To cope with these distressing emotions, they have developed meaningful and deeper connections with their colleagues to vent and release tension (Kim & Asbury, 2020). However, this conclusion is limited to the beginning stages of the transition; thus, it is not known if the situation remained the same.

The following online survey examined the effectiveness and relation of coping mechanisms with teachers' experiences. The results were gathered from 634 respondents from different continents revealing that tackling intensive work, worrying about health, time struggle, distance teaching and separating their career from their personal lives, because their home became their workplace, the situation burdened teachers with intense stress. However, they dealt with the circumstances by accepting the situation, being prepared, and diverting their attention to different tasks contrary to those who have refrained from adopting strategies to get the better of this complex case. While negative emotions and elevated stress were in harmony with escape mechanisms, the use of coping mechanisms showed a correspondence with less stress and more uplifting results (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Despite all the pressure, some of these instructors found ways to endure the reality.

A case study explored the experience of an instructor, who had previous online learning and teaching background, working in a rustic area in Alaska. The teacher stated that he and other colleagues received tremendous support from the educational leaders, who provided internet and technological assistance and access. Most importantly, instructors had already gone through

pedagogical technology practice, which facilitated the transition. It is worth mentioning that every week, the faculty gathered on the online platform and assisted each other by discussing and sharing resources. This particular instructor's key to having a successful class was interacting with learners, showing empathy, and checking on them during this time (Kaden, 2020). One could imply that faculty support makes online learning less problematic for both teachers and students (as mentioned under the previous heading of this chapter).

Another research conducted in Germany showed that collaboration and a good atmosphere results in a successful outcome. Teachers were very supportive of each other during this period. Some observed their colleagues, and others provided training and assistance, as some were more prepared for the transition. Teachers were concerned about the classroom dynamic because not all learners participated. Thus, it was tough to determine their understanding and presence due to a lack of verbal and non-verbal interaction (otherwise apparent in a traditional classroom). Despite the challenges, teachers did not have a terrible experience. For instance, they tried different approaches and kept the one's students approved of. Interestingly, some teachers are ready to keep using some of the resources they found to be useful for online classes (Delcker & Ifenthaler, 2020).

Similarly, another study investigated factors in-and-out of school context that affected online teaching. Like many other teachers, most did not previously prepare for this mode; thus, they learned from one another or were self-taught through available resources. Some teachers' personal lives provoked complications as well. For instance, some had children to take care of at home, whereas others did not have good internet access (Marshall et al., 2020).

The following research investigated three university instructors' experiences who shared different attitudes. One of the participants was more overwhelmed, stating that adopting this new

model generated anxiousness, interaction with learners was more passive, and providing on-the-spot feedback and evaluating learning were impracticable. On the other hand, the others expressed a brighter energy and acknowledged the conversion as a learning opportunity. They were optimistic about the communicative aspect; students seemed to be more involved and confident in participating because they were behind their screens. However, they mentioned that in traditional classes, there is more time to cooperate and accomplish tasks; thus, now, students have more responsibilities to complete at home (Gao & Zhang, 2020).

In a case study conducted in Finland, many teachers had intense preparation and tasks to accomplish. While they did not have technical issues, online communication hindered real-time interaction. They forced students to answer; however, some remained passive, making teachers worried about their success. This would not happen in a typical classroom because students would be physically present. Although educators noticed learners' dedication, they remained unsure about their academic growth. Therefore, another great challenge was assessing learning development (Niemi & Kousa, 2020).

A research that gathered results from teachers from different institutions in the Philippines did not share similar views. The outcome suggested obstacles in several areas:

- communicating effectively with learners,
- having the required skills for the online mode,
- lack of access,
- time and learning management, and
- stress.

However, those who taught in more developed places, had more teaching expertise, and attended workshops had a better experience. According to the researchers, if the instructors receive guidance from schools, they would overcome many issues (Alea et al., 2020).

Likewise, a case study was conducted among 22 instructors from three different countries of similar backgrounds: Libya, Palestine, and Afghanistan. Many teachers had more planning to do and experienced uncertainties in dealing with the circumstances, adapting their material and teaching methods, and assessing learning. They were unprepared to transmit knowledge through a new model, which also created differences in instruction quality among different teachers. On the other hand, some instructors had already experienced e-learning by giving their students additional learning opportunities. Also, teachers worked on their professional development through available resources, courses, and communication with coworkers. Teachers emphasized teacher-student relationships and support during this time. Finally, not having technical aid and a suitable environment for e-learning were significant challenges to tackle. Despite being capable, they believed that intensive and long-term practice was necessary (Khlaif et al., 2020). The results could mean that despite being highly self-efficacious and skillful instructors, teaching on the web is not similar to face-to-face mode, and there is the need to provide online teaching training. For instance, educators are required to modify their methods and adapt materials to make classes more enthusiastic and lively (Tandon, 2020), appropriate for the specific online context.

Additionally, a study conducted in Indonesia showed that teachers with no previous online teaching experience and lack of technological awareness had a detrimental journey. While some instructors worked on self-improvement, if given a chance, the instructors would incline to teaching in-person (Lie et al., 2020). The following study surveyed 43 university instructors of

different levels of expertise in South Korea. Teachers with brighter spirits and had more expertise in the virtual pedagogy had rewarding classes. Undoubtedly, those with experience were aware of tools and methods that online schooling demands; thus, they successfully implemented interactive tasks. In contrast, teachers who had to go through this sudden change had a hard time thriving. Positivity played a significant role as it allowed teachers to anticipate satisfactory learner response; whereas, those predicting complications were skeptical about students' success and the effectiveness of the transition (Bailey & Lee, 2020). When teachers are hopeless, this energy is transmitted to their students, whereas when they are hopeful and unconcerned, students' learning quality and experience is of higher quality.

A few researchers carried the following mix-method study to explore Canadian teachers' attitudes during ERT throughout different months, from April to June; They looked into four factors: "Teacher resilience and burnout, self-efficacy, attitudes toward technology and change, and job demands and resources" (Sokal et al., 2020, pp. 3-4). One thousand six hundred twenty-six teachers completed the survey; the results showed that those who were more receptive and optimistic about the novel education system and had self-confidence hold "teacher resilience" and could get by with the alternative setting (Sokal et al., 2020, pp. 5-6). Those who felt otherwise, for instance, having negative thinking, would undergo teacher burnout. Throughout the three months, the results showed that stress and fatigue increased, getting closer to instructor burnout; however, improvement and a positive attitude were observed regarding online classroom management as well as self-efficacy (Sokal et al., 2020).

These studies show that educators share various experiences and viewpoints. Some are resilient, confident, and experienced, while others are more overwhelmed, uncertain, and

inexperienced. Pedagogical challenges and emotional well-being could have an influence on teaching practice.

## **2.6 What does this Mean to Pre-service / Student-Teachers?**

According to Video Considerations for the World Language edTPA, as cited in IGI global publisher of timely knowledge, pre-service teachers are:

Also known as teacher candidates, this term is used to describe student teachers who are enrolled in a teacher preparation program and working toward teacher certification. They complete supervised field-based teaching experiences with the support and mentorship of university faculty and K-12 cooperating teachers (n.d.).

A teacher education program could also be composed of in-service teachers who are already certified but seeking for further professional development. The following is a comparison of the two terms explained by Koellner and Grenblatt: “The term *inservice teacher* designates a teacher that has certification or is already teaching in a classroom, in contrast to a *preservice teacher*, who is in the process of preparing to become a teacher” (2018, para. 1).

Student-teachers or pre-service teachers have been impacted by the pandemic twice as much as they are both students and teachers. Although there are not many studies that particularly reflect on their experiences during the forced transition, the education system has been through an abrupt change, and as presented in the previous sections, both teachers and students have been affected.

A few studies reflected on the overall experiences of student-teachers. Like some instructors, one of the challenges that student-teachers have been facing is adapting to the new learning mode that requires more than simply presenting the available resources to students through the screen (Kim, 2020). They should be prepared to go beyond the primary use of technology (Kalogiannakis 2010 as cited in Kim, 2020). However, no one could predict that the

education system would forcefully be remodeled and online learning would emerge as a universally mainstream learning setting. Nevertheless, preservice teachers are forced to learn and teach in pedagogical methods that go beyond what face-to-face education programs prepare them for. Thus, this could generate various responses.

A study conducted at the most predominant pedagogical college in Israel presented that student-teachers' health was affected by extensively engaging in screen time that was beyond endurance and being required to accomplish many collegiate responsibilities, causing them to collapse and remain passive not only behind their turned-off cameras, but also when the cameras were on during the online lessons (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020). Although this study demonstrates results regarding student-teachers' response, challenges, and emotional outbreak, it does not mention the data collection methodology; thus, making one wonder about its validity and reliability. Although, it was stated that in a survey quite a big number of learners provided the reasons for not turning on their cameras, it is still not enough evidence. However, it could indicate an intense pressure that many student-teachers could be facing because they are expected to fulfill their academic tasks and follow through their professional development as in-training teachers.

Finally, the following qualitative study investigated students' social-emotional intelligence in the education field and their ability to cope with the changed direction caused by the Covid-19 outbreak as future leaders. The researchers explored four categories recognized as VUCA: 1) volatility (unstable situation), 2) uncertainty (unclear plans), 3) complexity (impact on different factors), and 4) ambiguity (indefinable situation). The state of volatility instigated worry, anxiety, and tension given that the prearranged program was modified in an instant, which overwhelmed students. Their uncertainty triggered off further emotional disturbance, considering



that the comfort of knowing the original arrangement of plans and what is expected was absent. Lastly, regarding complexity, students had to tackle academic and personal life challenges, such as attending to their family and career needs, which was burdensome. Finally, the ambiguity concerning the unpredicted pandemic caused confusion and additional stress. There is an overlap among the four categories. As highlighted in the study, these students did not have social-emotional competency, which provoked tension and apprehensiveness and an adverse result on their learning (Hadar et al., 2020).

Even though e-learning has been gradually introduced throughout history and been adopted by institutions, emergent remote learning is a disparate form of virtual pedagogy. ERT was not anticipated to turn into the primary learning environment for such a long period of time; nothing really prepared anyone for such an unprecedented scale of a global health crisis. Thus, the educational system was not ready.

As highlighted in the literature, both students and teachers differed in their responses, attitudes, and battles. Some experienced external barriers, such as lack of access to proper internet and devices and a suitable environment; others went through internal complications, such as stress, anxiety, and lack of motivation. On the other hand, others did not struggle as much and could cope with the situation more successfully. Thus, there are positive outcomes that encouraged teaching and learning through a new model, finding new ways to communicate and build closer relationships among stakeholders, and obtaining comfort by fulfilling education and career demands from home.

These studies could indicate that there is a double impact on pre-service or student-teachers, which could be valuable for some and damaging for others. Although there are a few studies in this field regarding the strategies that were taken to transform the practical

teacher training course online (Moorhouse, 2020; Kidd & Murray, 2020), there is still a gap in the literature in demonstrating how student-teachers have responded to the forced transition overall including affective factors and different challenges, especially in the Armenian context and specifically at AUA. Therefore, it is critical to examine carefully and uncover the potential impact of the imposed transition from traditional learning setting to online.

### **Chapter 3 METHODOLOGY**

This study intends to explore the experiences and perspectives of AUA TEFL students during the forced transition to online learning due to the global pandemic COVID-19. The research methodology aims to gather in-depth, evidence-based information, which will have a potential impact on course design when deciding to offer online learning after COVID-19. The subsequent paragraphs illustrate the research design, context and participants, instruments, data collection and analysis process, limitations, and ethical considerations arranged for the study.

#### **3.1. Restatement of the Research Questions**

The following research questions originated from the purpose of the study and the compilation of the literature review:

***RQ1** What were TEFL students' attitudes towards the forced transition initially, and how might it have changed throughout the semesters?*

***RQ2** What possible challenges TEFL students might have experienced during the forced online learning, and how might they have coped with the situation?*

***RQ3** What are TEFL students' perceptions regarding online practical learning and future career development?*

### **3.2. Research Design**

The researcher employed an instrumental case study research approach within a specific educational department, incorporating qualitative and quantitative instruments for rich data collection and analysis. A non-probability purposive and snowball sampling were adopted to recruit participants for one-on-one interviews and an online survey. Data triangulation, a strategy to accumulate data from multiple perspectives, was used to increase the results' validity and strength. Thus, the researcher collected data from TEFL teachers and students. The faculty members participated in one-on-one interviews, whereas the students completed an online survey and engaged in one-on-one interviews.

### **3.3. Context and Participants**

The researcher conducted the study at the American University of Armenia within the department of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Yerevan, Armenia. The participants were faculty professors and TEFL students from different cohorts (Master's and certificate programs). Three teachers contributed to one-on-one interviews, and while 43 TEFL students completed the survey, 18 participated in one-on-one interviews. It is worth noting that first-year TEFL graduates had not begun their academic journey when the context forcibly shifted online in the Spring semester, beginning of March 2020. They attended their classes the following Fall semester, contrary to the second-year students who experienced the switch from the start of the outbreak. Finally, participants were informed that the research was implemented purely for educational purposes.

### **3.4. Ethical Considerations**

The case study was carried out in conformity with ethical regulations towards human beings:

1. The researcher received consent from the dean of the program and all the participants.
2. Everyone's involvement was voluntary, and their contribution was not imposed.
3. The survey was anonymous, and the interviews were confidential to protect the identity of the participants.

Additionally, in the course of data collection, participants were informed about the procedure and were allowed to withdraw from the process. Respondents agreed for the conferences to be recorded with the sole purpose of data authenticity and accurate transcription, which only the researcher would access. Finally, the three professors and 17 students agreed on an oral interview, whereas one learner felt more content responding in a written form.

### **3.5. Instruments**

To collect evidence, the researcher planned both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews) instruments.

#### **3.5.1. Interviews**

The researcher applied a one-on-one, semi-structured interview approach with TEFL professors and learners to assemble comprehensive data from multiple perspectives. The initial one-on-one interviews were intended to inquire about professors' assumptions regarding learners' attitudes, challenges, and other phenomena faced during the online transition based on their observations and interactions with learners (See Appendix A). The successive student one-on-one interviews aimed to provide insight into the survey outcomes and gain a clearer perception through individual cases (See Appendix B). Before conducting the interviews, the thesis adviser revised the questions to ensure that the researcher prepared unbiased, non-leading, and ethical questions.

### **3.5.2. Survey**

An online survey was designed for TEFL learners. The purpose was to attain an overall view of their experiences and perspectives regarding the imposed transition to online learning. The thesis adviser examined the nature of the questions, and upon approval, the survey was administered (See Appendix C).

### **3.6. Procedure**

The data compilation began with the professors' one-on-one interviews. The research reached three TEFL faculty members via electronic mail (Email) and sought for their willingness to participate in the study. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to an hour based on each interviewee's length of answers. A fixed semi-structured interview guide was used with all the teachers, which allowed the emergence of distinct follow-up questions for elaboration. The meetings were recorded on Zoom with the participants' consent.

The researcher developed the initial survey questions through the understandings acquired from the literature review, which were later revised according to the information gathered from the professors' interviews. The researcher contacted students through email to request their voluntary participation in the anonymous survey. The survey included Likert-scale questions with a close-ended and open-ended format accessible throughout the entire data collection operation.

Regarding the one-on-one interviews, learners were reached out through personal messages and online communication platforms. On rare occasions, learners were selected through snowball sampling. While the researcher conducted 14 interviews on Zoom and two through Viber, one was reported in a written form through email. The meetings lasted from 30

minutes to one and a half hours. Similar to the faculty interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was planned. Individual follow-up questions evolved instantaneously for elaboration.

### **3.7. Data Analysis**

As the research design suggests, the data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative survey was analyzed using the Microsoft Excel program and SPSS software (version 20). As for the qualitative data, the researcher implemented an inductive approach. All the interviews were transcribed and coded, allowing categorization during the analysis.

To ensure reliability, the same researcher interviewed all students and teachers; therefore, inter-rater variances were eliminated. Additionally, expert opinion was taken in all phases of the study (thesis adviser). Finally, an external researcher reviewed the results section.

### **3.8. Limitations and Delimitations**

The researcher encountered several limitations during the study. First, 64% ( $n=43$ ) of the students completed the survey, of which only 4.6% ( $n=2$ ) were enrolled in the C-TEFL program. Therefore, an in-depth statistical analysis across the three cohorts was not viable. Second, C-TEFL learners did not participate in the one-on-one interviews; thus, insights from this particular group could not be gained. Additionally, during the study, 1st-year MATEFL students had only completed their practicum fieldwork, not internships. Finally, since this is a case study of the TEFL department as part of the AUA College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS), which has a unique teacher development curriculum including practical education, the findings cannot be applied to all faculties.

As for the delimitations, the researcher decided to focus on the TEFL Master's and Certificate programs and confined the educational setting to the private American University of Armenia.

## Chapter 4 RESULTS

In this chapter, the results obtained from the various data collection methods are analyzed and presented. Each sub-section will answer one or more related research question(s). For the qualitative aspect, three faculty instructors and 18 students participated in one-to-one semi-structured interviews with the researcher. Seven of the students were 2nd-year graduates completing their last semester, and eleven of them were first-year graduates, of which some had attended offline classes at AUA during their bachelor's degree (details in table below).

Table 4.1 *First Year Participants' Background*

1st-Year Participants	Residence	Background	Attended Offline at AUA	Taught Online Before COVID-19
<i>Interviewee 7</i>	Yerevan	Parent Employed	✗	✓
<i>Interviewee 8</i>	Yerevan	Single Employed	✓	✗
<i>Interviewee 9</i>	Yerevan	Single Employed	✓	Language school transitioned online
<i>Interviewee 10</i>	Yerevan	Parent	✗	✓
<i>Interviewee 11</i>	Yerevan	Single Unemployed	✗	✗
<i>Interviewee 12</i>	Yerevan	Single Employed	✗	✗
<i>Interviewee 13</i>	Yerevan	Single Employed	✓	✗
<i>Interviewee 14</i>	Region	Single Employed	✗	Language school transitioned online
<i>Interviewee 15</i>	Region	Parent Employed	✓	Language school transitioned online
<i>Interviewee 16</i>	Confidential	Unemployed	✗	✗
<i>Interviewee 17</i>	Yerevan	Parent	✓	✓

Table 4.2 *Second Year Participants' Background*

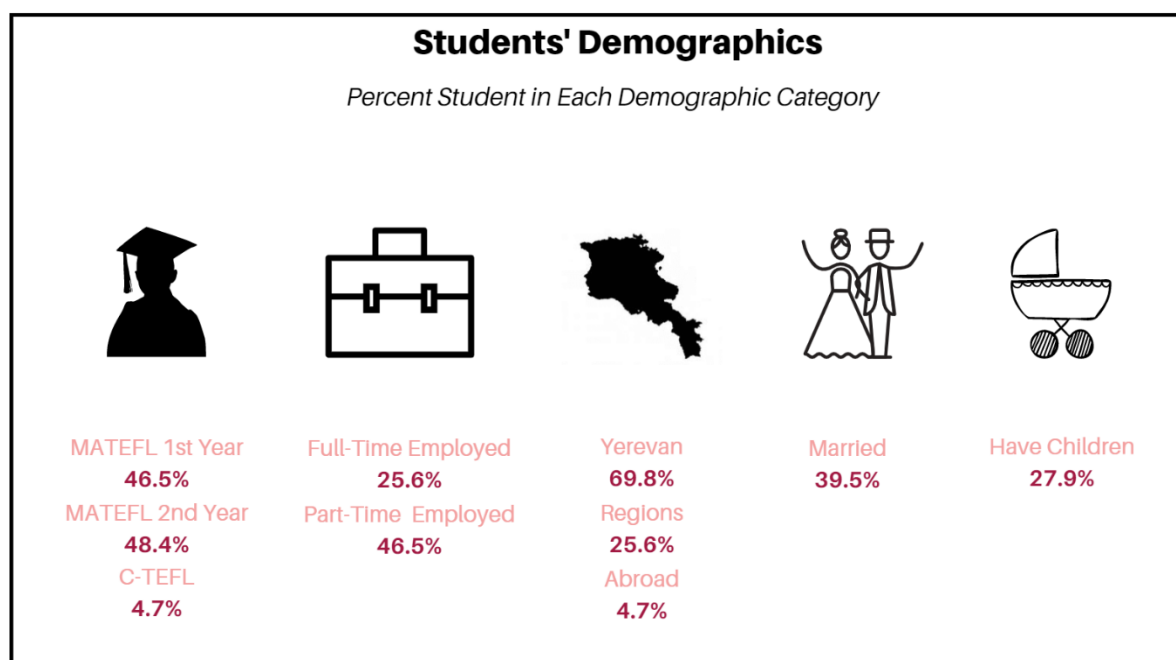
2 <sup>nd</sup> Year Participants	Residence	Background	Taught Online Before COVID-19
<i>Interviewee 1</i>	Yerevan	Parent Employed	✓



Interviewee 2	Region	Single Employed	✗
Interviewee 3	Yerevan	Single Employed	✓
Interviewee 4	Region	Single Employed	✓
Interviewee 5	Yerevan	Single Employed	Language center transitioned online
Interviewee 6	Yerevan	Single Employed	✗
Interviewee 18	Region	Single Unemployed	✗

It is noteworthy that the faculty's responses were based on assumptions and observations rather than being evidence-based. Furthermore, names and some personal information were excluded or adjusted in all transcripts to maintain the confidentiality of participants' identities.

Whereas 43 out of the total 67 TEFL students took part in the quantitative structured interviews. The demographic information of survey respondents can be summarized in the following chart.



### Figure 4.1 Students' Demographics

The majority (95.3%) of students who participated in the quantitative data collection were first- and second-year MA students (46.5%, ( $n=20$ ); and 48.4%, ( $n=21$ ) respectively), only 4.7% ( $n=2$ ) were in the C-TEFL program.

More than two thirds (72.1%) of students were engaged in either full-time (25.6%;  $n=11$ ) or part-time (46.5%;  $n=20$ ) employment. The remaining 27.9% ( $n=12$ ) did not work.

A comparable percentage of 69.8% ( $n=30$ ) reported to have been residing in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia and the city in which the AUA is located, at the time of the study. In the meantime, 25.6% ( $n=11$ ) were living in other governorates across the country, and only 4.7% ( $n=2$ ) were living outside of Armenia.

As for the marital status of surveyed students, a considerable 39.5% ( $n=17$ ) reported to have been married; of which 70.6% ( $n=12$ ) reported to have had children. A total of 60.5% ( $n=26$ ) were single and 72.1% (31) had no children.

This demographic breakdown of research participants will aid the researcher in analyzing the data regarding certain aspects and will provide an overall conceptualization of the TEFL students' backgrounds.

## 4.1 Students' Attitudes towards Online Education

The first research question is: *What were TEFL students' attitudes towards the forced transition initially, and how might it have changed throughout the semesters?* To provide a comprehensive answer to the question, six aspects were examined.

### 4.1.1 Professors' Initiatives and Students' Responses

According to the one-on-one interviews, professors reported that the beginning of the transition was harsh for a significant number of students; however, eventually, their responses took a turn for the better.

First, *Professor 1* claimed that the students' response for the imposed and involuntary change in education dissemination during the pandemic was unfavorable. In his/her opinion, the students were mentally unprepared; it was "*psychologically not easy*;" thus, many disliked the decision, "*There were students that voiced their resentment and disagreement to these conditions*". Eventually, according to the professor's perception, when learners recognized that education received online would not be of inferior quality, their attitude shifted rapidly. TEFL students, however, were mature, interested, and responsible. Furthermore, he/she stated that the faculty was very considerate, and that the students acknowledged and appreciated their efforts: "*Students tried not to fail their teachers in the first place. I think that some kind of a mutual understanding helped both to survive*".

