

Report on the EMCI Students' training experience with online classes and exams during lockdown¹

EMCI Projects Committee

During the General Assembly in September 2020, we discussed experience with conference interpreter training and exams during lockdown. Given its impact on our training courses and the persistence of Covid-19, it was decided to gather more information preparing two questionnaires about the way in which the abnormal situation was managed in EMCI Universities, what the consequences were and what advantages and disadvantages, if any, could be recognized. The Project Committee first submitted a short questionnaire to the 15 EMCI Coordinators by the end of September: based on their answers a longer questionnaire was prepared for last year's EMCI students which was then submitted at the end of October 2020. The first results of the Students' Questionnaire were presented during the online DG SCIC conference with the universities on December 4.

The first part of this paper outlines the answers to the open questions by the coordinators, while the second part presents a more detailed analysis of the results of the Students' Questionnaire.

1. Interpreting classes and exams during lockdown – the answers of the Coordinators of EMCI Member Universities

The first three items of the Coordinators' Questionnaire dealt with class organization, the platforms used and how feedback and evaluation in class was organized.

All classes were held online, both simultaneous and consecutive. The platforms used were mainly: Zoom, Skype, KUDO², Discord, Microsoft Teams, Moodle, but also GoReact, Google Meet, Blackboard Collaborate, InTrain, or Zoom and Webex combined, KUDO and also Televic InterpreterQ or Media Player together with VoiceBoxer. Both consecutive and simultaneous classes were held in a synchronous or asynchronous mode.

Consecutive classes were mainly synchronous, the most frequently employed platforms were Zoom, Microsoft Teams, KUDO and Skype. In some cases, classes were also asynchronous with students sending the recordings of their interpreted speeches. Feedback was given the following day in 'class', but also in written form or recorded.

Simultaneous classes were both *asynchronous* and *synchronous*. In the synchronous modality, KUDO was often used, sometimes involving two devices and not the virtual booth. When the platforms Zoom and Skype were preferred, speeches were either delivered online or a link or a file was sent to the students who then recorded themselves and sent the recordings to their trainers. Trainers listened and then sent their evaluation back to the students or gave feedback during class. Some trainers used Audacity to be able to listen to both the original and the interpretation at the same time.

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² The EMCI universities had an unlimited free KUDO account in the 2020 spring semester.

When the synchronous mode for sim classes was chosen, either the platform KUDO was used or two devices simultaneously, preferably Zoom and Skype. Another possibility was to employ separately an external source for a recorded file begun by students and the trainer at the same moment. Discord, Zoom and KUDO were used because they provided the option of listening to students in separate “rooms” or “booths”. Other options indicated were: Zoom and Webex together, KUDO, Televic InterpreterQ, Media Player and VoiceBoxer.

Discussions, feedback, and speech delivery in the remote mode were not very different from on-site training, as was reported in the answers to question 4. Instructions were given for handling technical constraints and the setup, in particular for sound quality, internet connection, headset and microphone.

Question 5 elicited the advantages and question 6 the disadvantages, if any, of remote training/teaching. Almost all answers indicated that there were advantages, but that they had to be considered within the context of the COVID-19 lockdown, for example: “we could have the classes and teach”, and “the interpreters/trainers don’t have any interpreting assignments, and have more time to work with the students”. The organization of mock conferences was also seen in one case as an advantage, given the difficult situation.

To contextualize the advantages, examples may help where the words “regularity”, “greater availability of the trainers” and “support” were mentioned most frequently:

With several trainers at the same time, more students could interpret at the same time.

It was easier for non-local trainers to give their classes (greater flexibility as far as schedules and time slots were concerned and some savings for the School which no longer had to pay for travel expenses).

More regular teaching, as trainers could plan classes more easily. It was also easier for students to plan practice sessions with each other. Greater availability of colleagues for mock conferences and exam panels.

Spare transfer time to the University.

Students seemed more relaxed and they’ liked such online training as something new.