According to *Professor 2*, initially, some students had an adverse reaction to the sudden switch; as stated, it was "*emotionally damaging*". While some learners' minds deviated, others had not exhibited emotional signs, explaining that "*they were either unvoiced about their feelings or they really were comfortable enough [with the transition] not to be bothered because they participated actively; they submitted their assignments; they didn't show any concerns so it really depended on the personalities*". The professor felt that students anticipated returning to campus and appeared disappointed when the recent news was contrary. Though the process was complex, they recovered gradually: "*I think emotions have subsided. We started hitting the road and are more or less working positively to get things done*".

Besides, according to *Professor 2 and 3*, an additional factor that played a major role in disturbing students' attention was the Artsakh war that broke out on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Additionally, the transition was difficult for some due to social distancing implications inflicted by COVID-19: *"Some people are really having a hard time with it, in a sense that they are isolated. You know, social life has kind of declined for them"*. In the Professor's opinion, those who had previously taken face-to-face classes reacted differently from those who had not.

To support students amidst the transition, professors took the following initiatives. *Professor 1* identified problems and sought solutions. Students voiced their concerns and provided feedback, which helped the professor discern the online mode's success: *"I felt responsible for not only the classes to go well but also for my students to feel comfortable"*. For instance, the assignments and projects were adapted to decrease tension. Apart from that, the professor gained an understanding of the circumstances by reading, attending seminars, approaching to psychologists, *"I wanted to try to know how I could help my students"*.

*Professor 2* stated that the faculty strived to build a community; thus, they planned an in-person gathering with learners. Additionally, students required a safe space to release their emotions during the war; therefore, the professor postponed lectures during a few sessions to ventilate on the situation: *"I know I am accountable for their learning, but this is a different reality and more important than learning objectives"*. Apart from that, the professor searched for pedagogical and technical solutions:

- Uploaded all the materials covered during the class on Moodle,
- Adjusted and simplified assignments by sharing videos to supplement teaching, and
- Became less strict and flexible compared to face-to-face courses.

Professor 3 mentioned being supportive and assisting students in several ways. For instance, helping students who could not meet a deadline: *“In terms of working with them on an individual level or having to meet with them I think that made a difference and helped with the transition”*. Additionally, the professor took the following initiatives:

- Extended deadlines and was flexible with due date,
- Did not penalize for late submissions, and
- Attained regular contact with students.

According to this case study, the professors’ perspectives imply that experiencing distress during the transition was a normal reaction as this was an unexpected and frightening circumstance. Besides, the Artsakh war that erupted a few months after the pandemic might have elevated the pressure. Despite the unfortunate situations, the majority of learners came along and were resilient. According to the data gathered from the survey, when the students were asked to express their overall satisfaction with online learning, the following was found (see figure 2).

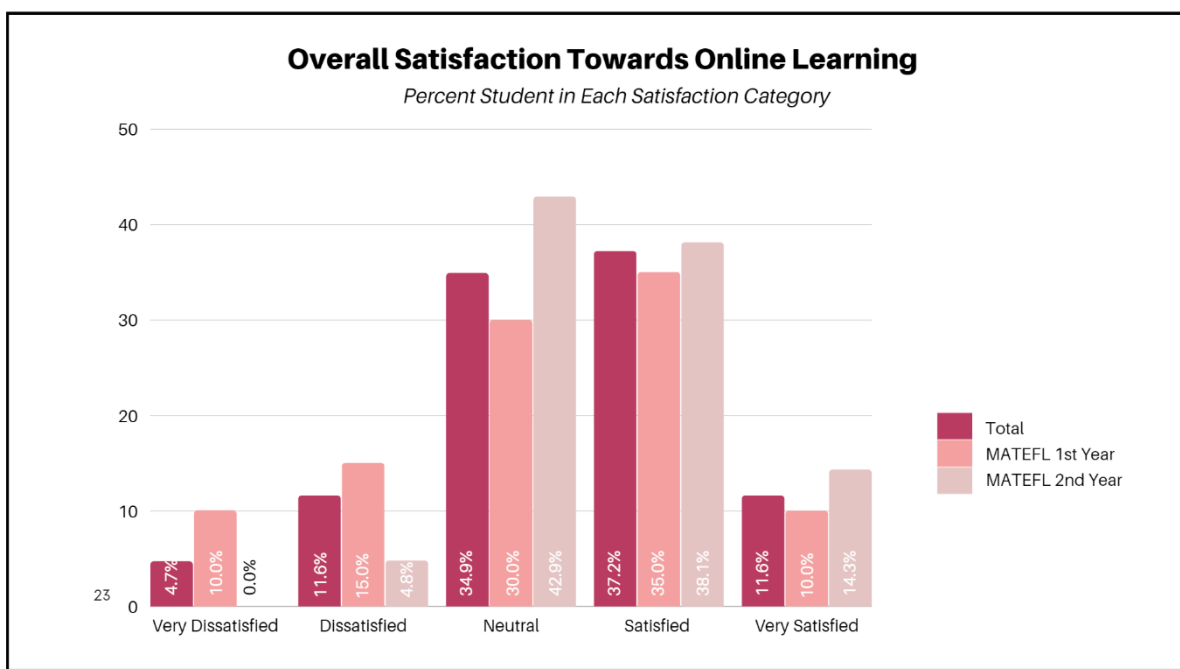


Figure 4.2 Student Satisfaction

While 11.6% of students ( $n=5$ ) reported being very satisfied, 37.2% ( $n=16$ ) were satisfied, and 34.9% ( $n=15$ ) felt neutral. The results imply that 83.7% ( $n=36$ ) of participants were accustomed to the setting.

In all, 16.2% of respondents felt contrary; as 11.6% ( $n=5$ ) selected dissatisfied, and the remnant 4.6% ( $n=2$ ) were very dissatisfied.

Table 4.3 Overall Percent Satisfaction of Students Per Program Year

<b>Crosstabulation</b>			<b>Which program are you in?</b>			<b>Total</b>	
			<b>C-TEFL</b>	<b>MATEFL 1st year</b>	<b>MATEFL 2nd year</b>		
<b>How do you feel overall about online education?</b>	Very dissatisfied	Count	0	2	0	2	
		%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	4.7%	
	Dissatisfied	Count	1	3	1	5	
		%	50.0%	15.0%	4.8%	11.6%	
	Neutral	Count	0	6	9	15	
		%	0.0%	30.0%	42.9%	34.9%	
	Satisfied	Count	1	7	8	16	
		%	50.0%	35.0%	38.1%	37.2%	
	Very satisfied	Count	0	2	3	5	
		%	0.0%	10.0%	14.3%	11.6%	
	<b>Total</b>		Count	2	20	21	43
			%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

1<sup>st</sup> year survey participants reported to be less satisfied (11.6%,  $n=5$ ) than 2<sup>nd</sup> year students (2.3%,  $n=1$ ).

Table 4.4 Overall Percent Satisfaction of Students Per Relationship Status

<b>Crosstabulation</b>	<b>What is your relationship status?</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Married</b>	<b>Single</b>	

<i>How do you feel overall about online education?</i>	<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	<i>Coun</i>	0	2	2
		<i>t</i>			
		<i>%</i>	0.0%	7.7%	4.7%
	<i>Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Coun</i>	1	4	5
		<i>t</i>			
		<i>%</i>	5.9%	15.4%	11.6%
	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Coun</i>	6	9	15
		<i>t</i>			
		<i>%</i>	35.3%	34.6%	34.9%
	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Coun</i>	7	9	16
		<i>t</i>			
		<i>%</i>	41.2%	34.6%	37.2%
<i>Very satisfied</i>	<i>Coun</i>	3	2	5	
	<i>t</i>				
	<i>%</i>	17.6%	7.7%	11.6%	
<i>Total</i>	<i>Coun</i>	17	26	43	
	<i>t</i>				
	<i>%</i>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Students who are married showed higher satisfaction with online learning (58.8%,  $n=12$ ), in comparison to single students (42.3%,  $n=11$ ). In addition, the majority (6 out of 7) of those who reported to be dissatisfied were identified as single.

Table 4.5 Overall Percent Satisfaction of Students Per Residence

Crosstabulation		Where do you live?			Total	
		Abroad	Regions	Yerevan		
<b>How do you feel overall about online education?</b>	Very dissatisfied	Coun	0	0	2	2
		t				
		<i>%</i>	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	4.7%
	Dissatisfied	Coun	0	1	4	5
		t				
		<i>%</i>	0.0%	9.1%	13.3%	11.6%
	Neutral	Coun	0	6	9	15
		t				
		<i>%</i>	0.0%	54.5%	30.0%	34.9%
	Satisfied	Coun	2	2	12	16
		t				
		<i>%</i>	100.0%	18.2%	40.0%	37.2%
Very satisfied	Coun	0	2	3	5	
	t					
	<i>%</i>	0.0%	18.2%	10.0%	11.6%	
<b>Total</b>		Coun	2	11	30	43
		t				

	%	100.0 %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0 %
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Students residing in Yerevan showed slightly more overall satisfaction with online learning (50.0%,  $n=15$ ), relative to students living across other regions of Armenia (36.4%,  $n=4$ ). However, results of crosstabulation for students living abroad at the time of the study cannot be analyzed due to their relatively limited frequency ( $n=2$ ).

Moreover, in-depth data regarding students' feelings, responses and attitudes were collected during the one-to-one interviews. Initially, four of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students felt concerned about the unprecedented situation and the online pedagogy. During the COVID-19 outbreak, fieldwork switched online; *Interviewee 6* was alarmed due to lack of expertise in online teaching. Nevertheless, considering the consequences of the newly emerged virus, two participants were pleased about maintaining their distance and remaining safe. Additionally, they were intrigued and eager to learn about the new model.

In contrast, five participants displayed disappointment. *Interviewee 2* mentioned that the news was terrible and stressful, especially since she had not expected it to last long, and *Interviewee 1* noted that the face-to-face program was a positive change in her life after not being a student for several years. Being on campus was the biggest motivator; thus, the transformation caused a lot of tension: *"This was not what I wanted my studies to be like; I really wanted to feel like I'm a student again. This is something that you can't compare with online lessons, it doesn't matter whether the quality is the same or not"*.

After some time, interviewees' attitudes changed. While two of them accepted the situation (1, 2), another two grew fond of the new opportunity (6, 18). *Interviewee 6* felt at ease and content during the second online semester; she enjoyed the setting and did not feel any contrast between traditional and virtual classes. On the other hand, *Interviewees 3 and 5*



sensed a reversal in their behavior (*e.g., disinterest, turning off the camera*) even though they were still in favor of online learning. Meanwhile, one interviewee remained bothered even though she was pleased to be at home, eating homemade food, and not dealing with the city's cold weather: "*I faced the actual reality, and no, I still don't like it*" (Interviewee 4).

Table 4.6 *Extracts from the Transcript*

<i>Students' Initial Response</i>	<b>Quotes</b>
<i>Interviewee 4</i>	I thought it was a joke and AUA is not going to do that. I was really disappointed, I was sad, I just couldn't believe it was happening. I was hoping that it was just for two weeks or even a month but not this long.
<i>Interviewee 5</i>	I started focusing more, I was really engaged in the lessons, when I saw the teachers were screen sharing, I saw everything very clearly, because you know when we were in class like sometimes you don't see the slide because of the lighting and everything. I was really active at that time, it was interesting.
<i>Interviewee 18</i>	I was one of those people that you know you can't learn anything from online teaching learning, so it was new and it was strange.

Table 4.7 *Extracts from the Transcript*

<i>Students' Later Response</i>	<b>Quotes</b>
<i>Interviewee 1</i>	Of course it is not the same if you were on campus, but, anyway, I am really content and pleased with the quality that we do, I know with some professors, it wouldn't even change if we were on campus.
<i>Interviewee 2</i>	Now you know I'm used to this a little bit already and started teaching offline. Some time came when I understood that you know this works, because I'm at home, especially when you are from a region, moving to another city is not easy,

*Interviewee 3*

it was especially stressful for me when I had roommates in Yerevan.

At the beginning, I always tried to turn on my camera, to listen, to listen carefully as I did in face-to-face lessons, so because all of my family members like my brother and sister also were online, we were doing it like how we are supposed to do face-to-face. Time by time, when we went and went and at this stage now I can't turn on my camera, I don't know why this happened, but I can't turn on, and of course, at some point, I am getting distracted.

*Interviewee 5*

Maybe at first everything was new for me that's why I was more focused and interested in this platform and how online learning works.

*Interviewee 18*

I changed my perceptions 180 degrees. I guess it's because our professors quickly shifted into online teaching and they prepared for that and they gave us whatever it was needed.

Similarly, 1st-year participants revealed different attitudes. Initially, when most students applied to the program, classes took place on campus. Interestingly, some were worried about attending lectures for personal reasons, such as being away, facing health issues, and having a hectic schedule. Thus, the news regarding the shift was relieving.

As a mother, teacher, and learner, *Interviewee 7* felt uneasy about attending classes and handling life responsibilities. Still, she was determined to pursue her dream of attaining a Master's degree. Thus, the sudden online transition was a suitable solution: *"I was relieved. I became manageable, flexible, I could have my online classes, and then I could switch to my own classes, and I could take care of my children, because of COVID-19 they stayed at home, so it was a great idea for me"* (*Interviewee 7*).

Similarly, the following three participants were appeased about managing life events and classes without interruptions. Attending courses outside of campus appeared beneficial since

they were able to continue their education anywhere: *“In that sense, to be honest, it was positive because it gave me the flexibility to do something” (Interviewee 8).*

However, their attitudes changed when their lives settled, and the shift took place longer than awaited. Tension arose, and they desired to return to campus. *Interviewee 8* considered dropping out due to extreme boredom and the lack of motivation to perform. The other (*Interviewee 17*) stated that learning with people she had not directly met was unacceptable; sometimes, she encountered familiar faces on the street, which kept her puzzled.

***Interviewee 8:*** *Now, I am not that happy, to be honest. I am not doing anything while studying; I am just studying, so I don't see the point anymore. The only good thing is that I am saving time; no, I don't think time is that important when you kind of compare to the other things.*

***Interviewee 17:*** *Kind of virtual life mixing with real-life; it's weird. I tried offline [learning], and I saw how it is to be on campus, how it is to meet the professors, the students, your classmates, have lunch together, share some ideas. Now, you just mute your microphone, you just turn off the video, and not take part in the lessons.*

Two other interviewees despised the concept of virtual learning from the very beginning and strongly hoped that everything would return to pre-COVID-19 normal. In some students' opinions, COVID-19 was no longer a threat.

***Interviewee 9:*** *I hate it; I think that no virus is a good enough reason to substitute reality with some visual illusion. We don't know how long it's going to be around, so we may need to start living with it, work on our immune system, but not just stay at home waiting that magically somehow it's going to be resolved.*

**Interviewee 13:** *I don't think that online classes can give us the same quality of education. I completely understand that at first, it was necessary to do classes online for the sake of our health; but now that COVID-19 cases are getting lower and lower in Armenia, and other schools and universities are opening their doors for students, I think that AUA could do the same thing.*

**Interviewee 8:** *All the cafes, shops, hotels, weddings, funerals, everything is open and going on, and all universities and schools and classes, and only AUA is online.*

On the other hand, two interviewees who were initially shocked and concerned regarding this transition, had grown into loving the new design as it was more convenient for their everyday activities. While *Interviewee 14* thought of taking a gap year, and *Interviewee 15* stressed about her poor technological skills, they overcome those challenges and could no longer go by without online pedagogy.

The remaining three interviewees shared mixed emotions. One of them felt neutral. As she had never experienced offline classes at AUA, the setting felt natural and organized. Two of them were not entirely in favor of the transition; instead, they pointed out accepting the situation and becoming accustomed to it. It was emphasized that university was not only about receiving an education; there was a whole experience that they were absent from:

**Interviewee 11:** *It doesn't feel like you are having a university life, because it's not just about studying. It's meeting people, going to university [physically], and we don't have that at all.*

The results could mean that the transition worked out well for some learners who expressed complete satisfaction, in particular, when students had reasons that prevented them from attending classes, the shift to online courses seemed worthwhile; though, only temporarily.

Nevertheless, while some interviewees were devastated initially, they reached an acceptance after going through with it for a long term, contrary to others who were still discontent at the time of the interviews. Learners' preferences depended and varied widely based on their personalities and needs.

The following table (8) represents the results gathered from the survey to the question “*Is there anything else you would like to share about transitioning to online learning?*”.

Table 4.8 Survey Qualitative Data

	1st year students	2nd year students
<i>Single</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Overall it was a good experience</li> <li>✓ I had great experience</li> <li>✗ It's a new experience for me but I don't like it</li> <li>✗ Since online classes started I feel that I'm not communicative a lot; anxiety and nervousness</li> <li>✗ I wish we had never done that...or at least we will be back to normal reality as soon as possible.</li> <li>✗ With online classes, we became like robots</li> <li>✗ It's really stressful; affected mental and physical health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Online reduced level of anxiety and stress during classes</li> <li>✓ Adaptation took a while but overall I am very satisfied</li> <li>✗ I miss my friends</li> <li>✗ The transition was quite hard. Face-to-face classes are really important. The students really need and lack the communication</li> <li>✗ I DON'T LIKE IT</li> </ul>
<i>Married</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Online learning is awesome.</li> <li>✓ It is very convenient for me learning from home</li> <li>✓ I personally liked the online learning experience</li> <li>✓ It was very comfortable as I have two children and need to stay home</li> <li>✗ I hope it will be over soon and will never come back again</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ I feel less stressed</li> <li>✓ The beginning was stressful; now it feels quite natural</li> <li>✗ As teachers or future teachers we used to communicate a lot, share ideas, experiences during face to face classes.</li> </ul>

The survey's additional comments indicated that most married students were delighted about the online transition; however, some suggested otherwise. Similarly, most single students seemed to prefer offline classes; however, a few had contradicting answers. Other participants,

regardless of relationship status, mentioned the advantages (*comfortable environment, not commuting, anywhere/anytime, time-saving*) and disadvantages (*screen time, no university life, health issues, lack of interaction, stress*) of online learning (See Appendix D).

In addition, interviewees were asked to voice their opinion regarding the initiatives that professors took throughout the forced online transition. Two interviewees in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year mentioned not needing assistance; one was aware of the virtual setting because of her teaching background. The other believed that nothing was unusual *“The only change was Zoom”* (Interviewee 6). In contrast, two students noted that communication was rendered possible; professors made electronic interactions simpler (Interviewee 5), and office hours transitioned online: *“It’s really good, I really like one of the professor’s schedules, we could choose the time, and the professor taught us how to do it. That was a good initiative for me”* (Interviewee 3).

Additionally, professors were more flexible; two participants mentioned professors postponing deadlines in some instances, especially during the war. One of them noted that the number of readings was reduced and substituted with videos, *“Especially when COVID-19 cases were high and during the war, I’m very grateful for them to be so understanding”* (Interviewee 18). An interviewee was grateful for the extension; however, she preferred having fewer days because starting earlier stressed her as she constantly modified her work until the deadline: *“It is a disadvantage for me, because I should suffer one more week”* (Interviewee 3). Besides, Interviewee 4 realized that professors were not as serious about the grading, making her feel less tense and *“more appreciative.”*

As for 1st-year interviewees, two of them mentioned not needing any assistance (Interviewees 7 and 10). A few of the interviewees noted that they preferred dealing with

everything by themselves or with their classmates' help; nevertheless, whenever they reached out to the professors, they found them to be very accessible (*Interviewee 7*) and helpful (*Interviewee 12*). Three students stated that when they required deadline extensions, professors were considerate. Like 2<sup>nd</sup> year students, one of them noted that it reduced pressure, especially during the war: *“Having relatives in the war, doing the homework, and then working, I felt like I couldn't cope with that, with the homework, but the professors were flexible and adjusted everything [for us]”* (*Interviewee 14*).

Three participants stated that professors put a great effort into making online learning feasible, *“They are to a great extent ready to make everything easier for us,”* said one of them. Another interviewee felt the environment was supportive, and professors' attitudes made her feel better and confident whenever she felt *“anxious and uncomfortable”* (*Interviewee 16*). One participant noted that professors tried to make the circumstances lighter by sending emails. Still, it was not helpful, and only receiving *“apology mails”* from the university's president made the situation worse as it was not sufficient:

***Interviewee 13:*** *They were not trying to do anything about this situation. They were calling this situation a "new norm" which made me very angry. Instead of trying to organize some co-curricular classes, which was possible since they were organizing some meetings at PAB building.*

Another learner was dissatisfied as professors did not take those initiatives on their own; for instance, students had to request an extension:

***Interviewee 8:*** *I felt drained when I asked for an extension; I felt drained just after doing it, just sometimes you do something, and you feel like this was so tiring as if you were running a marathon, but you were not running.*

The results corroborate that the professors were mindful of the circumstances, which most participants were very grateful for, especially during the war. The warm atmosphere facilitated the process; nevertheless, some students felt otherwise.

#### **4.1.2. Persistence**

During the student interviews, the researcher collected information regarding the strategies used to remain determined and carry forward with education despite the involuntary circumstances. Three 2<sup>nd</sup> year participants showed a strong desire to graduate and achieve their career goals and life plans. They pointed out that taking a gap year would slow their journey and contribute to losing knowledge. For instance, *Interviewee 1* wanted to stop her education for a while as she was entirely against the transition; nonetheless, she tried to understand the situation due to the unforeseen future. Two interviewees added that studying at AUA was their aim, implying that they could not give up (*Interviewees 2 and 4*). One of them noted that after receiving a high percentage of financial aid, leaving would be the “worst mistake of her life”. The remaining three interviewees enjoyed online learning and believed that it resembled face-to-face classes:

*Interviewee 5: The progress I’m seeing in myself, the readings, homework, and group work, and everything, it’s the same. That’s why I’m still learning online because I feel like everything would be the same when I would go to the university.*

Similarly, some of the 1<sup>st</sup> year interviewees were pleased with online learning, and all of them possessed a great sense of responsibility towards their education. A few participants presented themselves as dedicated learners with a strong love for learning: “*I am a person who wants to learn as much as possible*” (*Interviewee 7*). While five of the participants considered dropping out, they remained committed; one of them stated that the thought disappeared by itself



(*Interviewee 11*), two of them were driven by the diploma, and the other two remarked that dropping out would be a decision they would later regret.

*Interviewee 8: If I drop out, I am sure I will regret it, but if I continue, I will never regret it; I am not carefree, so I think that's what's helping me stay dedicated, but it's torture.*

Additionally, four students accepted the condition and pointed to the importance of proceeding in life while maintaining the hope of returning to the norm one day. As three of them stated:

*Interviewee 10: If I need to study like this, it means I need to study like this.*

*Interviewee 16: I try to keep myself motivated by trying to think that it will be over very soon.*

*Interviewee 17: I just hope that soon we will go back to normal life. Otherwise, everything would be delayed, our lives, in general, would be delayed.*

The results obtained for this case study showcase that TEFL students were generally mature, accountable, and eager to learn.

#### **4.1.3 Benefits and Drawbacks**

During the interview, one of the professors noted that theoretical courses were more applicable online than practical ones that required accomplishing tasks in real-life situations, outside of the classroom: "*I could tell it was not that easy through digital media*". Although there were some shortcomings in the practical aspects, the quality was not affected as the activities were adjusted and compensated by other requirements:

*Professor 2: I think the results are very comparable. I am not seeing major gaps in what they are submitting, but of course some of the assignments had to be changed. I am sure the emotional experience and their memory will be different.*

*Professor 1* mentioned that discussions during face-to-face classes were different; however, it was still successful online: *“I could feel that the students could still feel part of the whole. They could still have very fruitful conversations, discussions, even debates, whether they are in breakout sessions or bigger sessions”*.