Students said they felt more supported, and closer connections were felt with those who participated regularly.

We have done more and they all worked more regularly. We could concentrate more on each student’s performance.

The students had the opportunity (as also the trainers/interpreters) to test different platforms and thus prepare them for the future of the interpreting market.

Extra-rigour; stricter planning ahead; team-playing and staff teaching coherence; extra-motivation and responsiveness on the part of the students.

Examples of the disadvantages encountered:

Psychological and technical difficulties (connectivity issues, bad headset etc.) for some students, for trainers (two devices needed to listen to the original and the interpretation at the same time via two channels...).

Very time consuming, mainly because the situation was new, but also later on, particularly for those trainers who opted for the asynchronous mode of teaching and evaluating, and for the preparation of the speeches.

Lack of human contact (loss of the sense of communication, usually a driver for interpreting). Remote teaching was more tiring, because everything had to be planned very carefully, therefore, interaction was absent or was less spontaneous.

Mock conferences were organized almost exclusively via KUDO. Students participated in the SCIC conference when they were held in their A-language (questions 9 and 8) and when the time schedule allowed it.

Most universities tried to carry out their final exams (question 9) on site (sometimes postponing them). Some of the universities used a blended version of exams – on site and on Zoom at the same time, or on site and sending the double recordings to external jury members. Only a few schools held all the final exams via platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, KUDO or Youtube + Canvas. Final exams were, therefore, more time-consuming because the speeches had to be pre-recorded and longer effort was needed for the jury to evaluate all the speeches asynchronously. The technical side did not present difficulties; therefore, there were hardly any technical problems.

Entrance exams (question 10) were carried out mainly on platforms and worked well. Logistically their organization was easier compared to the traditional setting (you don't need to bring everybody – candidates and trainers – together at the same time; it was also easier for candidates from other countries or cities). In some cases, selection was based on the application. Interim exams (question 11), when held, were organized on platforms.

Items 12-14 referred to students with disabilities, but this year there were no such students.

The last question referred to this year's arrangements: two universities had chosen to be online from the beginning, six to have blended courses and six had decided at least to begin on site, and later, depending on the epidemiological situation, change, if necessary.

2. Students' answers to the questionnaire on interpreting classes and exams during lockdown

The Student's Questionnaire was delivered in October 2020 and 68 students from the 15 EMCI member universities answered. It comprised 41 items divided into four Sections: **1. Interpreting classes during lockdown (1-17):** to elicit whether cons and/or sim classes were on site or remote; what platforms were used; students' preferences; whether peer-to-peer sessions were organized; what changes, if any, were necessary in the way of learning; and how long it took to adapt to the new situation. **2. Mock Conferences (18-26):** how were mock conferences organized and what were the differences compared to the normal situation; whether there were more trainers than usual present and if so, what the consequences were (additional stress, better or excessive feedback). **Section 3 dealt with the possible advantages and disadvantages of remote interpreter training** and included two open questions (27-28) where students could express their opinion at length. The items in **section 4 on Exams (29-41)** were conceived to elicit information about

consecutive and simultaneous interim and final exams as well as entry exams: whether they were remote or on site; were the speeches live or pre-recorded; and whether the use of technology led to more stress for the students or less.

The answers received have drawn an interesting picture of how students experienced their conference interpreter training in the lockdown period between March-July 2020 and how they felt about it. They can also help us better understand what has proved useful and what detrimental in remote training, inducing a reflection on what can be maintained, changed or improved.

2.1 Consecutive and simultaneous class arrangements – Questions 1-9

This section includes the answer to items 1-9 about class organization and platforms used.

Consecutive classes were held almost entirely online, with 64 (94,1%) answers out of 67; there were 2 answers for both modalities, on site and online, and one for training only on site. There were 61 (92,4%) answers for the synchronous mode and 30 (45,5%) for the asynchronous indicating, therefore, that in some courses a mixture of the two was used.