A drawback mentioned by *Professor 2* was the inability to connect with students as before: *“I'm not aware what's happening there, because many of them are not able to turn on their videos, so I kind of lose the touch, lose control in some of power sharing that we have in typical face-to-face class gets dissipated somewhere in the virtual reality”*.

*Professor 3* pointed out that learners were always present, contrary to offline classes. Additionally, they were productive: *“I found the presentations to be really good. They were really well organized, that wasn't affected at all”*.

The results showed that while the assignments underwent significant adjustments, practical learning remained limited, and communication was not ideal. However, the quality of education remained of high standard.

Apart from the professors' data, students participating in the face-to-face interviews shared their favorite and least favorite aspects of online learning. The following are the results of 2<sup>nd</sup> year students. The practicality and comfort of online learning (*e.g., home environment, taking classes on the couch or in bed*), turning off the camera, listening without being observed, or performing unrelated activities, were presented as online learning benefits. Additionally, an interviewee mentioned that the online setting offered the opportunity to instantly surf the internet for information through the laptop, which would not be as effective during face-to-face classes (via phone). Additional family time was marked advantageous by an interviewee who moved to Yerevan during offline courses. Also, participants pointed out not rising early to get ready and

commute to university, especially during the peak-winter season, as one of them noted. An interviewee stated that her favorite part was the freedom of not using the camera, which kept her in her comfort zone; it reduced stress, especially when presenting or not being well prepared for class:

*Interviewee 6: When I was doing presentations during offline classes, I was shaking.*

*Online, I feel so comfortable because I am at home, sitting here. Every time I forget something, I can open my notes and look for information, and that makes me feel more relaxed.*

On the other hand, as a mother, *Interviewee 1* mentioned the classroom responsibilities being interrupted to meet her child's needs, especially when she did not have a helping hand at home. Participants from the regions missed seeing their friends; *Interviewee 2* stated that all she did was study, for she could not meet her close ones in or outside of university as they resided in different locations.

*Interviewee 3* noticed that her vocabulary and knowledge suffered. She used to have more opportunities to participate and learn during the offline setting; in contrast, she felt that she was not participating enough during the online sessions. While *Interviewee 5* was glad to see the shared material clearly, unlike via the projector in offline classes. Another one disliked reading through the screen: *"I can just tune off and not even pay attention, it's very difficult for me"* (*Interviewee 4*). Another participant added having a weak internet connection and problems with her device. Finally, one student mentioned the breakout rooms and group activities as her least favorite aspect of online classes.

*Interviewee 5: I feel like the focus is more on each of us when we are in the breakout rooms; I feel like I have to participate, there is this pressure on. I didn't feel this when we were face-to-face.*

Finally, two participants from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year MATEFL programs agreed that online presentations were less demanding and having the cameras off affected their skills negatively.

The following is a comparison provided by the two interviewees:

*Interviewee 1: The professor observed and you had to prepare better [offline]. When we shifted online, I think it was much easier. Also, we had the opportunity to have our cameras off, so I think this is kind of negative and not professional.*

*Interviewee 8: I wanted to grow in terms of communication, the online transition is making it worse. Presenting is easier online. I can just put a document on the screen and read it. I don't know how to speak in front of a crowd. I was shocked when somebody told me that I have good presentation skills, no it's just that I am alone in the room.*

Similar to the 2<sup>nd</sup> year participants, 1<sup>st</sup> year interviewees were in favor of the offline setting's practicality and flexibility (*time-saving and accessibility from any place*). Participants enjoyed drinking coffee and taking classes simultaneously; one of them was pleased about not having to go to the cafeteria during the break: *"You are in your environment"* (Interviewee 11). Also, some interviewees mentioned that virtual learning felt pleasant, especially during the cold weather:

*Interviewee 14: Sometimes if you feel sick or moody or just the weather is not warm, you can sit on the couch and have a cup of tea or coffee, and then have your class, and that's amazing.*

Two interviewees stated that they liked taking quizzes and tests from home. *Interviewee 10* assumed that the content would be more difficult offline. Another participant pointed out that conducting everything online was going to be helpful if she desired to follow this career path in the future. Like the 2<sup>nd</sup> year interviewees, one of the participants described the benefits of presenting online, “*You don’t need to learn your text by heart, you can easily read from your screen and no one would notice it*” (*Interviewee 13*).

Furthermore, an interviewee loved the engaging aspect of online learning, such as breakout rooms, communication with peers, and involvement in various activities: “*Even if they are virtual, you cannot touch or feel it, it [still] feels so good when you participate in something interactive*” (*Interviewee 15*). Contrary to these responses, one participant expressed her discontent with all the aspects of online pedagogy, in her own words, she “detested” it.

Nevertheless, all students craved human interaction with their peers and professors, even the introverts. One participant stated: “*Everybody comes in one click and everybody goes out in one click*” (*Interviewee 9*). Another participant expressed the need for nonverbal communication with professors for better comprehension of each other, which is almost impossible to achieve during the online classes because it was difficult to observe and track body languages or gestures (*Interviewee 10*). One interviewee complained about the hours she was forced to spend in front of the computer, and another complained about the load of work required from them per unit time. In addition, many learners were faced with technological challenges such as poor internet quality, one of them clarified that not being present or able to participate in discussions due to internet troubles was simply “*not fair*”.

Although one participant acknowledged the time-saving advantage of online learning, she stated that it was secondary compared to the wellbeing of her physical and mental health. She

hated constantly working, studying, having meetings, and practicing teaching in the same environment through the same mode. This new reality nourished her introverted character and encouraged her to avoid humans, which was damaging to her health: *“Physical and mental health are more important than some of the benefits of online learning”* (Interviewee 8). Another participant stated that she did not benefit from online learning in any way, *“Online [learning] doesn’t add anything to offline [learning]; [on the contrary,] it just takes away a lot of important aspects from offline [learning]”* (Interviewee 9). Finally, many other significant events coincided during online classes, which one participant found to be *“infuriating”* (Interviewee 11).

The case study implies that while some participants were pleased and relaxed, others were displeased and overwhelmed. In addition, sessions might have been interactive for a few students, whereas for others, being paired or grouped might have maximized pressure leading to apprehension. Receiving information through the screen might have a detrimental effect on learning for some, yet it is beneficial for others.

#### **4.1.4 Success of Online classes**

Regarding the learning quality and the overall online pedagogy experience, professors agreed that the tasks were adjusted to the online setting and students’ needs; however, the learning aims were not affected: *“It is as rigorous as it used to be”* (Professor 1).

Furthermore, the faculty was more considerate, which was also acknowledged by the students: *“Students tried not to fail their professors in the first place. I think that some kind of a mutual understanding helped both to survive”* (Professor 1).

As for students, all 2<sup>nd</sup> year students were pleased about the quality of education they were receiving and stated that their learning was not compromised after the transition; however, they pointed out a few general setbacks. Interviewee 1 stressed that the success depended on the

course as she was “*fully satisfied*” with some but not with others no matter the setting: “*If at this stage you decide to do something, you really want to get valuable things that you can rely on later in your career, something you can't do independently*”. Moreover, *Interviewee 2* stated that classes were more effective offline as online required more effort. Whereas *Interviewee 3* noted that while the online courses fulfilled the same objectives as offline learning; however, she was slightly worried about her academic growth.

While one of the interviewees stated that breakout rooms allowed her to chat with her friends, others shared different views. Even though paired activities worked sometimes, *Interviewee 2* described breakout rooms as “*unsuccessful and meaningless*”. For instance, the assigned members were not always present, “*You go to the breakout room and you call this person and there is nobody*”. Another interviewee mentioned that the rooms were efficient; however, if classes were offline, they would have had more meaningful discussions (*Interviewee 4*). One participant explained that some tasks were “*simple and dull*” (e.g., *looking at examples of previously written papers*); thus, the information became repetitive, and it did not improve anything, which affected her “*positive*” and “*active*” participation (*Interviewee 5*). Finally, the preference of breakout rooms depended on the type of assigned activities (*Interviewee 6*). According to participants, professors “*allocated too much time*” and did not check on each group; it was “*a waste of time in most cases*” (*Interviewee 4*) and ineffective:

***Interviewee 3:*** *It's not productive, it's a waste of time for me, it's better to discuss topics together.*

***Interviewee 5:*** *I get distracted before the teacher sends us to the breakout room and I'm like what are we supposed to do? I don't really see the importance of the tasks we do in the breakout rooms.*

**Interviewee 18:** *There are some activities where we sit and talk about our daily life.*

Participants also shared about the success of online group work. One of them stated that the management of group work used to be better during offline classes, as now she had to do everything independently:

**Interviewee 1:** *When we met at university at least you utilize this time to work together, and you implement your ideas. On Zoom, everyone is in a hurry all the time; if it's offline, you have more communication with group members and everyone puts the same effort.*

On the other hand, three students were satisfied with online collaboration. *Interviewee 3* explained that she had always preferred working on shared documents rather than meeting at the library. The other stated that everyone she worked with was more punctual, including herself. Besides, group work's success depended on the individuals (*Interviewees 5 and 18*).

The following table (*Table 9*) summarizes 2<sup>nd</sup> year students' requests, regarding online learning.

Table 4.9 *Requests Shared by Students During the Interview*

2nd year students	
<i>Requests</i>	Breakout rooms to be in a timely manner and with a purpose. Have more available courses. Reduce online learning tuition Offer more opportunities and workshops related to psychology or linguistics for the TEFL students (e.g., teach about APA format before asking them to write a literature review).

As for 1<sup>st</sup> year interviewees, all of them believed that they received a high-quality education. A participant stated the setting did not matter since the content was identical; however, she assumed that online was more productive (*e.g., she could instantly use the internet to expand her knowledge or mention new information during the class*). On the other hand, four



students with offline AUA experience stated that it would have been better face-to-face (Interviewees 8, 9, 13 and 17). One of them noted that professors attempted to make classes similar to the conventional setting, which worked to some extent, but not entirely, “*It can't be completely done, especially practical things*” (Interviewee 17). Additionally, one interviewee mentioned that she did not fully receive the opportunities AUA promised to offer, which was one important reason why she applied to the institution (Interviewee 10). Another interviewee said that professors gave constructive feedback; however, some did not provide grades until the end of the semester, which made her undervalue her performance (Interviewee 7).

Furthermore, four students stated that opting to breakout room was an adequate alternative to offline group works. A few interviewees pointed out that this allowed them to connect, socialize, and discuss topics unrelated to class while using their native language:

**Interviewee 8:** *It doesn't always work, but I like it because sitting there in this main session for three hours is too much and it's always good to go on a break in the breakout room.*

Seven participants commented that the success depended on the task, timing, and the individuals in the breakout rooms. Sometimes, students worked by themselves or returned to the main session without accomplishing the assigned activity because their group members were muted, not active, or unwilling to contribute:

**Interviewee 9:** *Usually, I am the only one who has listened. I am the one who has to explain everything one more time [to the other students] about what we are going to do there.*

Six participants shared their opinions about the success of group work. In the beginning, one of the participants did not like the idea as it was demanding (*finding a convenient time*);

however, she changed her perspective because they distributed the workload and relied on each other (*Interviewee 11*). One interviewee stated that group work was the most amazing part; it helped students interact and learn about each other (*Interviewee 12*). Another mentioned that groupmates managed to organize meetings at night because they were busy during the day (*Interviewee 14*).

A participant noted that the success depended on the partners; however, it was manageable through online shared files: “*Now we are aware of more online tools than we were before, and it’s really easy to work regardless of the distance*” (*Interviewee 16*). Another participant stated that it worked; however, not as successfully. Two students with offline AUA experiences preferred in-person group work. One of them tried to meet with her partners in person; however, it was not always possible, “*Sometimes, we sit somewhere and discuss the project together, of course that’s much better than Zoom sessions, but it’s okay [to use Zoom] not too bad*” (*Interviewee 17*). The other one noted that it was difficult to work on Zoom, whereas if the setting was still offline, they would have met in the library (*Interviewee 13*).

TEFL department’s students’ voices might indicate that the educational success did not depend on the setting, but rather the interest in the course and the quality of the presented content. While online learning was highly achievable, it lacked some essential aspects of offline learning (e.g., campus benefits).

#### **4.1.5 Student Choice**

During the interviews, all three interviewed professors agreed that if given the choice, their students would choose offline learning, for a variety of reasons. According to the *Professor 1*, students would choose the offline setting even if there would be opportunities for asynchronous tasks: “*The feeling of belonging and togetherness is the nature of people*”.

Whereas according to *Professor 2*, students would choose so because the university did not offer online learning originally and students expected to be personally present, *"This is a forced transition"*.

However, *Professor 3* thinks that most students have the ability to go through this online learning set-up, even though they might think the opposite; *"I think the majority don't want to be online but to say that they couldn't handle it actually it would be wrong, I think they don't think they can handle it but they handle it"*.

Additionally, the following paragraph reveals the students' preferred learning setting if they were given a choice. One interviewee stated that she would choose online learning at present due to her fixed plans; however, she favored offline learning overall: *"As being a student at university, of course, [I prefer] offline [learning], I really hope that after the break we will be at least back to offline"* (*Interviewee 1*). *Interviewee 5* noted that she loved online learning and teaching; it suited her personality. Three 2<sup>nd</sup> year participants opted for a blended setting. One of them stated that she would take theoretical courses online, but not the ones that demanded in-person interaction (*Interviewee 2*). The others noted the advantages of combined online and offline settings (flexibility, and student life) as reasons for considering that option.

***Interviewee 3:*** *For AUA, offline is a better option, because the classes, the atmosphere, everything was perfect when I had the classes in-person, I felt the students' spirit; now, I really don't feel the students' spirit that I would like to feel, but of course I like online classes and I was very happy that we are having online learning, so it's mixed (her feelings).*

***Interviewee 6:*** *You want to go to the university, enter the building, feel that you are a student. Now I do not feel like I am a student, I miss that part of my life.*

Additionally, two participants confirmed that they would choose to accomplish their degree entirely offline learning. One of them was not against blended learning since it provided the two options, but; she missed the in-person classes and the university atmosphere (*Interviewee 18*). The other was in favor of going to the campus every day and said: *If I am supposed to go to the building, to AUA, I'd just like to do it 24/7, because the library is the perfect place to study, and just [seeing] people, they inspire me. Now, I live outside of Yerevan (Interviewee 4).*

As for 1<sup>st</sup> year students, *Interviewee 15* chose the online setting because she lived in the regions. As for the participants who voted for offline learning, one believed that the online transition should have been a temporary solution: *“When they realized COVID-19 is staying, they had to switch back offline, even if it would take a lot of risk, who said online learning doesn't require taking a risk? It takes everything that education is for” (Interviewee 9).* Another stated the following: *“Maybe that's because I don't live far from university, but I don't think it's the same in terms of quality” (Interviewee 17).*

*Interviewee 1* chose online learning as it was suitable for her schedule and motherhood responsibilities; but, she would prefer blended classes if it were obligatory. Furthermore, students chose the blended setting for the following reasons:

- Tests to be online and the remaining requirements to be offline,
- To fit the needs of everyone, those who preferred offline and those who did not,
- To stay at home for some lectures and on stormy days,
- To experience both modes, and
- To live outside of Yerevan, but also attend offline classes.

***Interviewee 11:*** *I always wanted to come to university to be a part of it and right now I don't feel as much a part of it.*

*Interviewee 14: AUA can have a camera in the classroom, those who want to go can go and those who don't, they can just stay at home, that would be an ideal version [of blended learning].*

Interestingly, one of the participants was unsure; she was scared of returning to campus, but she also disliked online classes. Thus, she did not want to be given a choice because she could not decide herself (*Interviewee 8*).

The following table (*Table 10*) summarizes the students' preferences regarding mode of learning.

Table 4.10 Summary of Students' Choice from Both Years

Setting	Nº of Students
Offline	5
Online	3
Blended	9
Unsure	1

The data could imply that students had contrasting preferences; but the majority seemed to agree with a blended version.

#### 4.1.6 Recommendation to Take Online Classes

When interviewees were asked if they would recommend future TEFL students to take online classes, all of them, except for one, agreed. *Interviewee 17* would suggest the online setting unless there were no other available options. A few participants noted that the choice depended on the individuals; nevertheless, the online quality was valuable, as *Interviewee 1* stated, "We did a great job, and we can prove to everyone that even though it was online, we were still professionals in our field, and we can do a great job". However, she added that if they wanted to feel like students and "get everything out of AUA," she would advise them to register completely offline. Although AUA offered great opportunities in the online setting compared to

other universities, *Interviewee 4* would recommend offline learning to meet the professors, experience real interaction, and have a higher concentration level during classes.

Furthermore, three participants would recommend blended learning as some courses could work online, but they would advise taking all courses offline if they had the choice. Finally, one of the interviewees noted that if candidates had a hectic calendar and did not suffer from psychological issues, then she would recommend online learning, *“It’s working for some people, but it’s just not working for others, so it really depends”* (*Interviewee 8*).

The results imply that most participants were not against recommending others to take online classes at AUA as the quality was not inferior to that provided by sole offline learning; however, they would advise either offline or blended learning to acquire a holistic university experience (See Appendix E).

## **4.2 Challenges Faced by Students During Online Education**

The second research question is: *What possible challenges TEFL students might have experienced during the forced online learning, and how might they have coped with the situation?* To provide a comprehensive answer to the question, five aspects were examined.

### **4.2.1 Challenges, Impact on Learning, and Coping Strategies**

According to the professors’ impressions, the timing was rough as students had to tackle more than the forced transition. In addition to COVID-19 breakout, lockdown, and loved ones being at higher risk of mortality by the disease, the war increased the burden multiple fold: *“In addition to this emotional pressure there was this war and that was devastating obviously for all of us”* (*Professor 2*). Thus, another teacher stated that students battled through apprehension as they had many concerns: *“Most of them work so most of them had to think about their studies, take care of their families, take care of their student”* (*Professor 1*).

Furthermore, *Professor 1* indicated that there were academic and technical challenges. Participation was different; during face-to-face classes, students could contribute by using gestures or a signal, which was not viable during online classes: *“They had to give full answers, or they had to wait, or they didn't have a chance of speaking, or even an input in that small short sentence, because that would create some extra noise and we wouldn't be able to listen to each other”* (*Professor 1*). Another challenge was completing synchronous assessments within a limited time frame in front of a device while encountering distractions in their environment. Despite everything, learners always got prepared for class. Furthermore, internet connection, power outage, and technical functions (*e.g., allowing students to screen share*) were other complications (*Professor 1*). Additionally, some students expressed their concerns during office hours, which helped them perform better:

***Professor 1:*** *Perhaps these frequent meetings gave them some kind of confidence and the responsibility towards their own learning and of achieving their goals gave them this full understanding that they need to work hard.*

According to the professors' perceptions, due to weak internet, students lost data, which may have impacted their engagement and emotional state: *“Oftentimes, I still get students that are not able to be present a 100%”* (*Professor 2*). As there was no evidence, he/she could not give an accurate interpretation and was unsure whether the issues impacted learning.

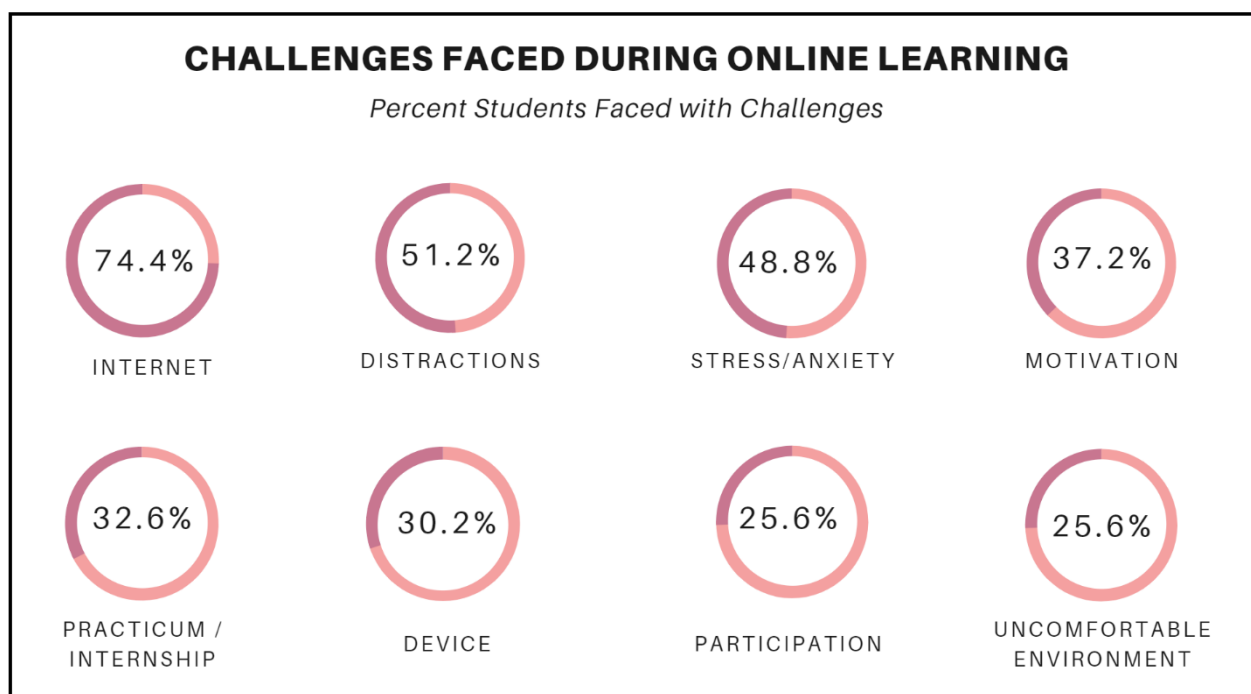
Another challenge was timing. Professors were more attentive to time; some tasks lasted longer online. Additionally, it was reported that sometimes, due to distractions (*e.g., texting, being surrounded by children, having the videos turned off*), students failed to hear the information, which led to miscommunication: *“It takes longer to explain things or get messages across, or be able to give all the necessary information and not have someone miss it”*

(Professor 3). According to him/her, group work was another inconvenience: “It’s much more complicated to get group work done, to make it more student-centered. The activity of breakout rooms though it works, sometimes still consumes time without being effective”.

The answers provided by the professors suggest that students faced a great number of challenges that may have provoked academic and emotional complications.

Additionally, the challenges recorded by survey respondents are summarized in the chart below.

Figure 4.3 Online Learning Challenges



The majority of survey respondents, 74,4 % ( $n=32$ ), reported the internet as a major challenge, making it a significant online learning obstacle. A substantial percentage struggled with distractions, stress and anxiety, and motivation, 51.2% ( $n=22$ ); 48.8% ( $n=21$ ), and 37.2% ( $n=16$ ), respectively.

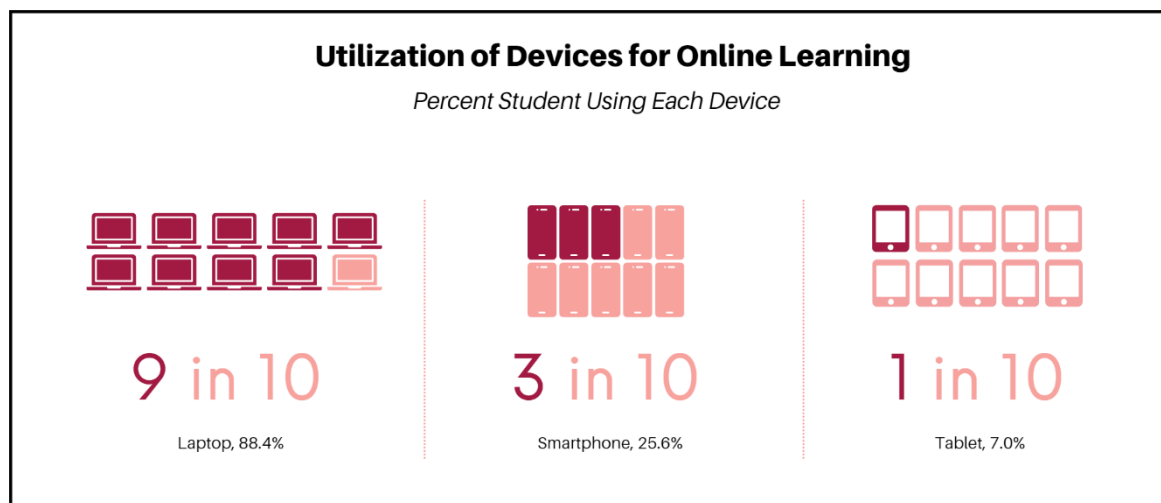
It is worth noting that 32.6% ( $n=14$ ) of learners had conflicts with practicum and internship and a considerable percentage of 30.2% ( $n=13$ ) had device-related problems. As for



the remaining, a total of 25.6% ( $n=11$ ) reported facing challenges with participation, and another 25.6% ( $n=11$ ) found it difficult to find a comfortable environment while taking classes.

The following chart is a summary of the devices used by surveyed participants during online education.

Figure 4.4 Devices Used for Online Learning



According to the one-on-one interviews, the following were challenges faced during online learning. Three of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year interviewees identified struggles with time management and completing tasks; being at home created the illusion of having more time, which delayed their performances. Consequently, they had trouble setting priorities between university requirements and controlling the different events they had in life (*e.g., family, employment*). One of the participants noted that this affected her motivation negatively. The other explained that the university atmosphere, specifically noticing other learners' productiveness, used to encourage her to accomplish her tasks.

Additionally, most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students noted that technical difficulties (*internet, device*) faced by both students and professors were serious issues. This aggravated during presentations and exams (*Interviewees 1 and 6*), when being excluded from Zoom and missing on

details (*Interviewee 2*), and when not hearing the professors' speech, especially when students posed questions (*Interviewee 5*). These affected learning because students did not obtain complete and satisfactory information like they would in offline classes (*Interviewees 2 and 5*):

*Interviewee 2: it affects my learning, because the professor could speak more during these hours, now the professor does less, because of the internet or noisy background.*

Additional technical issues discussed were not owning a suitable device or having to charge the device constantly. One participant mentioned her computer not working adequately, which caused her intense frustration and apprehension: *"I couldn't even manage to do presentations, or take part in activities, and it was making me very nervous and angry"* (*Interviewee 6*).

Furthermore, the hours spent in front of the device were a severe predicament for all participants. Many of them were not only online students but also teachers. However, despite it being exhausting, three of them became accustomed to it:

*It was a really stressful situation for me last year, when everything changed into online mode and it was too much [university, work, practicum]. We were in front of the computers from early morning till late at night (Interviewee 1).*

Six of the interviewees reflected on their poor health conditions. They experienced severe neck and backaches, headaches, and declining eyesight. For instance, *Interviewee 3* required eyeglasses, and *Interviewee 4* expressed the desire to rest. When students had physical access to the university, they could borrow books from the library and copy the material, but with the online education, they lacked this opportunity (*Interviewee 1*).

Having distractions and an unsuitable environment were other challenges faced during the online setting. During the first few months, one of the interviewees did not have a

comfortable space and furniture to study, “*the setting was awful*” (Interviewee 2). Five of them were distracted at home due to television and family members being around or doing household chores, which also affected learning:

***Interviewee 4:*** *It takes more time to study than it would have taken without all the distractions.*

***Interviewee 6:*** *If you are living in a small apartment with many people, it’s just difficult not to get distracted from the class and it can affect the learning process.*

On the other hand, a participant with a quiet environment was also troubled by distractions, especially when being tempted to use the phone: “*Sometimes, I find myself thinking about other things, all of a sudden I’m distracted*” (Interviewee 5).

Some of the participants struggled to join Zoom on time. According to the interviewees, it was challenging to find the correct link, which caused them to be late; While one did not stress about attendance, the others felt embarrassed. Despite connecting on time, *Interviewee 5* was late and experienced pressure by the thought of being called on while not being present. Another participant connects on time during the early hours but gets distracted throughout the day and forgets to join the subsequent classes, “*It’s like you don’t pay much attention to the timing*”. Being aware that teachers did not track presence during online courses was advantageous (*Interviewee 6*).

Moreover, the data gathered some of the impact of these challenges on learning. One interviewee admitted to being too stressed and not wanting to study; hence, she was more prepared during offline classes. Another interviewee stated that she might have gained more in-depth information and knowledge during traditional courses, as now she missed details due to

distractions. Finally, a student mentioned that the terrible internet and its impact on synchronous interaction affected her learning:

*Interviewee 5: I don't get satisfied with the answer because of the internet; therefore, it affects my learning. I don't get enough information as I am supposed to, so it affects what I'm taking about teaching, and maybe it's affecting my teaching as well.*

2<sup>nd</sup> year interviewees shared the strategies they employed to overcome these challenges.

Regarding time management, *Interviewee 1* suggested not to procrastinate. *Interviewee 4* attempted to schedule her day and use a diary, which was not always successful. However, talking to friends and learning about their accomplishments were helpful yet stressful indicators to start working on tasks and meeting deadlines. When missing information due to distractions, *Interviewee 3* watched the professors' videos and followed the readings, presentations, and instructions posted on Moodle.

When missing details due to internet disruption, *Interviewee 5* moved on without asking professors to repeat because she disliked receiving attention or putting them in an uncomfortable position. Additionally, when using the device became tiring, the student listened to the session without following the screen (*Interviewee 5*). Moreover, *Interviewee 6* managed to download a complicated and large-sized program to reduce background noise during classes. As for the health issues, while a student admitted that seeking medical consultation would not be beneficial before finishing online courses, another stated that she needed immediate physiotherapy sessions (*Interviewee 18*).

Furthermore, 1<sup>st</sup> year participants shared similar and additional challenges. Ten of them mentioned health problems due to the hours spent in front of the device (e.g., *headaches*); some had had eye surgery. Additionally, most of them took online classes, taught through the same

mode, and performed their tasks on the device; thus, they spent the entire day using and sitting in front of technological devices. For instance, *Interviewee 7* used her computer “24/7” as she taught for five hours, took classes for five hours, and studied at night after taking care of her family: *“It’s really bad, it’s damaging your health. I do not go out, I do not have any fresh air, today I didn’t go anywhere, I am here on my chair from 9:30 in the morning until now 9 pm, and still I have to study and plan for the upcoming week”*.

Another participant who could not tolerate prolonged screen usage stated that, at least in the traditional setting, they moved around the class during group work, which was now replaced by online breakout rooms (*Interviewee 9*). More participants complained about all the tasks being conducted in front of the screen (*e.g., assignments, readings*):

***Interviewee 14:*** *All the readings are in PDF format and sometimes the quality is awful. We don't have textbooks and that doubles the challenge. 3 hours in front of the screen and then maybe 5 hours of reading, and then doing homework, meeting on Zoom with classmates for group projects, that is a disadvantage.*

***Interviewee 16:*** *You're not only sitting in front of the computer, but, then, you do all of these readings. Sometimes, you may not manage to print, and you have to read from the screen, which is not good for your eyes.*

Furthermore, *Interviewee 17* had to attend classes from her parents’ place, for she needed her mother’s assistance in taking care of her children. Thus, she studied in the bedroom, which was comfortable but not appropriate: *“I wouldn't say it's the best environment I would imagine myself working in”*. While some interviewees had their own study space, others faced stress and distractions due to a lack of a peaceful environment. Many of them admitted to being disturbed and irritated by family members, guests, and background noise; they had to ask others to lower

their voices constantly. One of the students had to remain constantly muted “*due to ongoing construction work and loud family members*” (Interviewee 13). Another interviewee got distracted even though she had a private room: “*Sometimes, knowing that my family is hanging out in the room next to me, I want to be there more than sitting here and taking my class. The environment is not there; you can't see other students sitting with you in the same classroom trying to learn something*” (Interviewee 9).

Similarly, interviewees found trouble concentrating due to the distractions around them, such as receiving text messages, having children, or checking something on the computer. One of them mentioned that she already had trouble focusing in a natural setting; thus, she implied that e-learning made it a more significant problem (Interviewee 11). One learner had to mute everyone on Zoom in some cases, as she could not bear to listen to the lecture and students any longer: “*Sometimes, I just need to take a break, even though they give breaks, it's not enough, I can't sit in front of it all the time, so I am not always concentrated, especially because it's tiring, I just can't keep following with what they are saying*” (Interviewee 9).

Interestingly, Interviewee 10 believed that she might not remain as concentrated in a face-to-face setting; since she did not have to look around the room and saw everyone in one place (angle), she focused on the screen.

One of the learners mentioned experiencing a lack of comprehension due to online communication. Sometimes, it wasn't easy to understand tasks, expectations, purposes, and concepts; yet, she hesitated to seek clarification in front of others. Thus, she had to rely on emails instead of instantaneous in-person feedback from the professors. She highlighted that students faced problems and confusion with the materials and assignments, but the only source they had was *Moodle*; therefore, they relied on each other for assistance, which puzzled her: “*Sometimes,*

*it's stressing me out, because I get confused, are people not aware of the things that are going on online?"*. Additionally, she faced complications with understanding the professors' behaviors, which she assumed was due to the lack of in-person meetings: *"There are some classes that make me nervous, [on the contrary, during] some classes I feel really good and free to express my thoughts"* (Interviewee 7). Perhaps communication would have been more efficient in face-to-face classes, and students would not be as lost, especially because it was hard to contact professors online.

Furthermore, two interviewees remarked on students' simultaneous participation during class time. While *Interviewee 12* mentioned being stressed and intimidated to participate initially, and *Interviewee 9* was frustrated that everyone tried to speak at once, another noted that she still did not get the chance to participate: *"It's not good because your professors may think that you are not very active, that maybe you haven't done your readings, or that you have nothing to say, but very often it's just that you do not want to interrupt someone because everybody is already interrupting each other"* (Interviewee 11).

1<sup>st</sup> year participants also experienced technical difficulties, such as finding the Zoom links before every class (*Interviewee 7*) and having a reliable internet connection. While one interviewee was not bothered, these issues frustrated others, especially when presenting or taking quizzes. *Interviewee 9* mentioned feeling irritated, especially when people needed to repeat themselves several times. Two participants stated not being comfortable informing the professors about their challenges: *"Sometimes, there are issues with the internet and there is no way that you can tell your professor that this is not your fault"* (Interviewee 11).

Owning a suitable, well-functioning device was another issue. An interviewee reported that several times, her computer failed to operate: *"It just shuts down, it refuses to work"*

(Interviewee 17). Additionally, Interviewee 8 pointed out that her malfunctioning device affected her learning and participation. She explained that she could not afford to buy a new one, which put her under a lot of pressure and anxiousness, especially when expected to accomplish tasks within a time limit. She also shared a recent experience when she needed to download, access, and upload a word document for a quiz, but the Microsoft Office on her device did not run: *“I was waiting for Word to start but it didn’t, and I just had 3 minutes, I wrote anything and I uploaded it, so this will affect my grade and I don’t think this is equal for all of us, we are working with different devices and this makes the whole difference”*.

Participants with prior offline learning experiences shared two challenges. One of them stated feeling nervous during online classes (Interviewee 8). Though she described herself as an introvert and initially loving the idea of staying inside, eventually performing all her tasks and responsibilities in the same environment was a lot; thus, it affected her negatively: *“I think it’s helping me become more of an introvert. I think it’s not healthy for me, it was healthier that I go out and see people”*. Another participant found trouble performing interactive activities.

Although students could work together on a shared document and meet on Zoom, working online was not similar to offline, *“It’s not the same, really, interaction is missing here”* (Interviewee 17).

While most participants had to tackle many obstacles, one student had all the requirements for a successful online learning experience and presented herself as a cheerful and easygoing person, *“Even if it is like a technical issue, we fix it as soon as possible and we move forward”* (Interviewee 15).

Regarding coping strategies, the data revealed that two interviewees were not motivated. One of them felt that she would not maintain her academic excellence because of the conflicts



presented during online learning: *“I just feel like it will decrease, and I don’t want it to, under any circumstances, this is my only thing that I want to be perfect in” (Interviewee 8).*

One interviewee had excellent time management and preparation skills (*Interviewee 7*). She divided her tasks into several parts and accomplished everything ahead of time through the help of a timetable: *“I think I have good time management skills and on weekends, at least one day, I can dedicate to my family” (Interviewee 7)*. Despite “despising” every aspect of online learning, one participant pointed out her love for teaching and how her “*perfectionist character*” was helping her survive: *“I am a great student, I love earning A’s, I love being the best” (Interviewee 9)*.

A few students mentioned exercising as a strategy to overcome these challenges. One participant took gym classes, and another one exercised following YouTube videos. Another exercised for a few minutes during online classes before returning to her seating area. Additionally, two participants bought protective glasses to reduce eye damage, and two printed out the readings. While two interviewees hoped for circumstances to return to normal soon, another accepted the situation despite not being in preference of performing everything online: *“It’s okay, it is a job, there is no job that is easy” (Interviewee 10)*.

The following table (*Table 11*) summarizes the various implications of online learning on students’ overall wellbeing.

Table 4.11 *Summary of the Impact of Challenges on Students*

<b><i>2nd year students</i></b>	Stress Health issues Lack of motivation (more prepared offline) Missing details (more in-depth knowledge offline) Dissatisfaction (teacher response)
<b><i>1st year students</i></b>	Stress Irritation

	No personal time (Fresh air) Lack of comprehension Lack of motivation Dissatisfaction (group work) Physical Health issues Mental health issues
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The case study implies that the challenges TEFL students faced brought unfortunate consequences. While some had effective coping strategies, others struggled due to factors that were out of their scope.

#### 4.2.2 Participation and Motivation

Based on the data obtained from the instructors' interviews, *Professor 1* believed that learners had to be active since classes were generally communicative, which also encouraged them to contribute to the online classes. In some cases, the participant called on students to respond; thus, they were required to participate: *"They didn't have any way out."* In her/his view, students were always prepared for class; thus, there was no reason to refrain from participating: *"If they are ready, why should they be shy and refrain from answering the questions?"*.

*Professor 2* believed that students were mainly motivated as the experience with the TEFL group was pleasant: *"I think they were able to stay on track, obviously considering the circumstances, they were shaken, but they were able to stay on track and stay focused and readjust, I think in general positively"*. However, according to the professor's perception, the journey was less engaging. Students were physically present during face-to-face classes, even if they got distracted by their technological devices, which was not evident during online learning, especially when they had their cameras off: *"When you have students in the classroom they are your captive audience, they cannot escape, they just have to be there"*.

He/she tried to overcome this barrier by asking everyone to participate through Zoom's chat feature: *"I think most of the time students respond, but not always, that's how I shifted to*

*measuring participation level, some students are not responsive at all for different reasons, unknown reasons” (Professor 2).*

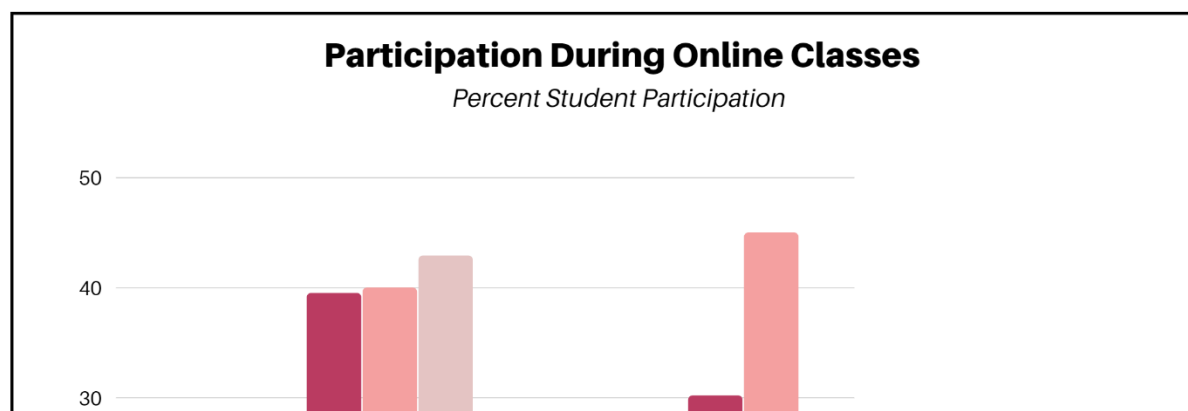
Nevertheless, he/she did not have a clear judgment and thought that the camera might not impact their presence: *“They might in fact be more engaged, it’s just my perception, just because their cameras are not on it just might be the opposite” (Professor 2).* It was also noticed that students, who were not as active during face-to-face classes, engaged more during the online lectures, which allowed the professor to recognize quiet learners' perceptions as they shared *“some of the best ideas”*.

In general, *Professor 3* believed that most students were involved and actively participating even if their cameras were off, except for a few. Nevertheless, when the professor asked them to turn on their cameras, they acted accordingly. 1<sup>st</sup> year students used their cameras more often. Also, everyone participated during the classes, given that the professor ensured that they all took part. Besides, the professor noted that students were motivated to attend the lessons as this was their only means of access to social life: *“Their social lives have become very limited so the classroom became that place where they actually got to have a glimpse of some of their friends or students, some of them haven't met each other or anyone physically yet” (Professor 3).*

The result could mean that most TEFL students were intrinsically motivated and engaged regardless of their on/off cameras.

Moreover, the following chart represents a summary of the degree of participation of surveyed students.

*Figure 4.5 Student Participation during Online Classes*



The findings show that the number of respondents who participated more during online classes (51.1%,  $n=22$ ) was almost identical to those who participated less often (48.8%,  $n=21$ ).

Table 4.12 *Participation Percent of Students Per Program*

Crosstabulation			Which program are you in?			Total
			C-TEFL	MATEFL 1st year	MATEFL 2nd year	
How often do you participate during online classes?	Rarely	Count %	0 0.0%	1 5.0%	3 14.3%	4 9.3%
	Sometime	Count %	0 0.0%	8 40.0%	9 42.9%	17 39.5%
	Often	Count %	1 50.0%	2 10.0%	6 28.6%	9 20.9%
	Always	Count %	1 50.0%	9 45.0%	3 14.3%	13 30.2%
Total	Count %	2 100.0%	20 100.0%	21 100.0%	43 100.0%	

MATEFL 1<sup>st</sup> year survey participants indicated to be slightly more engaged during online classes (55%,  $n=11$ ) compared to 2<sup>nd</sup> year respondents (42.9%,  $n=9$ ).

Meanwhile, of the respondents who reported to have been participating less, 57.2% ( $n=12$ ) consisted of 2<sup>nd</sup> year students, whereas 45% ( $n=9$ ) were 1<sup>st</sup> year students.

Results of crosstabulation for C-TEFL students cannot be analyzed due to their relatively limited sample size ( $n=2$ ).

Apart from that, during the one-on-one interviews, participants described their motivation level as well as activeness during online classes.

*Interviewee 1* explained that she was not motivated at the beginning of the transition; however, observing her professors adjust to the setting indicated that she needed to be flexible as well. As for participation, she was naturally an active student; thus, the setting did not matter, especially that she was always prepared. Her motivation level depended on her interest in the courses and the professionalism: *“I think the university has to take some precautions regarding this” (Interviewee 1)*. In contrast, five participants stated that they were attending courses only because they were mandatory: *“Sometimes, we have to take classes because of the credits, so it’s mandatory. That is why I take the class, and if it doesn’t interest me, then I don’t feel like focusing at all” (Interviewee 5)*. Two interviewees included that their motivation depended on their goals. However, three participants noted that their motivation was lower during online learning.

Additionally, some of the reasons why students participated included: acquiring a high participation grade and meeting professors’ expectations (5); the topic of discussion (4); the desire to learn (3); and showing awareness about the content, and engaging in pair work (6). Furthermore, while two interviewees believed that using the camera did not influence their engagement, the remaining stated otherwise. While one interviewee was happy about not needing to be *“presentable”*, two others believed that this impacted their participation. One of them explained that going to university obliged them to *“look nice”* and *“fit in”*, whereas online, both interviewees stayed in their sleepwear and turned off their cameras; thus, being and feeling less responsible: *“When you’re in your pajamas, you turn off the camera, you stand up, go near the window, go to the balcony... and then you miss 20 minutes of the class” (Interviewee 2)*.

Additionally, two interviewees noted that having their cameras on created attention causing them to participate; thus, they kept it off and did not feel pressured to be active.

However, *Interviewee 6* mentioned that having a turned-off camera demotivated her; yet, she still thought she participated more often online because she felt more free and confident to share her thoughts: “*When I’m [attending class] with a turned off camera, even if I know the answer to the question or I have some experience and I can share some information about it, I don’t get motivated to do it*”.

*Interviewee 4* stated that using the camera distracted her as she focused on her looks rather than the class. She was more engaged when her classmates used videoconferencing as she did not feel alone. Three participants admitted that without the cameras, they were distracted; their thoughts shifted to other responsibilities (e.g., *accomplishing other tasks*), especially if they were not interested in the class. Participants stated that they disliked it when professors obliged them to participate, thus tried to find alternative ways to respond (e.g., *checking what bright students typed and copying their responses*). Three interviewees noted that they engaged in online classes only when they desired to. However, sometimes this was impossible because another student had already given a similar response, which impacted one student’s engagement as she could not be “*fully in the process*” (*Interviewee 3*).

Similarly, 1<sup>st</sup> year interviewees shared their motivation and participation level during online classes. Four interviewees stated they were highly motivated since they were very interested in the classes and the professors' materials, including their love for learning. Additionally, three 1st year participants pointed that their motivation depended on the courses and professors. *Interviewee 10* said that she had a purpose; thus, she enjoyed the classes. However, looking presentable and socializing were more important aspects for 1<sup>st</sup> year students. *Interviewee 12* had not experienced offline learning, so the online setting was the standard. Four participants stated that the desire to become “*a successful teacher*” was a great motivator for

them. One participant noted that grades increased her motivation: "*You want to keep your grades on a good level, especially when your parents are interested; you want to appear accountable in front of them, with parents or whoever is interested, and of course you can tell yourself you're doing okay, you're doing your best*" (Interviewee 16).

On the other hand, *Interviewee 13* felt frustrated when she had to join the class due to the online setting. Four interviewees mentioned having low motivation; three of whom pointed out that their motivation decreased due to online courses (*Interviewees 8, 9, 11 and 17*). In the beginning, everything was exciting to them; now, they only accomplished their requirements because of their sense of responsibility, not interest (*Interviewees 8 and 9*), as stated: "*I don't know what to do to push myself to do the deadlines happily, I want this day to come when I am actually working on my assignment happily*". *Interviewees 8 and 11* had instances when they questioned why they pursued their master's education and whether it was worth it. One of them pointed out that her motivation arose from the offline classes' routines (e.g., *getting ready, commuting, having a meeting*), which kept her busy and prevented her from sinking into her thoughts.

***Interviewee 8:*** *I think the process of going to university and not having time to think is healthy for me, but I have all the time now, after classes, between classes, I have all the time to be with myself...it kills motivation, because you overthink and feel like what you are doing maybe is not the right thing.*

***Interviewee 11:*** *I know sometimes I have this feeling that I don't understand why I am doing this and I don't know whether it is worth it or not, but I try to kind of control such emotions and thoughts, because first year is almost over and I think it's already too late to change anything.*

Furthermore, interviewees clarified their participation level and the reasons that urged them to partake. Everyone participated; however, they were not all similarly active. While some desired to speak and share their thoughts constantly, others contributed solely when they felt like sharing or were obliged to participate.