The most widely used platform was Zoom (43 answers, 65,2%); it was also the preferred platform for consecutive classes with 27 preferences when used alone, 6 in combination with Zoom plus Skype, 2 in combination with Webex and 1 together with KUDO. Skype and Microsoft Teams were indicated by 22 students each (33,3%) as the second most widely used option; Teams received 8 preferences from the students, while Skype received two preferences when used alone and 1 in combination with Teams. KUDO was chosen by 13 students (19,7%) and obtained 6 preferences, and, in addition, one in combination with Zoom. Google Meet was the most widely used option for 9 students (13,6%) and indicated by 3 as their preference. Webex and Discord were ticked each by 7 students and GoReact by 6, but received no preference. The other possible answers were Moodle, Blackboard Collaborate and VoiceBoxer with 2 answers each, and, finally, InTrain and Televic InterpreterQ receiving no answer.

The item Other received 19 answers (28,8%) meaning that there were other platforms employed in class not included in our list but added by the students. Among these platforms Adobe Connect obtained 9 preferences and 1 in combination with Zoom, while Jitsi Meet and WeChat received one preference each.

Item 5 enquired into the reason for their preferences and the most quoted reasons were: the sound quality; that the connection was better; it was user-friendly or easy to use; it had an easy set-up; or allowed breakout rooms. Here are some examples of students' comments:

I don't have many tools for comparison as I only tried those two (Zoom and Discord) for classes, and Skype for group training, but I liked Zoom because I didn't have technical issues using it and it allowed everyone to turn on their camera, and the speaker automatically is put to the fore. I should specify: I only had consec classes, and have no insight as to how it would work for SIM.

Better experience, better feedback and it is easy to use. (Blackboard Collaborate)

Simple to use, well-arranged, easy to divide students into breakout rooms; it also simulates the classroom environment successfully. (Zoom)

I liked zoom for live lessons (like in class) and GoReact for homework since it allowed getting feedback with timecodes - much more convenient than just sending a record and receiving text file as a feedback.

It allowed us to create breakout easier. (Adobe Connect)

Skype worked very badly or simply didn't. Teams was fine, but it required a very stable connection for adequate use, which wasn't always the case. Moreover, it didn't have the option "grid view" at the time, like Zoom, which meant that you could only see a couple of people at the same time.

The answers to the simultaneous questions confirmed to a large extent the picture seen for consecutive classes: of the overall 64 answers to indicate the modality used, 59 (86,8%) referred to remote training and 2 to on-site training. The synchronous modality was chosen by 61 (95,3%) students, while the asynchronous by 31 (48,4%). There was, therefore, some overlapping between the 2 modes. Question 7 elicited the most extensively employed platforms and several options were possible: KUDO was the top scorer with 46 (71,9%) choices, followed by Zoom with 33 (51,6%), Microsoft Teams 22 (34,4%) and Skype 17 (26,6%). Both VoiceBoxer and Other collected 8 (12,5%) answers, Discord and GoReact 7 (10,9%), while Webex and Televic InterpreterQ received 4 (6,3%) answers each; Google Meet and Blackboard Collaborate were chosen twice and Moodle once.

For simultaneous training, KUDO was the preferred option with 29 ticks of which 4 were indicated together with Zoom. At greater distance, Zoom collected 8 preferences, Microsoft Teams 6 and VoiceBoxer 4. Moodle and Televic InterpreterQ were selected 3 times as well as Blackboard Collaborate which was also chosen once together with KUDO and Zoom.

When asked about their platform preferences, students were invited to explain their reasons. The most popular answers referred to the absence of connection problems or good sound quality, or to the fact that the platform made it possible to have a near real class situation, or that it was similar to a professional booth situation. Here are some examples of the comments made:

KUDO is a very intuitive and easy to use application. Zoom was more complicated when listening to the partner.

TELEVIC was useful because we could make a recording and play it at the same time as the original (with the décalage), the teacher could add written comments directly in the recording.