*Interviewee 7* was always prepared and loved to express her opinions: “*For me, it’s a real class, doesn’t matter if it is offline or online*”. *Interviewee 13* stated that she forced herself to participate; thus, she became more active despite rejecting the setting. Two interviewees pointed out that it was important for them to receive marks for participation, so this was a reason to be involved in the discussions. Three participants mentioned how difficult it can be to participate in online classes due to its impracticality (*using virtual hands, being muted, being unnoticed*) or because others would speak simultaneously: “*I think offline classes in general will give me a better chance to speak because at least I am heard; In this case, sometimes, I am muted. Sometimes, I think it’s good that nobody heard me and another time I will say why didn’t they hear me say it?*” (*Interviewee 17*).

According to eight interviewees, not using the cameras affected their participation negatively. As one stated, “*The moment I turn it off and I mute myself, I just lose it, I’m no longer there*” (*Interviewee 9*). Another participant stressed the importance of turning on the camera to show her presence and respect to the professors; she disliked when others did not do the same as her. She stated that students did not focus and relied on the more active classmates; thus, she often accomplished all the responsibilities of group work by herself, which got very tiring and frustrating, especially that she desired to learn from others: “*I do not understand people who are switching off their cameras or muting themselves all the time, because for me, it’s like they are not there, not participating at all*” (*Interviewee 7*).



The following table (*Table 13*) summarizes students' motivation level and reasons for participation during online classes.

Table 4.13 *Students Motivation Level and Participation Reasons during Online Learning*

	2nd year students	1st year students
<i>Motivation Level</i>	<p>Level depended on course/professor interest <b>(Frequency=6)</b></p> <p>Low motivation because of online setting <b>(Frequency=3)</b></p>	<p>Highly motivated due to courses, professors, and knowledge <b>(Frequency=4)</b></p> <p>Motivated due to awareness of getting the education; not having taken offline before <b>(Frequency=2)</b></p> <p>Low motivation; four of them because of the online setting <b>(Frequency=5)</b></p>
<i>Participation reasons</i>	<p>Grade</p> <p>Meeting teachers' expectations</p> <p>Topic interest</p> <p>To learn</p> <p>Showing awareness</p> <p>Pair work</p>	<p>Grade</p> <p>Desire to speak and share</p> <p>Obligation</p> <p>Interest</p>

The results suggest that the online setting deprived most of the students' motivation; however, other reasons might be associated to this drop in motivation. Additionally, participation could be related to both internal and external factors.

#### 4.2.3 Workload and Fulfilling Responsibilities

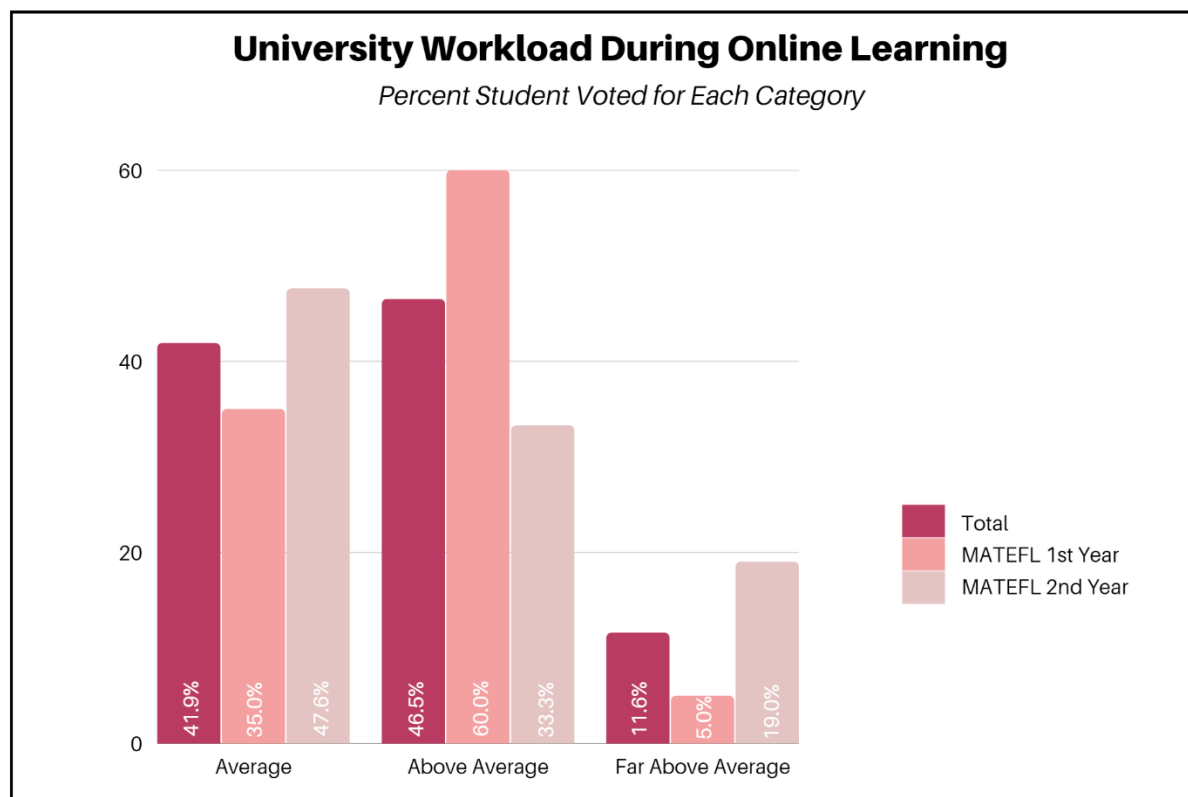
Regarding workload during online learning, two of the professors stated that students were more devoted and accountable for their education and assignment quality: *"I had this feeling that there was more responsibility, more work was being done, more people became perfectionists"* (Professor 1). Professor 1 also admitted that the load was a lot; thus, assumed that students worked more on tasks. For instance, during face-to-face classes, they accomplished some assignments in class or stayed a bit longer; which was simpler: *"In my efforts to be a good*

teacher, I think that I also loaded the students with lots of tasks and non-graded tasks, and the results were amazing”. Accordingly, the professor believed that students genuinely desired to learn and gave their best as they were not “after grades”.

Furthermore, *Professor 2* was not aware of any change in the workload; however, learners still submitted quality work. According to *Professor 3*, students were more organized and focused; they performed their tasks more efficiently and promptly: “They do better with more flexible due dates and extensions, kind of like opportunities for them to have another chance”.

The results imply that students’ workload might have been greater than usual; however, their responsibility level was undaunted, and they remained diligent to their tasks.

The following chart is a summary of the students’ responses regarding university workload during online learning.



*Figure 4.6 University Workload According to Survey Respondents*

The survey question included five pre-identified choices: far above average, above average, average, below average, and far below average. The results showed that 41.9% ( $n=18$ ) of participants claimed the workload was average whereas a corresponding rate of 46.5% ( $n=20$ ) considered it to be above average. Besides, 11.6% ( $n=5$ ) selected the option far above average. No student selected the below or far below average choices.

Table 4.14 *University Workload Percent of Students Per Program*

Crosstabulation			Which program are you in?			Total
			C-TEFL	MATEFL 1st year	MATEFL 2nd year	
How has university workload been?	Average	Count	1	7	10	18
		%	50.0%	35.0%	47.6%	41.9%
	Above average	Count	1	12	7	20
		%	50.0%	60.0%	33.3%	46.5%
	Far above average	Count	0	1	4	5
		%	0.0%	5.0%	19.0%	11.6%
Total		Count	2	20	21	43
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The percentage of MATEFL 1<sup>st</sup> year survey respondents, 65% ( $n=13$ ), who reported the workload to be more than average was moderately higher than those of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year 52.3% ( $n=11$ ). Interestingly, 80.0% ( $n=4$ ) of those who answered far-above average were 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduates.

Results of crosstabulation for C-TEFL students cannot be analyzed due to their relatively limited sample size ( $n=2$ ).

During the one-on-one interviews, three of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year participants believed that the workload was similar to offline classes, *“I feel like the assignments and everything are the same”* (Interviewee 5). On the other hand, the rest pointed out having more work to do, especially during the second online semester, which was overwhelming. However, it felt lighter during their final semester because they had fewer courses.

*Interviewee 2* said that professors did not consider time limits during online learning and assumed that staying at home meant they could manage to do more, which was not the case. Another participant noted that the workload maybe seemed heavier but in fact was not: *“When you are at home all the time, you’re waking up during your classes, and time flies so fast, and it appears to you as if you are overloaded with everything and you don’t manage to do anything”* (Interviewee 6). She also stated that this variable depended on the professor; while some professors assigned students with a fair load of work, others overloaded them: *“I am always frustrated, shaking, and I don’t want to do it. It is resistance...when you have lots of things to do and you don’t even want to start doing them. It also makes you very nervous, anxious”*.

Participants also shared the strategies they used to perform their responsibilities during these unprecedented circumstances. As a wife, mother, teacher, and student, *Interviewee 1* managed to complete all her requirements; She had goals and worked hard to reach them, even if it meant staying up all night: *“I have done a great job, sometimes I’m really proud of myself”*. Two participants mentioned having terrible sleeping schedules as they had to work on university tasks after completing life responsibilities, which affected their engagement during class; as they felt constantly distracted and in need of sleep. One of them stated that in order to fulfill the requirements, she had little or no sleep at all, and sometimes she did not manage to eat, which impacted her wellbeing:

*“In university, during the break you should go and eat something quickly, but now especially when you have meetings all the time, like last semester there were days I finished a class and [immediately afterwards] I had group meetings, even sometimes we’ve worked until 12 a.m. via Zoom, and I couldn’t manage to eat or even drink at least tea” (Interviewee 2).*

*Interviewee 3* tried to schedule her days; however, she lacked time management skills; thus, she was driven mainly by deadlines, feeling of responsibility, and the desire to submit quality work to learn, as well as satisfy her instructors. *Interviewee 4* mentioned not having time to accomplish all the assigned readings; thus, she compensated by listening during class. Online learning, distractions, and her job largely reduced the dedication and effort that she could have given her assignments. Another participant learned to complete her university tasks and responsibilities ahead of time: *“Before coming to AUA, I was lazier, and whenever there was a deadline, I would leave it for the last minute. AUA taught me to do my homework on time” (Interviewee 18).*

In contrast, two participants had no trouble completing their responsibilities because the class and work hours were convenient and flexible (*Interviewees 5 and 6*). One strategy they utilized was setting personal deadlines aside, to manage everything ahead of time and avoid feeling stressed (*Interviewee 6*). However, the same student (*Interviewee 6*) was affected at some point: *“When it was closer to the end of the semester, I had to take a break from my job, because I didn’t manage at all to do all the things”.*

1<sup>st</sup> year participants also shared their views on the university workload and the strategies they used to manage responsibilities. Interviewees felt responsible for their learning and planned everything to accomplish all their requirements, despite facing difficulties: *“I feel ashamed when*

*I don't manage to do something, so I would stay up all night to finish a task, on the one hand it's good, on the other it's affecting my health" (Interviewee 17).*

*Interviewee 7* opted to wake up early to complete her commitments to her family, students, and education; however, she did not sleep enough: *"Sometimes, it's affecting me very severely, I have headaches, I forget some stuff, I always forget my cooking, it just burns, because my mind is so full with other things to do, information, reading, and everything"*.

Five participants emphasized having an intense workload. *Interviewee 8* stated that pushing herself helped her fulfill requirements despite the unhappiness that online learning caused; She added that she gave less than she did during the previous semester, *"You don't know what people go through to come up with what they have"*. Furthermore, the interviewee felt like professors did not consider the other courses' weights; thus, everything was assigned concurrently. She believed that this could be changed and improved, especially after transitioning online.

Furthermore, many participants had trouble reading all the assigned chapters as they had plenty to cover. One of them noted that it might have been different if learning continued to be offline: *"I would have had to spend more time on my studies to be more confident when answering, I can't just look at my draft"* (*Interviewee 10*). Similarly, *Interviewee 14* was not pleased with having multiple projects and readings simultaneously, *"Some professors are really eager to give as many readings as they can"*. She felt confused with all the information she was reading when she was required to read a lot. Sometimes even, she did not understand the chapters' relevance to her coursework. Another interviewee felt that the workload was excessive for some classes; thus, stress and exhaustion affected her learning and concentration on the

material: “Sometimes we have 50-60 pages for one class per chapter, so we have like 3 chapters, overall it’s almost 200 pages to read. Sometimes, we just mix the material” (Interviewee 12).

One of the students pointed out facing difficulties when asked to remember citations, terminologies, and names: “The content is what’s difficult” (Interviewee 17). On the other hand, Interviewee 9 did not struggle because she was aware of the content and experience due to previous knowledge and exposure to online learning and teaching. Hence, there was no need for her to skim through all the resources and reading assignments: “I could just read the titles and I knew what it’s going to be about”.

The following table (Table 15) summarizes the students’ responses regarding workload during online learning and strategies to manage responsibilities.

Table 4.15 Summary of University Workload and Strategies to Cope

	2nd year students	1st year students
<i>Workload</i>	Heavier online ( <b>Frequency=4</b> ) Similar to offline ( <b>Frequency=3</b> )	Heavy ( <b>Frequency=6</b> ) Not that heavy ( <b>Frequency=1</b> ) Manageable ( <b>Frequency=2</b> ) No comment ( <b>Frequency=2</b> )
<i>Strategies to manage responsibilities</i>	Terrible sleep schedule Feeling of responsibility Approaching deadline Satisfying instructors Desire to learn Planning	Staying up all night Pushing oneself Working with a friend Feeling of responsibility Planning

The case studies revealed various perspectives concerning workload. While some learners employed successful strategies to perform their responsibilities, others struggled.

#### 4.2.4 Communication

During the Zoom meeting, Professor 1 noted that communication with students mainly occurred through email and during office hours; announcements were posted on Moodle. The professor believed that learners were comfortable contacting via email, and office hours were

more frequent. The particular reasons were that students passed by the professors' office for inquiries during the conventional setting, which also allowed them to listen to their peers' concerns, or they skipped in-person meetings due to time inconveniences. However, with the online transition, the professor accepted everyone's meeting requests, and no one felt excluded: *"One-to-one online communication kind of gave students more time to speak freely about the worries that they had"*.

Additionally, *Professor 1* believed that face-to-face communication with students was necessary to learn about each other's characters: *"Now in the online setting we are deprived of knowing the person, even the facial expressions, gestures, body language, everything that can tell about the person, I think meetings like that are very important"*. During the classes, *Professor 1* stated that student-student interaction happened through chat, shared documents, and breakout rooms. It was noticed that the atmosphere was more serious compared to face-to-face where humor was shared: *"Maybe that was the part people were missing, being close to one another, having a remark, showing this happy mood, we definitely missed that"*.

Similarly, *Professor 2* noticed that students connected through chat and breakout rooms; they were grouped a few times during the class. He/she assumed that they got used to virtual interaction and had discussions in English; thus, there was no need to monitor the process constantly. Due to the lack of physical presence and sensory connections (e.g., *hugging, sharing meals/snacks*), the professor predicted that the students' bond was impacted: *"This more physical material connection being absent is probably impacting the extent to which they bond and build relationships, maybe they are not as a tightly knit community as they would have been in face-to-face context"*.



According to *Professor 2*, communication between professors and students was more written (e.g., via *Moodle*). It lacked spontaneity, whereas during offline classes, they stayed longer or went to the office to ask questions: *“These are not happening anymore so when some classes are over, it’s over, unless there’s an appointment made right after class, pre-planned, predictable, so these unplanned communications, opportunities, they’re not there anymore”*. However, everyone adjusted to the new conditions, especially 2<sup>nd</sup> year students who grew more at ease at making appointments. Besides, there were more opportunities for casual consultation. As for face-to-face communication with students, the professor stated that it was important, but *“not critically important”*.

*Professor 3* assumed that students found a way to communicate (e.g., *texting, in-person gatherings*); yet, their bond was not the same. Rather than being grouped, students were more paired; they found partners to work with and support each other. The professor was unsure if TEFL learners habitually socialized due to their maturity and private lives: *“They don’t seem to be connecting with their classmates as a whole, it would be different if it were face-to-face”*.

According to *Professor 3*, professor-student interaction remained the same, but possibly transitioned into more written communication. They connected through emails and office hours regularly. However, sometimes, there was a miscommunication, for the information got lost on the internet: *“I think they don’t hear as much. It’s much easier in a class to have everyone’s attention and see that everyone’s listening”*. As for the importance of meeting students face-to-face, the professor noted that it would not make a difference as they are already meeting online; yet, it would be nice in a way.

Regarding communication, the professors’ perspectives indicate that both professors and

learners started interacting more casually and frequently, through online platforms. Besides, the responses suggest that students established a bond; however, it would have been more profound in a face-to-face setting.

The following chart is a summary of teachers' accessibility reported by surveyed students.

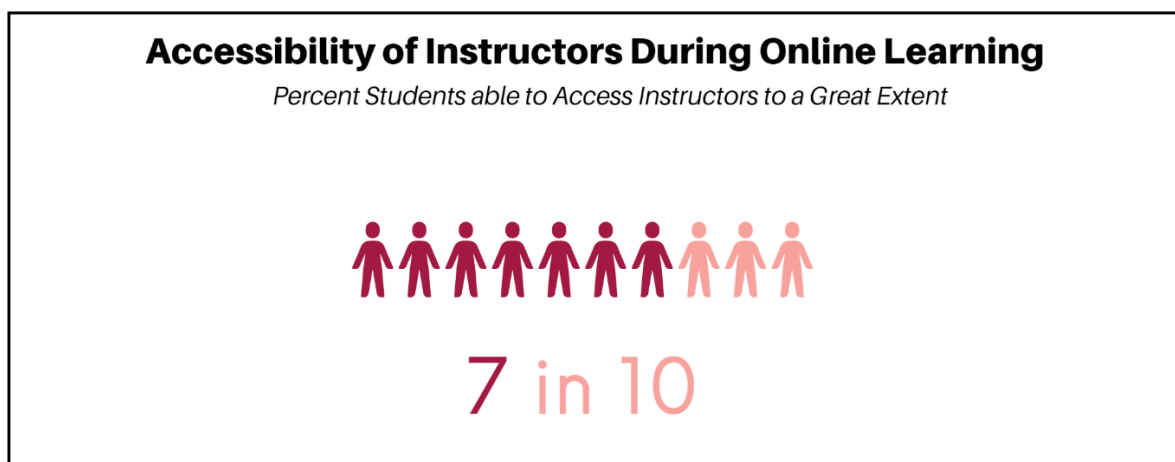
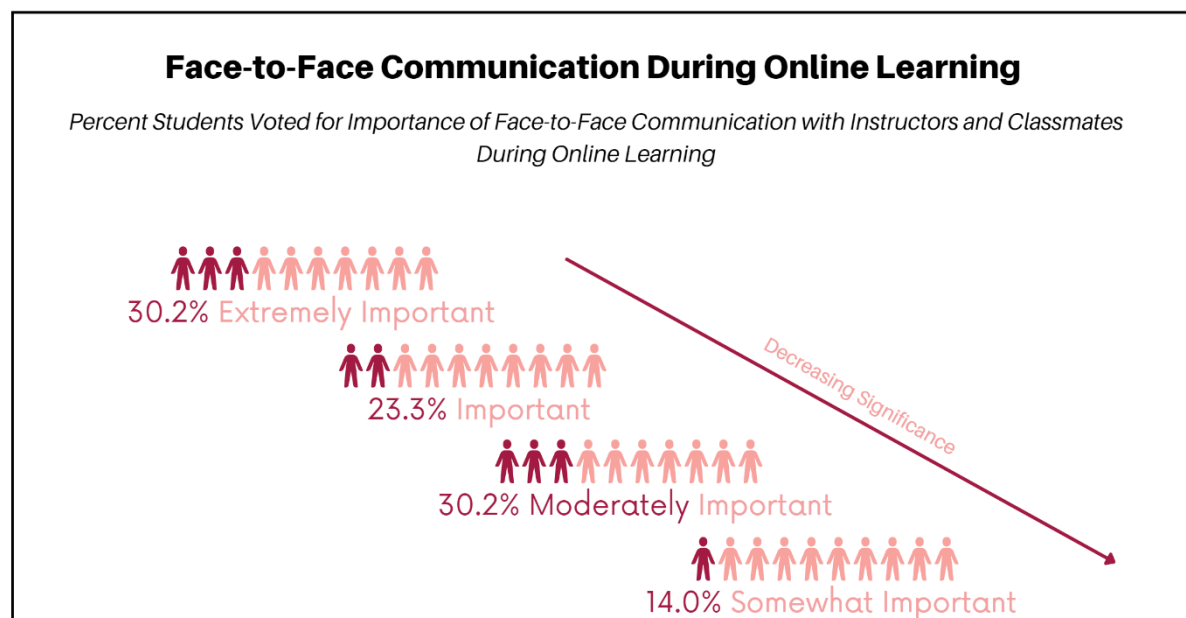


Figure 4.7 Instructor Accessibility

Regarding accessibility, 72.1% ( $n=31$ ) of surveyed participants responded that teachers were accessible "to a great extent," whereas the 27.9% ( $n=12$ ) selected "somewhat". The data indicated that professors were typically available.

The chart below represents a summary of the importance of face-to-face communication identified by survey respondents.



#### Figure 4.8 Importance of Face-to-face Communication

The findings showed that 44.1% ( $n=19$ ) of respondents reported that face-to-face communication was somewhat or moderately important, 13.9% ( $n=6$ ) and 30.2% ( $n=13$ ) respectively. In contrast, a significant number of participants (53.4 %,  $n=23$ ) believed otherwise, for 23.2% ( $n=10$ ) claimed to be important, and 30.2% ( $n=13$ ) answered as extremely important.

With the online transition, communication modes transformed as well. Although *Interviewee 1* did not have many opportunities to communicate with her classmates during offline sessions, she still preferred in-person contact, which, according to *Interviewee 18*, was easier and more enjoyable. Three participants enjoyed having real conversations during the break, which was something they lacked during the online learning: “*You don’t have the same feelings, you don’t feel emotionally attached*” (*Interviewee 1*). This could imply that learners yearned for separate or physical communication opportunities with classmates.

*Interviewee 2* stated that connection with classmates was of inferior quality as contact was infrequent outside of class. She believed that face-to-face communication was critical because peers helped overcome stress, “*Usually you share the same thoughts, worries, but in online classes we don’t have time for that*”.

*Interviewee 4* agreed that learners were more united offline; after having that experience, it was noticeable that the interaction was not the same. Additionally, face-to-face meetings were really important: “*I phase out a lot when I have to hear other people’s comments and answers. I think offline, I would’ve paid more attention, it would’ve been more effective*”.

Another participant felt that everyone was isolated online. Although she did not feel connected to her classmates, it did not affect her, for she was an introvert: “*The fact that the majority of students are turning off the camera may be the reason. There is this sense of isolation*” (*Interviewee 5*).

In contrast, another introverted participant missed offline communication: *“I am not a very talkative person, I don’t like speaking a lot, but I really miss that”* (Interviewee 6).

However, she understood that it was something far away from educational goals. A few participants managed to connect with classmates through social media and maintained their relationships with close friends.

Regarding communication with professors, most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students stated that it was successful and not very different from the offline setting. *Interviewee 2* disliked the lack of immediate feedback. She had to wait for days to receive an answer electronically, whereas offline communication was faster. Additionally, professors were more attentive to her utterances and accessible during face-to-face meetings: *“You can just go and knock on the door, now it takes a lot of time”*.

According to two interviewees, face-to-face meetings with professors were vital. One of them stated that sometimes, professors kept their cameras off during online conferences, and the student could not feel the communication, which also impacted comprehension: *“Eye contact and gestures affect everything”* (Interviewee 2). The other stated that in-person meetings were more beneficial because technical problems were time-consuming and reduced the allocated time for meetings, leaving an insufficient amount for purposeful communication online: *“You do not manage to talk to them properly. It’s not the same during offline mode where you can meet them in the corridors and ask one or two questions. During online mode, you need to write and wait for one or two days, even a week [sometimes], because they are too busy”* (Interviewee 6).

On the other hand, *Interviewee 3* noted that she never liked visiting professors during office hours; it was a very stressful situation for her to be put in whether offline or online:

*“If I have to ask personal questions, for me that day is stressful, I should wait for that time to ask and just run from the office”*. Nevertheless, emails were convenient, plus the conversation was written and could be referred to whenever needed. She stressed that professors were accessible and extremely patient.

*Interviewee 4* visited professors more during offline classes, but she had no problem contacting them online; accessibility depended on the professor. Finally, *Interviewee 5* felt connected with the professors, contrary to the offline setting.

1<sup>st</sup> year participants shared their experiences as well. Regarding communication with classmates, a few of them were able to make some friends. Three participants stated that even though communication was not similar to the offline setting, they built a bond during group work; but, it did not resemble real interaction (*Interviewees 11, 12, and 14*). For instance, *Interviewee 14* stated that it was unreal and unattainable as she only spoke with two students.

A few interviewees mentioned not feeling a bond. *Interviewee 8* stated that the university should have planned gatherings once a month, for the country was not strongly reshaped by COVID-19. She believed that the university should have recognized students' different personalities; she did not request for workshops with the entire university but only for the TEFL community.

Moreover, sometimes, it was hard to connect because characters online were misleading (*Interviewee 7*), as *Interviewee 13* stated: *“You can't judge someone without actually seeing them”*. Thus, it was essential to meet classmates in person as it affected learning in many forms. Misunderstandings occurred during group/pair work: *“Sometimes, this online thing is not working”* (*Interviewee 7*).

*Interviewee 9* missed the casual conversations she used to have with classmates as they walked into the classroom, “*Just being able to talk about anything, just a couple of words,*” but it felt odd online. One participant met some classmates offline, which eased online communication; nevertheless, face-to-face contact with everyone was essential, “*I like to see people, I like to be with people*” (*Interviewee 10*).

*Interviewee 13* was uncomfortable talking online because there were many participants and turn-taking was difficult to her; she liked her classmates, but it was difficult to bond.

*Interviewee 17* stated that even though they worked together and got to know each other, it was more professional, not personal, which was not enough for her.

While one participant made a friend and met in person, another's personality did not allow her to ask her virtual classmates for a face-to-face gathering. She was always isolated at her home, not because of fear of contracting COVID-19, but because initiating outings was out of her comfort zone: “*You don't know your friends and you don't have the chance to meet. I am the type of person who requires others to initiate conversations and outings with, so now I just end up staying home in my room all the time and studying*” (*Interviewee 8*).

There was a consensus between 1<sup>st</sup> year and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students concerning online communication with professors. *Interviewees 8 and 9* stated that communication was easier offline, as they could pass by the professors' offices, whereas now they had to send back and forth emails, which took a lot of time: “*The world is over by the time you get the reply, but that's not the meaning of communication, sometimes you have a question and you need the answer*” (*Interviewee 8*). *Interviewee 9* missed casually approaching professors before and after class or walking to their office and “*talking about random things*”.

*Interviewee 17* stated that she contacted professors more often during offline learning (e.g., passing by their office); She avoided sending emails for group works, because she did not trust the formality of the language. Another participant felt that communication was poor, but as there was no other option, she had to become acquainted to interacting with them online (*Interviewee 10*). Another participant noted that when professors explained new concepts or provided feedback, she preferred to have in-person discussions (*Interviewee 13*).

On the other hand, a few interviewees were pleased about online communication. *Interviewee 11* believed that not having to go to their office felt better. According to two participants, professors tried to be supportive and accessible (*Interviewee 14*) as well as kind, patient and helpful (*Interviewee 16*). Two participants thought that meeting with professors offline or online would not make a difference. One of them stated that she felt comfortable contacting them online when needed; however, she desired to meet one professor face-to-face, which *Interviewee 8* agreed on as well:

***Interviewee 7:*** *I generally love this professor's classes and I feel very comfortable with sharing my opinion, because I would not get criticized and I would receive very helpful feedback*

***Interviewee 8:*** *I am not getting the benefit that I can get from my professors. For example, I love this professor's personality, and I see that he/she has a lot of experience and a lot to share and he/she is willing to do those things with us, but just because of the online mode, I see this professor during the online class and then it is goodbye.*

Regarding the importance of meeting both classmates and faculty members face-to-face, most of the interviewees agreed it was necessary and believed that their relationship would be

different offline, *“Maybe the energy that you get [offline] is really different from what you get in front of the screen” (Interviewee 16).*

The responses imply that in-person communication was essential to many; however, insignificant to others. Additionally, interviewees indicated that professors were greatly accessible, apart from a few opinions.

#### **4.2.5 Mental Health**

In respect of mental health, *Professor 1* was concerned about the students' well-being. For instance, when they sent emails stating that they could not join the class (*e.g., feeling ill*), the professor wrote back to check on them. He/she believed that showing interest would not jeopardize the academic relationships. It was vital to reveal that everyone was human, even the professor: *“It's not right to give the impression that you're a superhero detached from everything else. I am concerned because I think that one's well-being also promotes one's good performance in academia”.*

The professor noticed apprehension among learners; however, not to the extent of severe mental health issues. Students generally discussed and shared their worries concerning their health and online classes: *“I think that luckily at least, I have not noticed any serious psychological problems. They were amazingly strong people” (Professor 1).*

*Professor 2* was worried about students during the transition; yet, not to an extremity. He/she believed that challenges were part of life, and humans were given the ability to conquer them while learning something in return: *“I trust they're going to be fine”.* The professor felt that some students were emotionally disturbed, whereas others did not display any sign.

Moreover, he/she provided students with the chance to pour out their emotions during the war, which was a crucial decision; otherwise, keeping everything within could have been



damaging. Students did not reach out to him/her for counseling; however, they might have sent a message indirectly (e.g., *asking about assignments*). Thus, there was the need to be less firm and more flexible: *“Perhaps, students asking about their assignments, how it could be adjusted, I could feel it comes from their emotional state also, so I had to keep in mind that these are unusual circumstances and provide advice”* (Professor 2).

Professor 3 stated that there was no intense psychological distress among students; everyone was able to concentrate and fulfill their responsibilities *“no one has failed”*. Nevertheless, he/she assumed that this was not the case with all of them; students had difficult times, primarily due to the war, as stated: *“People who've lost close people in their families would have a really hard time, but somehow they've managed to pull themselves kind of together and up”*.

The professor believed that classes became the place where students diverted from critical situations: *“It's changed the role in a sense, it is a place that somehow they can forget about everything else”*. Additionally, he/she noted putting a lot of effort into providing more opportunities for students to meet through online office hours, even on weekends, compared to face-to-face classes: *“I did find a bigger need for people wanting to just connect and talk about personal issues rather than academic issues, but I also found that people in classrooms shared a little bit more of themselves and asked for support indirectly”* (Professor 3).

The responses imply that professors acknowledged that students experienced emotional challenges; however, not to an alarming degree. They believed that TEFL department students were able to withstand the unfortunate circumstances that they were passing through collectively. The information in the chart below is a summary of the survey participants' stress intensity during online learning.

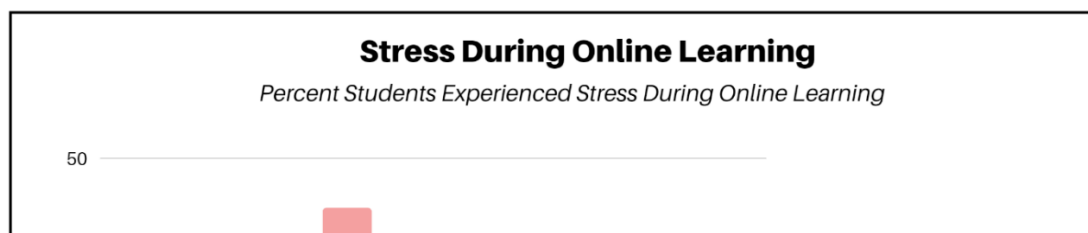


Figure 4.9 Level of Stress during Online Learning

The findings show that 25.6 % ( $n=11$ ) of surveyed students were not stressed at all, 30.2% ( $n=13$ ) were slightly stressed, 23.3% ( $n=10$ ) were moderately stressed, and 20.9% ( $n=9$ ) were stressed to a high extent.

Table 4.16 Stress Percent of Students Per Program

Crosstabulation			Which program are you in?			Total
			C-TEFL	MATEFL 1st year	MATEFL 2nd year	
Have you experienced stress during online learning?	Not at all	Count	1	5	5	11
		%	50.0%	25.0%	23.8%	25.6%
	Slightly	Count	0	9	4	13
		%	0.0%	45.0%	19.0%	30.2%
	Moderately	Count	0	2	8	10
		%	0.0%	10.0%	38.1%	23.3%
	A lot	Count	1	4	4	9
		%	50.0%	20.0%	19.0%	20.9%
Total		Count	2	20	21	43
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Out of the 44.1% of respondents who underwent more stress the 27.9% ( $n=12$ ) were 2<sup>nd</sup> year students, which was considerably higher than those of the 1st year (13.9%,  $n=6$ ). Whereas the remaining 2.32% ( $n=1$ ) who reported to be stressed a lot was a C-TEFL student; thus, it cannot be analyzed.

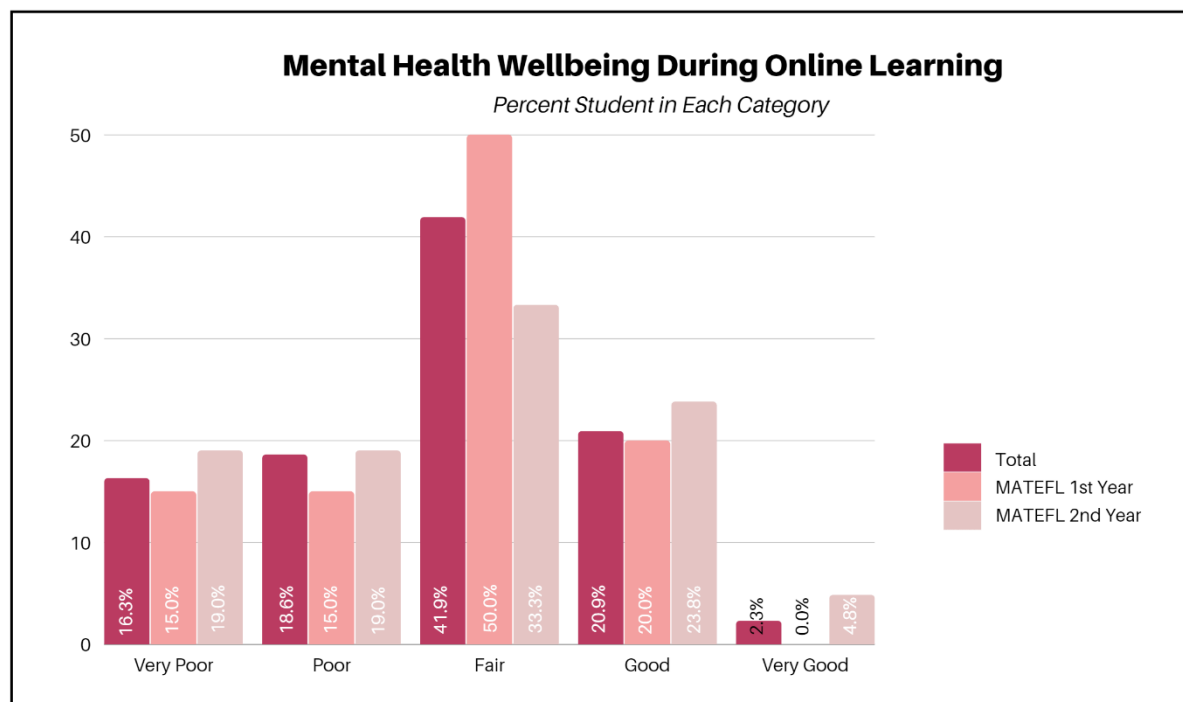
Table 4.17 Stress Percent of Students per Relationship Status

Crosstabulation	What is your relationship status?		Total
	Married	Single	

Have you experienced stress during online learning?	Not at all	Count	5	6	11
		%	29.4%	23.1%	25.6%
	Slightly	Count	4	9	13
		%	23.5%	34.6%	30.2%
	Moderately	Count	6	4	10
		%	35.3%	15.4%	23.3%
	A lot	Count	2	7	9
		%	11.8%	26.9%	20.9%
Total	Count	17	26	43	
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

The 25.5% ( $n=11$ ) of surveyed students whose relationship status was single experienced a modestly higher level of stress than the 18.6% ( $n=8$ ) of those who were married.

The following chart represents a summary of surveyed students' mental health state during online learning.



*Figure 4.10 Students' Mental Health Well-being*

The findings showed that 34.9% ( $n=15$ ) of participants struggled with mental health, whereas 41.9% ( $n=18$ ) responded being in a fair mental condition. In contrast, 23.2% of respondents' mental health was stable, as 20.9% ( $n=9$ ) reported their mental health being "good", and 2.3% ( $n=1$ ) very good. The findings imply that while many students were psychologically doing well, others were not.

Table 4.18 *Mental Health Percent of Students Per Program*

Crosstabulation			D1 Which program are you in?			Total
			C-TEFL	MATEFL 1st year	MATEFL 2nd year	
How has your mental health been during this time of crisis?	Very poor	Count %	0 0.0%	3 15.0%	4 19.0%	7 16.3%
	Poor	Count %	1 50.0%	3 15.0%	4 19.0%	8 18.6%
	Fair	Count %	1 50.0%	10 50.0%	7 33.3%	18 41.9%
	Good	Count %	0 0.0%	4 20.0%	5 23.8%	9 20.9%
	Very good	Count %	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 4.8%	1 2.3%
Total	Count %	2 100.0%	20 100.0%	21 100.0%	43 100.0%	

A considerable percentage of 32.5% ( $n=14$ ) of survey participants who answered having poor mental health were almost equally distributed among 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduates; 13.9%

( $n=6$ ) and 18.6% ( $n=8$ ), respectively, with the exception of one C-TEFL participant (2.32%,  $n=1$ ). A significant percentage (39.5%,  $n=7$ ) of 1<sup>st</sup> (23.2%,  $n=10$ ) and 2<sup>nd</sup> year (16.27%,  $n=7$ ) participants reported having a fair mental health state.

During the one-on-one interviews, the participants shared about their mental health state during online learning (See Appendix F).

*Interviewee 1* stated that the previous year was awful. She experienced anxiety and felt overhyped: “*For any reason, I would shout, I would go mad,*” which she believed was due to the stressful situation and being confined at home. However, she felt better when her teaching job returned offline. *Interviewee 2* underwent a lot of stress and anxiety due to the strict quarantine and the desire to have offline classes as well as distractions at home and other personal issues. For instance, she had situations where she needed to explain something to the professors, but they did not listen. Additionally, she experienced insomnia, “*I couldn't sleep for some time because I had too many things to do and then I couldn't sleep at all*”. All of these situations had a considerable impact on her mental state. Her coping strategies were exercising every morning, eating better, and leading a better lifestyle.

*Interviewee 4* stated that her mental health was terrible, especially because of the war and lack of interaction; she lived in the regions, and her friends were in Yerevan. Many times, she experienced low self-efficacy while she had to perform tasks. Her coping mechanism was keeping a diary, playing the piano, and reading a book about success. *Interviewee 6* felt “*aggressive*” and “*angry*” for having to deliver projects, which involved working in a real-life context and waiting for stakeholders' collaboration. However, her anxiety level was higher during offline classes; she did not experience any anxiety during the online classes. Her coping

strategy was distracting herself with other tasks and hobbies and setting a personal time to relax and clear her mind every night.

Similarly, the following participants' mental health was better during online classes; she only experienced intense stress during the need for classroom participation. As an introvert, online learning was great for her psychological well-being, contrary to offline courses: *“When we had to do some presentations during face-to-face classes, the fact that I was going to stand in front of these people made me feel pressured”* (Interviewee 5).

*Interviewee 18* experienced psychological distress during the beginning of COVID-19, *“Somehow, it also affected our learning,”* but felt better after adapting to it. Similarly, *Interviewee 3* stated that her mental health was normal, except when she was worried about COVID-19, *“I love staying home, being cozy, and being surrounded with my people”*. Nonetheless, she had a case where her mental health was disrupted; she experienced anxiety and stress due to a task's requirements and deadline. Her coping mechanism was being at home surrounded by her loved ones, the fact that she would graduate soon, and her desire to learn something new.

The following is the data gathered from 1<sup>st</sup> year participants. *Interviewee 15* stated that her mental health was good, and she had not needed any help. *Interviewee 12* said that university tasks distracted her, which helped her cope with her psychological struggles. *Interviewee 10* felt that everything was *“okay”*; she felt nervous; however, she could not connect it to online learning.

*Interviewee 7* felt relaxed because she worked from home; however, some personal life obligations (*having children, family members' health*) and university assignments made her feel

anxious and stressed, and distracted her during and outside of classes: *“Still, it doesn't affect my learning quality, because I know I have to do it. I love to feel myself as a student”*.

*Interviewee 9* mentioned feeling depressed, crying every night, and not eating at the start of the transition, especially with the strict quarantine; however, once her work switched to offline mode and she met her friends, she began to feel better. During the last semester, *Interviewee 14* faced anxiety, stress, and panic attacks due to many reasons, including the political crises and workload; she felt stronger in the time being, despite the elevated pressure sometimes, *“Maybe the support from family, professors, and groupmates helped”*. *Interviewee 16* experienced stress with her English language skills, lack of interaction with peers, and social distancing; however, she worked on herself and felt more comfortable.

Moreover, *Interviewee 8* shared her struggle with mental health. She faced various psychological issues, including constant stress and anxiety. As a child, the participant went through a mental health crisis stage (*crying, not wanting to go to school*) and recovered after a few years; however, the online transition caused her to relapse. As an introvert, she was reluctant about returning to campus; nevertheless, she firmly believed that she had to because the online setting deteriorated her mental health (panic attacks, existential crisis, overthinking, questioning choices): *“It's not that I am happy with going back to campus, but it will help me. When the president sent an email that we might be going back, I felt so scared and then I was alarmed like why are you scared? You went to the same place for years. What's wrong?”* (*Interviewee 8*).

*Interviewee 13* pointed out confronting stress and headaches due to online learning, which harmed her education and daily life. *Interviewee 17* believed that her mental health was terrible; she was stressed, anxious, and exhausted from the unknown future, unclear university assignments, and deadlines: *“Our mental health is really exhausted, so we need a big break”*. Her

coping mechanism was canceling her teaching classes when she did not feel like working and spending time with her children. Finally, *Interviewee 11* felt anxious and nervous (not only because of the online setting) and experienced low self-worth; her opinion was that: *“It would be great if the university dug a little bit deeper into this topic and they tried to understand that some people may have issues, and it was more neuro-divergent friendly. I wish this whole experience was more convenient for people who may have any issues with their mental health”*.

According to students, their mental health was severely affected as the surrounding circumstances and the load they were carrying was beyond durable. Nonetheless, the interviews also indicated that the forced online transition helped many overcome their mental struggles.

#### **4.3 Students’ Perceptions Regarding Online Teaching and Career Preparation**

*The third research question is: “What are TEFL students’ perceptions regarding online practical learning and future career development?”*

According to the professors’ observations, *Professor 1* stated that while some student-teachers already had the experience, others were not prepared. Preservice teachers had the chance to observe lessons a few times before their teaching practice. However, the classes they were required to teach also transitioned online; thus, they had to go through similar challenges with their own students (internet, camera on/off). Accordingly, professors adjusted the evaluation by modifying the grading system from a letter grade to pass or fail.

Although it was challenging, student-teachers discovered various sources to implement during the online mode. The professor noted that the faculty was unaware of how preservice teachers would instruct in a face-to-face classroom. It was a different atmosphere and required different methodologies; nevertheless, they had the opportunity to practice the online mode,



which was believed to remain a popular pedagogy: *“It has kind of limited some of the opportunities but opened up [room for] new opportunities”*.

The professor believed that an online-teacher training course was essential because it could not be conducted in the same manner as offline. Aspects of online pedagogy should be taught or addressed before teaching: *“We do not have enough evidence, which part of the lesson can be discussion, which part of the lesson should be application, how much should the teachers’ involvement be as opposed to the students’ involvement, there are lots of things”*. He/she would encourage students to practice both online and offline teaching.

*Professor 2* was not directly involved with Practicum and Internship. However, he/she heard that students were not as prepared because they were unaware of the setting; thus, they faced classroom management challenges (camera on/off). Nonetheless, the faculty and students were able to work it through altogether. As for career preparation, the student-teachers had the benefit of growing during the online pedagogy. The faculty was not prepared to instruct preservice teachers how to teach online; thus, they learned about online language teaching, especially to young learners. There was the need to make progress in the online pedagogy area as this was not an online-teacher education program. Likewise, *Professor 2* would encourage students to practice both online and offline teaching.

*Professor 3* thought it was more difficult for student-teachers to instruct online; some students despised it and were reluctant to teach; however, they eventually accepted it as this was their only option. Additionally, time management was a challenge; regardless, preservice teachers coped with the process. Online teaching limited student-teachers' opportunities to explore around the physical classroom, and the faculty could not observe them entirely, such as for classroom management. On the one hand, it was positive because pupils did not disturb the

class; however, it was not the best way to gain real experience: “*Classes are smaller so you don't have the experience of managing the bigger classroom or dealing with students face-to-face, but to say that they have not been successful it would be wrong*” (Teacher 3).

As for career development, the professor assumed that they were not as prepared. However, online pedagogy was not going to disappear; thus, they still received beneficial training. If student-teachers were able to practice online teaching methodologies (*playing games, having group activities, adjusting*); then, they would definitely be able to manage offline classes. On the other hand, their self-assurance might be affected during face-to-face teaching, but they would be able to overcome the barrier.

According to the professors' perspectives, online teaching was beneficial. Although student-teachers did not practice in face-to-face classrooms; it was not a significant limitation.

During the interviews, student-teachers shared their experiences with practicum and internship. The following is the result of 2<sup>nd</sup> year students. Four of the interviewees loved online teaching. They believed they were technologically savvy and loved using online games, music, and PowerPoint in their classrooms. *Interviewee 3* stated that slides helped students to concentrate and understand better as they visually saw the content. Two participants mentioned being unable to apply these methods during offline classes because the technology was unavailable.

Furthermore, at first, *Interviewee 1* responded positively to online Practicum as it was the only choice; however, she wanted to complete her internship offline. Even though the professors provided the opportunity, the process was demanding as she had to meet several conditions and record her classes for observation; thus, it was not applicable. Additionally, *Interviewees 1 and 5*

believed that their practical experience was positive because they were technologically skilled and taught their own students.

*Interviewee 2* explained that Practicum and internship were difficult because besides the war that coincided in the same period, the teaching platform was online: “*You need to send them to the breakout rooms and you are out of Zoom*”. Finally, *Interviewee 18* pointed out that the transition was difficult for teenagers during the war, but, irrelative to that case, the process was challenging. For example, lack of student participation distracted her: “*You call their names and they are not there, they just turn on the Zoom and do whatever they want to do*”. This would have been different offline, as she could have asked learners to concentrate, listen, or participate.