I didn't have any technical problems while using it, it wasn't as demanding for my laptop as KUDO. (VoiceBoxer)

Because it was specifically conceived for interpreting and it allows the recreation of one or more booths from home, as if we were in class, where, sometimes, instead of interpreting, we listen to some other fellow students who interpret in the booths. (KUDO)

It's specifically designed for simultaneous interpreting, no surprise it's the best one. It's the only platform that allows the professor to switch from one booth to another, just like in real life. (KUDO)

I found Televic very clever and helpful, because you could not stop the recording once started.

In some cases, preference was determined by the fact that it was the only available platform or that it was the platform with fewer connection problems than others, intuitive in its use, not difficult to use:

It was the only platform that we had available that simulated best real booth conditions. (KUDO)

It is a dedicated platform. You can hear the original speech better and it is very easy to use. The teacher can listen to the students very easily too. MS Teams is too complex to use for SIM classes, since you need at least two devices. (VoiceBoxer)

All three (VoiceBoxer, KUDO, Zoom) were very good and user-friendly with only a few small deficiencies (channels in KUDO for example, though I'm told this is now ok and you can select whichever language you want).

Because we could get an immediate feedback and it simulated the environment of a booth. (KUDO)

Critical aspects in their experience with platforms for simultaneous classes were also stressed:

We tried to use Zoom with the synchronous modus, but it required us to mute our microphones while having another device and another platform from which the teacher could hear our interpretation. This was aimed at preventing others from hearing the interpretation and letting them practise, optimising time. However, many issues arose. Teams was fine for the asynchronous modus. KUDO didn't live up to our expectations. It was hard to manage, the sound quality wasn't always good and some of the students couldn't even get access to the working sessions. The internet connection was also an issue. Overall, however, the more we got used to the platforms, the easier finding solutions to those issues became. (Teams, KUDO, Zoom)

KUDO and ZOOM both have advantages and disadvantages: KUDO worked fairly well, but on some days would fail for unknown technical reasons - since it happened unexpectedly, it caused disruptions a couple of times. ZOOM, on the other hand, was more stable but harder to work with from the organizational point of view (takes more time for the trainer to switch from one student to another, less convenient for working with videos and so on).

3. Interpreting classes during the lockdown – Questions 10-17

This section of the survey focussed on the instructions given to the students, the peer-to-peer remote sessions as well as the need and the time for adaptation to remote learning platforms.

We wanted to know if students had received instructions as how to record their interpretations prior to the exercises. 38 out of 60 participants (63.3%) stated that they had received appropriate instructions for the asynchronous classes in consecutive interpretation and 22 respondents (36.7%) had not received any instructions (Question 10). As for simultaneous interpretation asynchronous classes, there were 41 students (69.5%) out of 59 who had received instructions, while 18 persons (30.5%) had not (Question 11).

The next two questions focussed on the possibility to have peer-to-peer sessions to practise when learning remotely. For Question 12 we received 68 answers. 60 students (88.2%) stated they had had such an opportunity during distance learning and only 8 students (11.8%) had not. We received different answers as to the regularity of such sessions (Question 13). Sessions were organised by students more or less on a regular

basis. A group of students declared to have remote sessions almost every day (11 answers), 7 – three times a week, 17 – once or twice a week and another group of 11 students – once a week. It means that the majority of the students were motivated to work remotely with their fellow learners systematically, although four students declared to have remote peer-to-peer sessions only once or twice a month.

According to the majority of the respondents, remote interpreting training requires pre-training. This opinion was shared by 52 out of 68 students (76.5%); 16 did not agree with this opinion (23.5%). (Question 14).

Question 15 was an open question, which allowed the students to express their opinions on pre-training in remote modalities during training in conference interpreting. We received 62 varied answers.