Two other student-teachers initially faced challenges with student-engagement, but after a few classes, pupils became responsive; one of them stated, “*You cannot force everybody to participate unless the activities are interesting for them; sometimes it affected me, sometimes not,*” which would have been more manageable offline (*Interviewee 6*).

*Interviewee 3* believed that she was not being of use for disengaged students. Constantly trying to win their attention consumed her energy. This caused her to worry and stress about their presence, success, and wasted finances. She was also nervous about the reaction of the teacher who would take over after her: “*When they write their midterm, they won't be able to do it, because they did not participate; it is not only my fault, they were not present during the class*”.

An additional challenge was technology, such as checking if the online activities worked on every device that learners owned; otherwise, there would have been “*major difficulties*” (*Interviewee 6*), or providing activities that suited the setting: “*I am not experienced to quickly shift and adjust the materials. Sometimes, I created an activity and it was not successful, and I got distracted and demotivated*” (*Interviewee 18*).

*Interviewee 4* had trouble teaching within the given time limit and managing deadlines, but the observers provided beneficial advice. One of the interviewees overcame the challenges by reminding herself that she would finish soon and not teach the group anymore.

The following list states the most favorite and least favorite parts of online teaching for 2<sup>nd</sup> year student-teacher participants:

Most favorite:

- Playing online educational games,
- Teaching own group,
- Students' active and happy responses and,
- Easier classroom management.

Least favorite:

- Students' cameras off,
- Classroom main teacher joining the Zoom and interrupting,
- Spending a lot of time on preparation,
- Technical issues, which had an emotional impact,
- Spending a lot of time writing a detailed lesson plan when observed, and
- Inability to attract students and make the material interesting.

*Interviewee 5* was always prepared for her class; but, she never thought about her speech ahead of time, which she was required to write in the lesson plan: "*Sometimes, I found myself not sleeping at all, I only slept 1 or 2 hours during the lesson day, I was awake until 5-7 am, and it affected my teaching and health*". As a result, she found herself asking questions that did not make sense, which confused her students. *Interviewee 6* stated that the classroom teacher

appeared during her training hours and caused her to fail an activity, which made her furious: *“It was something that couldn’t happen during offline classes”*.

Interviewees shared their thoughts about the university providing an online teacher-training course before assigning student-teachers to instruct online. One participant believed that student-teachers should have assistance and be taught how to teach online, *“It’s not the same. You can’t take the same book, come to Zoom and teach the same way you would have [in a face-to-face classroom]”* (Interviewee 1).

*Interviewee 3* stated that the course would be ideal, and she was discontent that she would not manage to take it if offered. *Interviewee 4* highlighted that if she had not had online teaching experience before the transition, she would have struggled; thus, the course would be a good opportunity for those who had never taught in that setting. *Interviewee 5* noted that they had to be trained before, as inexperienced students did not know how to teach online and use Zoom features.

*Interviewee 6* mentioned that it would be beneficial to work on the activities and platforms they could use while teaching online, similar to the “technology course”. *Interviewee 18* believed that it would be great, as she stated: *“It would be much more productive if we had some training,”* because practicum was very challenging, everything was new and *“it was a disaster”*. As for *Interviewee 2*, she stated that she would not enroll in the course: *“I will never try a training course because I am not interested in online teaching”*.

Table 4.19 Number of 2nd year Students for Training Course

Online teacher training course	Number of Participants
Yes	6

Finally, participants shared about their offline and online career readiness. One interviewee stated that she was not ready for offline classroom management. The participant had taught adults for a long time, but she recently started to teach teenagers offline, for which she was unprepared: *“You don’t get that experience during online classes, but during offline classes, you really need to have classroom management skills” (Interviewee 2).*

Another participant was unsure if she could teach offline; she believed that schools in Armenia were not technologically advanced and did not know if she would succeed with only worksheets and books, *“For face-to-face, I’m not ready, maybe if I have some training I will be, but for now not yet” (Interviewee 3).* She believed that classroom management was different, and she did not know how to behave in it. Additionally, she noted that face-to-face classes required more preparation and different methodologies. During virtual teaching, if students asked her a question (*e.g., word meaning*), she could instantly search online; however, in person, the situation would put her under intense pressure leading to lesson failure, especially with adults (*Interviewee 3*).

This case was also stated by *Interviewee 5*. She added that she could group adult students as she desired in breakout rooms, which was impossible during offline lessons. Although she believed that she could handle offline teaching, her classes would be more successful online. *Interviewee 4* noted that she could manage both settings; her only worry was the need to carry and print materials for offline classrooms.

*Interviewee 18* was happy about the online teaching experience as it helped her grow professionally. Although she felt that she could use the online materials regardless of the setting, she wanted to have offline training and receive constructive feedback from the observers. *Interviewee 6* stated that her confidence relied on the students' level, irrespective of the mode;

yet, she preferred virtual classrooms. She taught an offline class for 15 minutes, and it was "terrible": *I was so nervous during offline classes, I mixed everything, even the simple tenses, mixing 'do' and 'does' when talking, but during online classes that never happened*".

The following table presents information about the students' preferences regarding the type of setting they would choose to teach in.

Table 4.20 *Teacher Classroom Setting Choice*

<i>Choice as a Teacher</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>
<i>Offline</i>	2
<i>Online</i>	2
<i>Both</i>	3

**Interviewee 2:** *"Offline. Sometimes it can happen that I can also take online classes just to use the skills I acquired all this time, but I really love offline classes, it's really better"*.

**Interviewee 4:** *"Blended, because there are benefits in both. Having it together is really good, like one day offline one day online, based on different skills, maybe depending on the activities"*.

**Interviewee 5:** *"I started loving teaching online, it's become my passion"*.

As for 1<sup>st</sup> year students, the researcher collected the following data regarding student-teachers' experiences during their practicum.

*Interviewee 7* stated that her response to online teaching depended on the age of learners. For children, she preferred to teach offline and for adults online. During the practicum, she was pleased with the active students. On the other hand, others did not use their cameras, which affected her ability to involve everyone as she was unaware if they were present. The preservice teacher felt she was "*uninteresting*" and that students attended the classes by force. If it were offline, she would have reclaimed control over the students: *"It affects me as a teacher, because I*

*feel that I am talking to myself, and I lose my motivation to prepare something more interesting, because I think that they don't care, and if they don't, why should I put in more effort?"*

*Interviewee 8* shared similar views. Additionally, she believed that classroom management online was simpler since she did not need to control children's behaviors (e.g., *walking around, writing on the board*). However, she faced participation and technological challenges. She could not keep track of students who participated: *"This is not my class, I am not used to their voices, I don't know who is speaking, I am sharing my screen and at the same time, I need to look at faces, and then I try to scroll down to see who is raising a hand"*.

She did not know how to manage teaching her material and navigating through Zoom features simultaneously: *"I usually cannot keep up with sharing and un-sharing my screen, dividing breakout rooms, and technology and devices [in general]. I usually breakdown and I feel like I am paying attention to a lot of things and it makes me more stressed"*. She always felt stressed and afraid that something would go wrong (e.g., *when she had to record her class because the observer missed attending*). She also found difficulty explaining and transmitting information online, which would have been easier offline (e.g., *using realia*).

Even though *Interviewee 9* had mastered online teaching from her teaching career, she hated online teaching; it did not benefit her in any way. She desired to practice her practicum offline; however, the planning was very demanding, as *Interviewee 1* stated. Even though she received excellent feedback, the student-teacher was not interested as she had to deal with a personal challenge (teaching through the mode that she rejected). In her opinion, no matter how great Zoom was, online teaching did not work for young learners.

*Interviewee 16* felt that online teaching was more challenging than traditional teaching, despite her limited experience in the field. Identifying ways to handle young learners virtually



was tough. She experienced technical issues and reported one of the cases: *“I missed sharing the slide; They couldn’t hear my video, and I tried to share from another website and got stressed out. You have 5 or 6 windows open and you need to follow everything and you mess up everything”* (Interviewee 16).

*Interviewee 10* stated that the challenge was not with the setting itself but with teaching teenagers, since she had only educated adults. For the first time in her teaching career, she was very nervous. She stated that it would have been different offline; however, as she did not have the particular group-age experience, she was unsure if it would have been less demanding if they were teenagers.

*Interviewee 13* stated that her personal experience did not help with practicum because online teaching was completely different, and it was hard to manage the class. Additionally, *Interviewee 17* hoped that the internship would be face-to-face because she could not imagine fulfilling the requirement online.

On the other hand, *Interviewee 11* stated that online teaching was fun and might have been easier, *“No one comes and judges your body language, because they can only see half of you”*. Another advantage was not needing a lot of material, *“Everything is just one click away;”* It was easy to use Zoom overall, and using different features was not required with children.

*Interviewee 12* enjoyed co-teaching; she learned a lot from her partner and students, which also provided an online teaching experience for the future. Also, she liked practicing pedagogy in a comfortable environment (e.g., home). *Interviewee 15* was initially concerned, thinking that she would not handle the technological requirements; but, she overcame the barrier and valued her private classes: *“Now I teach freely and we have become a big family”*.

*Interviewee 14* completed the training with her private students; thus, she did not face difficulties and enjoyed the process: “*Maybe those who had to teach online for the first time to a completely new, strange class, they would have these difficulties, because you can’t build rapport with your students when you don’t know them and you just have the screen, that would be really stressful*”.

Some of the interviewees expressed their least favorite parts of online teaching. One of the interviewees stated that she disliked teaching children online, students not using videoconferencing, and the fact that she was never going to conduct virtual classes and apply online pedagogy: “*I could involve only some of them in the class, and the others who prefer to have their cameras off and mute themselves, I cannot. In real classrooms, you have different approaches, you can involve kids in various ways; but, online, either you ask them to turn their cameras on or participate, there is not much you can do*” (*Interviewee 9*).

Similarly, another interviewee stated that she disliked teaching young learners; it was difficult for them to listen through the screen or follow when the flow was interrupted because of the internet. She liked using many sources, online games, colorful material, audio recordings, and videos, which made classes interactive. Nevertheless, it was stressful. Thus, she spent a lot of time on material preparation and watched videos to learn how to teach virtually: “*It is challenging in the way that you have to figure out and adapt your lessons and activities to an online setting, because maybe they are written [designed] for offline settings*” (*Interviewee 16*).

Another interviewee disliked the inability to use eye contact and gestures when teaching online. However, on a more positive note, this setting saved time, and she had all the required materials (*Interviewee 10*). *Interviewee 11* disliked when the internet failed, and she could not hear half of what her students said, especially when professors observed the class. Internet and

technical issues were also a challenge for *Interviewee 12*, as she stated: “*We are not familiar with all of the options available on Zoom*”.

On the other hand, *Interviewee 15* was very positive and cherished every aspect of e-learning. She only disliked the fact that learners could turn off their cameras; however, she applied strategies to overcome the barrier (e.g., changing backgrounds).

Interviewees shared their perspectives about career preparation and training. One of the participants stated that she had offline and online teaching experience; thus, she felt professional in both settings (*Interviewee 7*). Likewise, *Interviewee 9* had enough training in both modes; hence, she thought having a face-to-face practicum was somewhat important. However, she believed that the online teaching feedback was not beneficial as she would never use it; “*If it was in person, I would have liked them to come to my own class, or a different language center and see me teaching the way I really would, I will, and I do*”.

*Interviewee 10*, with a similar background, was not concerned about being deprived of offline practice; She already taught in that setting and was constantly observed and given feedback at work. Alternatively, she would have wanted both online and offline practice: “*If I didn't have that work, it would have been very bad*”.

*Interviewee 8* was eager about practicum, but due to the transition, she hated it and considered dropping out because she was unwilling to complete the internship online. She believed that the training did not prepare her for offline teaching, which was critical in Armenia because, in reality, most classes were face-to-face. The student-teacher felt confused as everything she learned was meant for online education, yet she had an in-person teaching career, where she faced problems managing classes and getting students to listen. Thus, she felt unready, unprepared, and unconfident: “*It's one thing that I think we should be talking about, because if*

*there is no management, there is no learning. We are [currently] not considering it, we are not discussing it, we touched up on it for one lecture”.*

Similarly, *Interviewee 13* believed that online teaching practice did not serve for an offline education career; thus, she questioned her teaching skills as the program prepared for an online setting thus far: *“For people like me, who prefer offline teaching, it is really sad that we weren’t able to do our practicum offline face-to-face. We learn how to teach online, and when we go back to normal life, offline, it would be difficult to adapt”.*

Similarly, another participant believed that she was not confident to instruct offline: *“My teaching quality will suffer and I would have to go back and rethink many aspects of my teaching, because it’s mainly focused on online teaching”.* She hoped that she could complete the internship face-to-face and gain professional expertise in each setting: *“It’s quite a different environment and I think in the offline teaching, we would have more feedback and some kind of practicum for offline setting” (Interviewee 16).*

*Interviewee 11* believed that this practice provided her with online teaching experience, which will be of use if she decides to teach in that setting. Consequently, offline practical training was necessary if she chose to educate in that manner. *Interviewee 12* noted that she desired to practice her internship face-to-face to identify her abilities and overcome obstacles. Finally, *Interviewee 17* stated that the environments were distinct; the program prepared them for virtual teaching, which she hoped would not endure.

The table below (*Table 21*) reveals the setting that the interviewees would choose to teach in:

**Table 4.21 Teaching Setting Favored by Student-Teachers**

<b>Choice as a Teacher</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
<i>Offline</i>	4
<i>Online</i>	1

<i>Both</i>	5
<i>Unsure</i>	1

**Interviewee 9:** “Online is doable, but with kids not really, because a lot of their learning includes kinesthetic; like cutting, pasting, writing on the board, me helping them write, and communication with their friends...I would never do it in my practice, not in my classes [not even for adults]”.

**Interviewee 10:** “Offline, completely. I found this offline job just because I was tired of working online, it was really tough for me, so I thought maybe I should combine it, not because I like the combination, but because I like offline classes more”.

**Interviewee 11:** “I guess it depends on your working conditions. If you want to do freelance online teaching, it is a great option. If not, I guess nowadays we have lots of language schools; I am keeping my options open, so I will see how it goes”.

**Interviewee 12:** “It’s comfortable to be able to teach online, especially students from abroad. Offline interaction again is important and we cannot say anything negative about it, so I would like to do both”.

**Interviewee 14:** “I’d definitely choose blended teaching myself. Currently, I have both offline and online classes, and I think that gives a choice to my students”.

Regarding the need to enroll in an online-teacher training course, almost all student-teachers agreed that undergoing it was crucial. According to one participant, before starting her online teaching career, the institution provided a one-month training about online behavior and communication, which helped her significantly (*Interviewee 10*). *Interviewee 7* stressed that some teachers were not prepared for the concept and were completely against it or

technologically unaware, *“It’s very important to prepare mentally and physically, and the skills that we need for online teaching”*.

Another interviewee stated that at least webinars or workshops were required to familiarize themselves with Zoom: *“There are hidden options that we didn’t hear of yet, so it will be really useful for us to have that”* (Interviewee 12). As two student-teachers noted, the training was necessary to learn about Zoom, its functions, and online resources as they had to teach online when they lacked the knowledge (Interviewees 8 and 17). Another participant stated that it was necessary for those who did not experience the online transition; they needed some understanding of how online teaching and learning worked (Interviewee 11).

In contrast, Interviewee 9 stated that she could learn by herself, and she taught colleagues how to use Zoom. However, a training course for others would be beneficial: *“There are so many things you need to learn and it wouldn’t harm to have someone to tell you that”*. Conversely, one of the interviewees believed that she needed offline training rather than online because she currently practiced online: *“I think our lecturers adapted most of the stuff they do online, they demonstrate how to do it, they share slides and materials, and so we are already learning how to prepare for online classes. We have spent some time discussing and thinking about how it would work online”* (Interviewee 16).

The results imply that some student-teachers had a positive journey with their practical courses; others required more assistance for better outcomes.

Two interviewees shared some final thoughts; extracts are found in Appendix G.

## **Chapter 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Discussion**

With regards to the first research question about the attitudes of TEFL students towards the forced transition and success of online learning, the results imply that the education that the faculty offered throughout this tumultuous period was of high-quality. Satisfaction and preference for online learning varied significantly among students. Even though married students mostly preferred online learning, this appeared to be a more complex outcome which depended on multiple factors, part of which could be attributed to the students' relationship status, residence area, personality/character and year of study. Nevertheless, due to the limited sample and population sizes of this case study, the researcher was not able to weight these independent variables in terms of their correlation with the dependent variable in question. In general, the results imply that some participants were pleased and undisturbed, whereas others were displeased and overwhelmed. At the time of conducting the study, the majority of learners have already gotten acquainted with the setting and were unconcerned about their preferences anymore, as an entire year had passed since the forced online transition. A significant number of graduates regarded online education and the possibilities it imparted highly, indicating resilience. The latter statement is in accordance with Radha et al. (2020).

Other students were frustrated, arguing that life in Armenia was proceeding as though the pandemic was nonexistent; thus, the transition should have been temporary, as specified by Hodges et al. (2020) regarding the difference between online learning and emergency remote teaching. The program no longer provided the endeavors they envisioned, and in rare cases demanded a tuition reduction, which is compatible with the findings of Anderson (2020). A significant number of learners strongly believed that receiving an education was not merely about acquiring knowledge; it was about personal growth, belonging to a community, developing interpersonal skills, and supporting each other's journey. In contrast, some students were indifferent about experiencing the latter aspects of enrolling in a master's program.

Additionally, the results suggest that TEFL students were mature, accountable, and eager for knowledge, which kept them determined to pursue their education. Additional reasons which persuaded them included: wanting to graduate; not wanting to lose their financial aid; university admission; the unexpected future with many unknowns; avoiding feelings of regret; acceptance of the status quo; and the hope to return to campus. Regardless of the consideration to withdraw from the program and various attitudes towards online pedagogy, achieving one's goals remained more substantial; thus, students pushed forward in the face of obstacles. This contradicts the outcomes of Aboagye et al., indicating that learners desired to refrain from education until the context reverted face-to-face (2020). While a number of students acclimated successfully, others struggled.

Furthermore, the findings corroborate that professors were mindful of the circumstances, established a warm atmosphere, and eased the requirements, especially during the war. Thus, confirming the case study conducted by Quezada et al. indicating that the faculty initiatives, which were similar to the TEFL teachers' decisions, facilitated the adaptation to emerging



circumstances (2020). Nevertheless, the results also suggest that some students might need further means or support in order to feel comfortable approaching professors and presenting the limitations and struggles faced, without worrying about the emotional burden and concern of not being understood.

Moreover, students' perspectives might indicate that the educational success did not depend on the type of setting, but on the courses and quality of the presented content. Nevertheless, the results revealed that further adjustments regarding online learning aspects might be advantageous, to suit all students' needs. That being said, students' comments showed that the virtual classroom decreased public speaking and language skills. Besides, while learners were happy to socialize during the breakout rooms, the data suggests that the activities required more management and careful planning for meaningful outcomes. While online group projects were not ideal for some, it was more convenient and feasible for others; this success relied on group members, personalities, and the medium in which they communicated. Thus, this could mean that the transition prevented certain students from gaining the benefits and growth that in-person collaboration offered.

Finally, the data indicates that hybrid education seems to be striking a balance rather than running the program completely offline or online amid changing circumstances; and promises to meet the needs and interests of all students to a higher extent. The results imply that most students were willing to recommend future applicants to enroll in online classes at AUA; as the quality of online learning was not inferior to that of the offline setting. However, students would recommend otherwise if both options were made available, as online learning lacked the physical/human aspect of the overall experience, which in the current students' views was necessary if one was to achieve maximum benefit of the TEFL rich program and collaborative

atmosphere.

As for the second research question concerning the challenges and coping strategies adopted by students during the forced online transition, the findings of the case study revealed that the complications TEFL students faced brought about unfortunate consequences. While some students found effective coping strategies, others failed to synchronize between university load and personal matters.

Technical issues degraded the value of education by interrupting the learning process and quality of the information received and transmitted. The poor internet connection caused frustration and disappointment among students, being in line with the results of Mpungose (2020) and Krishnapatria (2020), which were strongly associated with conflicting reactions to the transition (Aboagye et al., 2020). Additionally, the inability to afford a proper device expedited a digital divide and unequal opportunities among learners. As involuntary challenges disrupted students' performance, it affected their motivation and readiness for class.

Furthermore, the responses suggest that the excessive amount of hours spent in front of the screen and attempting to fulfill responsibilities fatigued students, affecting their well-being and energy negatively, preventing some from offering their full potential and presence during classes, which supports the outcomes of Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot stating that student-teachers reached breakdown stage (2020). Interestingly, the results indicate that the workload varied between semesters and courses/professors. Alternatively, the amount of assignments may have remained consistent with the offline setting, however, the students' lifestyles may have become more demanding. Moreover, some cases revealed that students lacked skills for time management and prioritizing tasks, which is in agreement with MacIntyre et al., stating that teachers struggled with detaching their careers from private lives (2020). However, it contradicts

the inference that those who displayed negative emotions and tremendous stress escaped adaptation strategies, for the interviewed TEFL participants attempted various techniques to overcome the new and complex conditions despite the failed outcomes (MacIntyre et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, some responses indicated that teachers assigning projects simultaneously to students burdened them. A significant number of cases reported that the assigned readings were extensive, especially with the lack of tangible resources, leading to the inability to internalize and cover all the learning material. In some of the cases, it could be interpreted that some tasks triggered psychological issues. Yet, the sense of responsibility and productivity as well as the unwillingness to settle for less, pushed them to complete their academic requirements efficiently, though at the cost of sleep, health, family and career. Additional strategies included planning, talking to friends, printing materials, avoiding the screen, seeking medical help, setting personal deadlines, and taking breaks.

Moreover, participation was another inconvenience; however, it varied between cases. While some students were constantly involved, others were not, due to diverse physical and emotional factors. Answers indicated that distraction was an inseparable part of the online setting regardless of the degree of comfort of the environment; however, an uncomfortable environment intensified the students' tension. Most cases indicated that the camera's function was significantly interconnected to willingness for participation and concentration level, and they preferred to have it turned on. Surprisingly, rare cases implied that videoconferencing shifted focus to one's appearance, suggesting that it unfolded insecurity and interfered with attentiveness. Additionally, not using the camera encouraged anxious students to participate more. While it had some advantages, turned-off cameras in virtual classrooms mostly instigated feelings of loneliness.

Online setting in general limited participation, invoking annoyance and facilitating the copying of other students' insights (in the chat function). While learners desired to participate, findings revealed that many students preferred to engage in class discussions voluntarily, and others thought more time must be allocated for students' interference. Reasons that encouraged participation included acquiring grades, interest in the discussion, showing awareness, being prepared, and forcing oneself to take part in the conversations.

Moreover, the results suggest that some students found the online setting to be reviving and exciting. However, in many instances, it dropped students' motivation and forced high-achieving students to accomplish tasks out of their feeling of responsibility rather than interest in the courses/assignments, implying an unenjoyable educational experience, which is in agreement with Adnan & Anwar's results claiming that e-learning was less motivating than the traditional context (2020). Nevertheless, participants thrived through these challenges because they focused on their ultimate goals; which were to become successful teachers, achieve high grades, and make themselves and others around them proud. Yet, it is undeniable that some students showed high-level of motivation, which was attributed to the comfort and practicality of the new (online) setting. The results revealed that multiple factors might be associated to motivation level of students, besides the offline/online learning set-up, such interest in the course, professors' teaching methods, personal goals, and university atmosphere.