First, a large group of answers given by the students referred to the psychological aspects of remote learning. For some students the use of remote training constituted an additional stress factor in their training and caused additional anxiety that could impact on their work. They stated that communication, understanding and concentration during a distance learning class could be adversely affected by this new form of learning. One respondent stressed that the mental exhaustion was greater in remote interpreting, therefore, the pre-training was important to guide the students through the whole process. Some other respondents stressed that more instructions than they actually had received were needed about how to work on mental stability (which is considered to be the hardest part in remote learning). Some additional problems, such as increased effort and concentration, appeared during remote learning. However, in the opinion of one respondent, this form of learning had some positive aspects as *“the stamina for online sessions was all day around”*.

The second group of answers was concerned with the necessity of preparation in the use of a remote platform. Only for one person was the use of the learning platform intuitive. Also, one person stated that the devices and programmes were very simple to use. However, the majority of students (40 answers out of 62) stressed the importance of pre-training (of at least 15 minutes), which was welcomed in their classes. For the students it was important *“to be familiarized with all tools”*; *“to get a test session”* of some kind to guide them through the process; *“to spend some time explaining the applications and giving the students scope to practise with them”*.

In the case of several students, there were technical problems which they were not used to (for example, poor sound quality and poor connections), as well as the *“home environment”* itself (equipment, silence, different distractions etc.). The students stressed the need to know how to use the technology, otherwise it might be a *“disaster”* in particular for *“less technically-skilled individuals”*. Overall, the students declared that they needed *“to be aware of the difficulties regarding internet connection and how to properly use the platform”* and *“to get familiar with the various platforms and get used to working from home and not from a booth”*.

The use of learning platforms in conference interpreter training arrived at different moments of the students' training. Some of them had already been interpreting for several months in a face-to-face way, so they were already used to interpreting. For others, *“it would be better to learn traditional interpreting before starting with the remote one”*. One respondent stated:

Perhaps, if the lockdown had caught us at the beginning of the course, it would have been more complicated to get used to remote interpreting, but as it caught us almost in the middle, we had no problem with the change". The students observed also that they needed to know "how to use the platforms and what changes from 'normal' interpreting.

Finally, as pointed out by another group of respondents, a pre-training in remote modalities should be given to the trainers as well. According to the respondents, it would be useful to develop certain guidelines for trainers regarding both the technical part and the optimal ways of planning remote classes. What is more, the trainers need to learn how to use the platforms before and need to get used to that kind of interpreting.

The last two questions in this section of questionnaire were concerned with the way and the time necessary to adapt to the new training modalities.

Question 16. 43 students out of 68 (63.2%) declared they had had to change their way of learning due to the remote modalities and, surprisingly, as many as 25 (36.8%) had not.

Question 17. Almost all participants in the survey (45 students) stressed they had needed time to adapt to the new modalities of learning. Their answers showed different approaches and opinions ranging from only 1 session (1 answer) to two months (1 answer). The majority declared to need only a couple of weeks to prepare for remote training in conference interpreting.

4. Mock conferences – Questions 18–26

The next section of the survey dealt with mock conferences. Before the pandemic, various schools held different types of mock conferences. At some universities, a mock conference was a regular (sometimes monthly) training session with one topic, several languages and several trainers present. At some universities it was a major event that was held only once a year. Because mock conferences could not be held on site in the spring semester of 2020, different universities adopted different approaches to holding mock conferences online.

Out of 67 respondents, 76.1% answered that their university held online mock conferences, whereas 23.9% stated that this was not the case. These online mock conferences were mostly held via KUDO (63.6% out of 55 responses). This result might turn out to be quite different if this survey is repeated after the 2020/21 academic year because the EMCI schools had an unlimited free KUDO account in the 2020 spring semester, which was very helpful. Some schools used both KUDO and Zoom, some only the latter, and some also used VoiceBoxer or Microsoft Teams to hold mock conferences.

Question 21 of the questionnaire asked if there were more trainers present during online mock conferences than usual. Out of 53 respondents, 71.7% confirmed that this was the case, versus 28.3% that stated the opposite.