Both teachers' and students' responses imply that in-person communication was essential, and most students longed for face-to-face contact. Online communication constrained the clarity and straightforwardness of everyday discussions. Not knowing professors in-person (for 1<sup>st</sup> year students) and the virtual communication barriers affected students' understanding of the teachers' expectations and required tasks. There is evidence to suggest that these factors

might have contributed to anxiety, self-doubt, and nervousness. Nevertheless, the majority of responses suggest that instructors were accessible at all times, patient, and ready to help. While visiting professors during office hours might have been stressful and even mentally demanding for some, online information exchange was a suitable and pleasant alternative.

On the other hand, some reactions indicate that the lack of instantaneous feedback and asynchronous communication were inefficient. Physical interaction was critical to building a community and releasing tension. Surprisingly, while some introverted learners were not bothered about the lack of contact, others requested it, implying that in-person interaction was an inseparable part of human life. One student indicated that in-person meetings were essential to help timid students overcome their communicative shyness, therefore, the inability to provide such opportunities provoked undesirable emotional side-effects for them. Despite those virtual barriers, students managed to establish some connections; however, they were predominantly professional ties and largely insufficient to establish a feeling of togetherness and a sense of community and belonging.

Considering not only COVID-19 and online learning challenges, but also the country's political dilemma, it is no surprise that students' mental health suffered greatly in the year 2020; the conditions in which they attended to their obligations were beyond endurance. However, the results suggest that the forced transition to online learning constituted a large proportion of students' worries. Over time, this "new pedagogy" considerably reduced anxiety for some students as it shifted and occupied their thoughts away from the war and isolation scares while . Surprisingly, there was a dissonance among openly introverted students; while online learning provided safety and freedom for many, being restricted in one place precipitated an unhealthy amount of antisocial behavior and psychological distress. Furthermore, the results revealed

varying degrees of mental disturbances among the majority of TEFL department students; nevertheless, many of the cases gradually recovered their mental wellbeing after starting to teach in the conventional setting once again.

Some students, however, require psychological attention. Students forcefully abiding by the online education scheme rather than the ‘on-campus’ journey they applied to, while withstanding multiple challenges, induced anxiety, stress, and depression, leading to panic attacks, breakdowns, overthinking, reconsideration of educational choices, and unhealthy eating behavior and sleeping patterns, being in consonance with the findings of Son et al., (2020); Sahu, (2020); and Bozkurt and Sharma (page iii, 2020). Although AUA offered free therapy sessions, the results imply that TEFL students were not comfortable reaching out to them. Some of the coping strategies students resorted to seeking support from family members, breathing and physical exercises, and directing attention to different activities. Others’ psychological distresses were not directly related to the online setting, and, presumably, the online environment provided rather an escape for them.

In response to the third research question about practical learning and career development, the findings imply that practicing online teaching was an added value to TEFL students, as global education is expected to be reshaped after the COVID-19 pandemic to include a larger online-learning proportion. The results showed that some student-teachers underwent less uneasiness with their practical courses, as they had attended the online courses provided by AUA prior to their practicums and internships, as well had previous teaching experience and familiarity with their students. Moreover, many preservice teachers endorsed the comfort and pedagogical possibilities of virtual teaching. All in all, the outcomes showed that the many were comfortable with the online setting and utilized technology, which boosted their confidence to

teach via virtual platforms.

Meanwhile, inexperienced preservice teachers faced difficulties, which is in agreement with the findings of Lie et al. stating that teachers who lacked experience were likely to have an unfavorable journey (2020). The multitasking nature of online teaching tools overwhelmed and pressured student-teachers. Technological barriers restricted student-teachers from recognizing learners, involving everyone in the process, and attaining teaching authority, which could mean that meeting learners face-to-face prior to online class dissemination was critical to ensure e-learning success. As revealed in Kaden's case study, a personal bond with learners was necessary for a successful virtual classroom (2020).

Some cases indicated that student-teachers faced situations that led them to feeling self-doubt, stress, demotivation, and anger. Thus, implying "teacher burnout" (Sokal et al., 2020, pp. 3-4). Therefore, attending training workshops or courses which would prepare them for teaching online were regarded as highly critical and much-appreciated prerequisites of online practicum and internship, as supported by Roddy et al., (2017) and Kaden, (2020), since the setting demanded different approaches, behavior, skills, and resources. The latter statement is also supported by Paloff and Pratt, who found that training is critical to acquire the skills needed for the "art of online teaching" (2013, Chapter 2). Additionally, many TEFL student-teachers believed that teaching virtually was not attainable with young learners; yet, most of them were assigned to teach the younger generation. This could mean that preservice teachers had to technically and mentally prepare themselves in order to accept and proceed with the new reality, teaching in untraditional settings and extreme circumstances regardless of the age group.

Concerning career development, the online teaching practice limited the degree to which student-teachers felt prepared for post-graduation face-to-face classrooms. The results indicated

that preservice teachers were not equipped with essential conventional teaching qualifications, and required prior exposure to the setting, most notably in the areas of classroom management and behavioral expectancies and strategies, especially those who opted for that career path. Several preservice teachers admitted their inability to teach offline because of the lack of technology in physical classrooms. Although educational technology witnessed a revolution in the past few years, student-teachers believed that this was hardly true for the majority of schools in Armenia. This indicated that TEFL students required further preparation to teach in most schools in their homeland.

Overall, these findings are consistent with studies that revealed diverse learner perspectives. Participants who preferred offline learning battled with mental issues, demotivation, disinterest, and distractions; but on the other hand, had more time to spare for their families (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). Nonetheless, unlike Aguilera-Hermida (2020), findings revealed that TEFL students did not spare much free time by switching to online learning. Additionally, while a significant number of students appreciated the setting's adaptability, a few disagreed; similar to Rahiem (2020). Finally, while students appreciated the numerous benefits and safety-implication of online learning, a few complained of the increased workload, inability to concentrate, ineffective technology, and poor cooperation among teachers and classmates, such as Husseina et al.'s findings (2020).

## **5.2 Pedagogical Implications**

The discussions with participants and the data analysis gave rise to several recommendations for the forced transition and future online curriculum development.

First and foremost, the university must ensure that all learners have equitable access to online learning, as well as adequate learning resources, to eliminate inequalities and ensure



quality education and fair assessment for everyone, e.g. provide suitable devices for the deprived students.

Second, arranging seminars for the development of self-regulation skills in parallel with online classes is necessary. The researcher suggests having additional workshops tailored explicitly for the TEFL department's needs, not the entire university programs, to encourage the attendance of anxious/otherwise-troubled students.

Third, it is advised that each professor holds monthly in-person meetings with students individually to establish rapport. Strong relationships encourage students to approach their professors when needed to ask for advice related to improving overall learning experience and/or maneuvering psychological distresses or other causes.

A more COVID-specific recommendation is to conduct mental health workshops for all TEFL groups before returning to campus to reduce social anxiety induced by the implications of COVID-19.

As for the online practicum and internship programs, it is suggested to provide prior training and/or simultaneous assistance to inexperienced preservice teachers, similar to the institutions that provided mentorship for novice online teachers identified by Wortmann et al., (2008).

### **5.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

Considering this study's main limitation, it is recommended that future quantitative case studies include all TEFL-AUA students whenever applicable, in order to be able to make comparisons among students enrolled in all three program years.

While examining the students' responses to the forced online transition, mental health concerns were prominent among discussions with a considerable percentage of students. Thus,

the researcher suggests that periodic mental health assessment studies are conducted, as students try to cope with life's continuously changing circumstances, for its substantial impact on learning.

On a different note, the researcher came across numerous articles and studies regarding education in the post-COVID world. After the passing of the pandemic, it might be plausible to study the feasibility of the emerging non-traditional learning methodologies in teaching English in Armenian universities and schools.

Further suggestions include investigating learners' expectations versus the long-term reality in terms of learning objectives, online internship success and career-readiness.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be inferred from the findings that the forced transition to online learning was timely and successful in attaining TEFL department's pedagogical objectives. The results indicated that most students' responses were in favor of the teaching methodology amid the uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, and that online learning must become an integral part of the learning process at AUA, given that offline classes are also provided. The majority reported favorable impact on their overall educational journey; yet, some voiced alarming consequences for the online substitution of classes. While many students enjoyed the benefits of online learning, others struggled with mental disturbances as a result.

In general, online pedagogy is suitable for a wide range of learners who have diverse characteristics and ways of living, however, it cannot be a total replacement for on-campus learning. While a caregiver might prefer learning from home, another would rather attend courses on campus. Whereas a student with an introverted personality would feel at ease behind the screen, another would need to be physically present in class. Similarly, a learner from the

regions would feel inclined towards e-learning; conversely, another would prefer moving to the city to take part in the program face-to-face.

As for future online curriculum implementation, it is preferable that the online pedagogy is continually revised to suit the specific learners' needs. Furthermore, attention must be given to the students' accessibility to all aspects of learning, as well as mental health, to ensure equal and quality education to all students enrolled in the program.

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## Appendix A

### Teacher Interview Questions

1. How have you responded to the forced online transition?
2. Have you previously taught online?
3. How would you describe the difference/s between face-to-face and online classes?
4. How might your students have been impacted by the forced transition? What are some possible challenges for them? Has it affected learning quality?
5. What was students' attitude towards the change?
6. What was your role in assisting students during this transition?
7. How would you describe students' engagement through the screen?
8. How has digital communication among students been during the online classes?
9. How has digital communication among you and your students been?
10. How important is face-to-face communication for you while teaching online?
11. Do you have concerns about your students?
12. How has your students' mental health been during this time?
13. What was your role in assisting students' well-being during this transition?
14. If needed, have students reached out to you for guidance or counseling regarding their well-being?

15. How have assignments and projects meant for face-to-face classes been attainable? Has workload remained the same?
16. Have learning objectives been influenced by the transition?
17. How prepared have students been to teach online? What were potential challenges, if any?
18. Has the online teaching given the same opportunity for career preparation as it would when face-to-face?
19. How do you feel about online teacher training courses?
20. In the future, when classes go back to face-to-face, would you encourage students to practice both online and face-to-face teaching?
21. Based on your experience, if students were given the choice to choose face-to-face or online learning settings, or both, which one would they choose?

## **Appendix B**

### **Student Interview Questions**

#### Background:

- Where do you live?
  - Are you married?
  - Do you have children?
  - Are you employed?
  - Have you taken online classes before the forced transition?
1. I want you to go back to the first time you heard classes were going online. Can you recall your memories of how it felt to transition suddenly?
  2. How have you responded to the online learning overall?
  3. What is your favorite part of the transition and your least favorite part?
  4. How would you describe your motivation level during online learning?
  5. What are some potential challenges you have experienced during online learning, if any?

6. How do these challenges affect your learning, if any? How do you overcome these challenges?
7. What ways have helped you fulfill your responsibilities as a student?
8. To what extent have your face-to-face learning expectations been attainable online?
9. How has your mental health been during this time?
10. How do you feel about online communication?
11. How has communication between you and your classmates been? How important is face-to-face communication with your classmates for you?
12. How has communication between you and your instructors been? How important is face-to-face communication with your instructors for you?
13. How have you responded to online teaching? What was your favorite and least favorite part of online practice?
14. What are challenges you have faced / been facing if any?
15. How did / do you overcome the challenges?
16. How do you feel about online teacher training courses before starting practicum and internship?
17. How has this online teaching given you career preparation as opposed to face-to-face teaching?
18. If you had the choice, which setting would you choose?
19. What initiatives have faculty members taken during the transition, if any?
20. How have these initiatives helped your transition to online learning?
21. If given the choice to take online, offline or blended classes, which one would you choose?
22. Would you recommend future TEFL students to take online classes if offered?



**Appendix C**  
**Students' Survey**

1. Which program are you in?
  - MATEFL 1st year
  - MATEFL 2nd year
  - C-TEFL
  
2. What is your relationship status?
  - Single
  - Married
  
3. Do you have children?
  - Yes
  - No
  
4. What is your current job status?
  - Unemployed
  - Full-time employee

- Part-time employee
5. Where do you live?
- Yerevan
  - Regions
  - Abroad
6. What device do you use for online learning?
- Laptop
  - Smartphone
  - Tablet
  - All of the above
  - Other:
7. How do you feel overall about online education?
- Very satisfied
  - Satisfied
  - Neutral
  - Dissatisfied
  - Very dissatisfied
8. From the list below, select the option/s that has been a challenge for you during online learning.
- Distractions
  - Device
  - Internet
  - Practicum / Internship
  - Motivation
  - Participation
  - Feeling of stress and anxiety
  - Not having a comfortable environment
  - Other:
9. How often do you participate during online classes?
- Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Always
10. How has university workload been?

- Far above average
- Above average
- Average
- Below average
- Far below average

11. Have you experienced stress during online learning?

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Moderately
- A lot

12. How has your mental health been during this time of crisis?

- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor

13. To what extent have instructors been accessible for you?

- To a great extent
- Somewhat
- Very little
- Not at all

14. How important is face-to-face communication with instructors and classmates for you during online learning?

- Extremely important
- Important
- Moderately important
- Somewhat important
- Not very important

15. Is there anything else you would like to share about transitioning to online learning?

## Appendix D

### Survey Qualitative Data

Is there anything else you would like to share about transitioning to online learning?

43 responses

1. No, it's just an unusual experience I guess for all.
2. No
3. It's new and challenging. But it's not terrible. Let's enjoy it 😊
4. The transition was quite hard. Face to face classes are really important. The students really need and lack the communication.
5. If it is done properly it will bring good results

6. Online learning has the same advantages of the Face-to-face one. The only difference is the social interaction that is more normal at face-to-face classes.
7. no
8. I personally liked the online learning experience.
9. It is comfortable but real interactions are still extremely useful for people.
10. As teachers or future teachers we used to communicate a lot, share ideas, experiences during face to face classes. During online classes we lack this opportunity; I missed the feeling of community and the feeling of a whole.
11. No
12. 1.To be honest, the online classes reduced my level of anxiety and stress during the classes. As I am at home I feel more comfortable and relaxed.2. Secondly, I have discovered for myself many advantages of online teaching and learning, however they are very dependent on technical factors (e.g. internet, devices etc.) Overall this is a positive experience.
13. Online learning is awesome!
14. I DON'T LIKE IT
15. I miss my friends.
16. I wish we had never done that...or at least we will be back to normal reality as soon as possible. Regarding the previous question, these's no face to face communication in online learning.
17. It has its advantages and disadvantages. Adv: no time and location constraint , dis: lack of face to face interaction, health issues
18. No
19. It's really stressful. I think sitting in front of the laptop for long hours has definitely affected my mental and physical health. I am so stressed and the device really irritates me. However, when I started thinking that I really might need to go back to university, I figured out that I cannot do it now, as this online mode really saves time and is comfortable in that sense.
20. No

21. It was very comfortable for me as I have two small children and need to stay at home.
22. It has its advantages, e.g. not commuting to university and back home, or spending the breaks at your place. But the amount of time we spend in front of our screens is ridiculous. The classes, the projects, the homework - everything is done via computers, and, at the end of the day, it drains you of all your energy. Another downside of online learning is that it strips away the feeling that you are a university student. University life is not just about going to classes and doing homework.
23. Overall it was a good experience.
24. N/A
25. I would like to have face to face communication instead of online. But it is convenient those people who have work.
26. I like it as I found out that this kind of learning helps me feel less stressed
27. No
28. The thought of transitioning to online learning felt uncomfortable, but later on I discovered it definitely offered a number of advantages.
29. NA
30. I have enjoyed the process of shifting to online learning even though I was not familiar with it at the beginning. My adaptation took a while but overall I am very satisfied with the fact that I can join lessons with a device and learn the same way as I would during on-site lessons. I was introduced to online platforms and I was both learning and teaching during the pandemic. After doing so, I decided to continue my career as an online teacher because I realized how practical and flexible it is for me, and how I can use different tools (whiteboard, breakout rooms-i use it a lot for pairwork/groupwork activities, screen sharing) to teach my students online (e.g. on Zoom) as I was introduced to them during my online classes at AUA.
31. no
32. no
33. The beginning of it was challenging, stressful because of the unexpected turn of events. Yet, now it feels quite natural, and we have gained a huge experience of

teaching/learning online. Additionally, we have acquired a lot of soft skills, techniques that will help us in the future.

34. for working people Online education was really good, but anyway I'd prefer offline classes as it gives the sense of being a student and having a real contact with the professors.
35. Human communication and interaction is the only thing that sets us apart from robots. But with online classes, we became like robots
36. It's a new experience for me but I don't like it all.
37. Tuition fee should be deducted
38. Since online classes started I feel that I'm not communicative a lot, I have anxiety and I have become a very nervous person. At first I was very motivated and happy with the opportunity of studying at the best universities of Armenia- AUA, but now I feel like I do the assignments without any motivation, it's devastating to sit for so many hours in front of a computer.
39. I hope it will be over soon and will never come back again!
40. overall it was a good experience
41. It is very convenient for me learning from home
42. No
43. I had great experience

## Appendix E

### Extracts Concerning Recommendation to Take Online Classes

**Interviewee 1:** “We didn’t understand our AUA, I didn’t manage to love it. I really miss it, when I pass by I can’t say that it’s my university. I haven’t spent too much time there; you have to feel it”.

**Interviewee 4:** “For example, when we did videos during the class, I was more concentrated, so it’s because of the concentration, because of the overall quality of the lessons”.

**Interviewee 6:** “There aren’t major changes in the quality of education, it is something that is very personal; if you want to go to the university, to the building, it is more related to the physical things than the learning process”.

**Interviewee 8:** “To some extent, the online would work, I feel that the professors are doing their best, maybe it’s not working the way they wish it is but I see some of them doing their best”.

**Interviewee 11:** “Yeah, if they want to, of course. It would be nice for them to have the option to choose not the way it was for us”.

**Interviewee 12:** “If it’s comfortable for them, just take it, because they are really satisfying and the process is really engaging”.

**Interviewee 13:** “Absolutely not”.

**Interviewee 14:** “That’s something new, that’s something different, and they definitely have to try it because you know you have to try everything in life. I hope we’ll have blended classes in the future”.

**Interviewee 16:** “If their choice would be either half-half or all the classes online, I would recommend half-half. But if I would recommend to study at AUA because it’s online not offline, I would say sure you have to study cause it’s better to do it online then not to do it at all”.

**Interviewee 17:** “If they have no other choice maybe. If we know definitely that one two years later we will be back to offline education I will definitely tell them to wait, but because it’s not certain yeah because we are getting normal quality education of course I would recommend getting education at AUA but again it depends”.



## Appendix F

### Mental Health Quotes – Interview Extracts

#### Interviewee 1

I couldn't even sleep and then when you remember you have to wake up and take this laptop again it was really stressful, but now it is okay, I won't say that I like it but I'm used to it.

#### Interviewee 2

I remember I was having a presentation and we had a guest, she just entered our flat and she was speaking too loud, and then I was distracted during my presentation and imagine I was shaking I was really shaking, I forgot what I was going to say, it was really awful.

#### Interviewee 3

I have always loved writing but I don't know what happened, but I was in crisis, it was a stress for me, I don't know if it was anxiety or something, maybe because it was because I wasn't sure about my topic and the time was very fast, I changed my topic over again, and it was anxiety really anxiety for me, because I was trying to just manage to write and finish it.

#### Interviewee 4

I remember once I think it was before the start of the lesson, I was shaking and it was really bad, I couldn't concentrate I couldn't get myself to function normally, and it lasted ten minutes or something, it was really new for me and I didn't know what to do, it just got better

#### Interviewee 5

I always have this public speaking fear, anxiety, but right now I feel less stressed about that although I feel stressed but less stressed, it helped me in that sense as well. I turn off my camera first of all, of course when I turn it on I feel more pressure, but the fact that I can turn off my camera is helping me, and because I said I don't like attention, and when I'm offline, you have to stay there and everyone is looking at you, and you don't have the option to turn off the camera.

#### Interviewee 7

The readings sometimes are over, sometimes I have to complete like 400 pages per week, sometimes instead of sleeping I have to read, it creates anxiety. I have very little hours of sleep, I have to wake up early every morning and sometimes I do not feel well at all, like today, I have no power, I still have to study, and I have to talk to my parents.

#### Interviewee 8

Now that this is happening, I am having flashbacks. All those feelings started again, I am sure it has something to do with the learning mode, because I was in the same university, same AUA, almost seeing the same people, same country, what has changed? Only this.

#### **Interviewee 9**

Sometimes, I just get really angry, especially when comparing about these things: Why are others offline and why aren't we? And those minor things which are really irritating and those connection issues, the internet issues, everybody shouting at the same time, the breakout room, put pluses and minuses, that virtual hand things, and a lot of things, they seem to be minor but they are just irritating and yeah adding to stress and anxiety and everything.

#### **Interviewee 10**

I am an active person I like to do something and when i always sit i either bite my nails which is not so good, I need something in my hand, maybe it is some kind of nervousness, but still I can't say that it is connected purely with online classes, it can be connected with everything.

#### **Interviewee 11**

You do have anxiety and stress, and it kind of tends to build up and one day you are like I don't want to do this anymore, it can get a lot.

#### **Interviewee 12**

I had personal issues and concerns that I had some difficult times. I can say that learning helped me to overcome some stressful and mental issues that I had; just relieved them, it helped me to fulfill my time.

#### **Interviewee 13**

It's not a good feeling to be stressed and have a headache 24/7

#### **Interviewee 14**

Sometimes, they were really these periods when I had breakdowns, I thought that I may quit AUA or take a gap year, cause I thought it was really too much, the stress, the political situation, the workload, the assignments, and everything felt too much.

#### **Interviewee 16**

Stress and anxiety, I remember especially the first presentation as my voice was trembling, I was not confident and I was struggling with it, but later I overcame it.

#### **Interviewee 17**

Especially when we have some projects to work on, we see the due dates and we haven't even started. Sometimes it's not even clear what we need to do, we are given instruction, it's like the professor is speaking English, you understand what they are saying, but later you say what did she want from us? It's like you both understand and don't get what they want from you and it's terrible, especially because you think okay I didn't get it so I'll ask my peers or others, and then it turns out all of them are the same, so yeah that makes us of course anxious, exhausted.

**Interviewee 18**

For me, it was just physical health no mental issues

**Appendix G**  
**Final Thoughts Extract**  
**Additional Findings**

The following quotes were final thoughts shared by two interviewees.

**Interviewee 13:** I just wanted to add that the uncertainty of the situation makes it even worse.

We have no clue when we would go back to our normal lives. I don't want this online learning to become a new norm. We should understand that we are human beings, and not robots. We need face-to-face communication and human interaction. I have already lost my hope for Spring 2021 semester to be offline., but I hope that during the Fall 2021 semester, I can go back to AUA and hang out with my classmates at the cafeteria, library, Green Bean and Seroji mot. Also, there are vaccines coming to Armenia, so I hope it would make the process of transitioning from online to offline classes faster.

**Interviewee 18:** We say there is a lot of positive to this and some people are enjoying it, but let's face it like university and what I was applying for was some sort of experience that I imagined, this experience that I will be mingling with some people and networking with faculty and I am not getting the benefit that I can get from my professors. I think if we were all in the same place, the faculty, the students and everyone we would get this experience of networking with professors hearing from their experiences sharing, university is an experience, it's not just education it's not only about the quality of education okay maybe the quality of courses is not as affected but there are other things affected it's not only about the education that I get. I was

looking for some sort of experience I wanted to grow in terms of communications, I am not doing that it's making it worse actually, I am a worse communicator not a better one. I found out I can just put a document on the screen and I just read it. I don't know how to speak in front of a crowd. I applied knowing that I will be doing these things and it's not what I get. So it's not only about the education; those things are important, the experience, dealing with the faculty, with our friends, getting to know people this is something, this is so important and it's not like that even let's face it the big and good universities, it's all about the campus experience and they take it all away.