The next question (Q 22) dealt with additional stress when interpreting in front of more than one trainer at the same time. Out of 48 responses, 56.3% were affirmative and 43.8% negative. At many schools there is often more than one trainer present during on-site classes, and so the answer is not surprising because many students are used to interpreting in front of more than one trainer.

Question 23 asked if the feedback was better than in person. This question was somewhat inapplicable because many students had no previous experience with an on-

site mock conference and really could not compare. Out of 50 respondents, 34% stated that the feedback was better and 66% replied that it was not.

In the next open question (Q 24), the students had the opportunity to elaborate on their previous answers. Forty-three students responded to this question. Their answers cover a very broad spectrum, and we can only quote some. Eight students stated that the feedback remained the same. Among them was also this flattering answer: *“Our trainers always make sure to provide quality feedback, be it in mock-conferences or during normal classes.”*

Those that stated that the feedback was better made the following comments:

- Different trainers see different things, explain things differently. So, this is better for the student. (Ten similar answers)
- *“By having more trainers listening to us, they can divide the work and thus listen to us longer. In this way, the feedback was much more precise and enriching”.*
- Feedback from an invited expert was very valuable.
- Written feedback feels more structured, but less spontaneous and relevant.

Those that stated that the feedback was not better argued the following:

- More emphasis on a few details. It was more difficult to make and receive general constructive comments.
- Possible technical disruptions due to an unstable internet connection or occasional platform failures could make the feedback less complete. (Four similar answers)
- *“During mock conferences, some teachers would get a bit lost on who they were supposed to listen to, or their audio stream would stop working properly while hopping from one booth to the next.”*
- Students’ technical problems were not considered in the feedback; trainers were sometimes not aware of students’ technical problem. Too much feedback on the technical quality. (Two similar answers)
- There were not more trainers for some language combinations. (Two similar answers)
- Much more time consuming. It involved many people, and there was very little time at the end of the class to share feedback for everyone.
- General, not specific individual feedback. (Three similar answers)
- Feedback is better in person.

It can be summed up and stated that the feedback remained the same in most cases, and that the students like mock conferences with more trainers that can listen to more students for a longer period of time and give them more detailed, individualized feedback from different perspectives. The negative aspect was the lack of personal contact and, most of all, technical problems with the connection and with the platform, for both the trainers and the students.

Question 25 dealt specifically with the personal feelings of the students and asked whether the feedback during an online mock conference was overwhelming. Out of 52 respondents, only 11.5% replied that this was the case, whereas 88.5% stated that it was not so.

The next question (Q 26) asked students to elaborate why the feedback was possibly overwhelming or not overwhelming. Some students simply referred to their answer to Q 24 (Was the feedback better?), while 26 gave an answer to this question. The responses recalled part of the answers given to the previous questions and they varied from appreciating more detailed feedback from a larger number of trainers to appreciating that the trainers tried to see the bigger picture and focus on both positive and negative aspects at the same time. On the other hand, some students expressed criticism that: some trainers did not hear what the students actually said; or they only provided a list of mistakes to the students; sometimes not enough feedback; or provided this only at the beginning of the conference as they were too tired at the end to offer more feedback. The students greatly appreciated it when the trainers did not repeat advice already given by other trainers. Time management and fatigue during online sessions of all kinds seems to be a focal point. It would be advisable to hold more mock conferences during the year, make them shorter, and plan some time for feedback. Perhaps it would be good to use breakout rooms to give individual feedback to each student (from the trainers that listened to a certain student) and then gather again for general feedback for everybody. During these unusual times, when there is a lack of eye contact and personal encounters, we are especially glad that one of the students stated the following:

The teachers were very kind to us during lockdown, not letting us lose focus, while also being understanding.

5. Advantages and disadvantages – Questions 27-28 Section 3 of the EMCI questionnaire asked about possible advantages and disadvantages of remote interpreters' training and included two open questions (27-28) where students could express their opinion.

Let us look first at question 27: **“Could you please describe the advantages, if any, of remote interpreters' training?”** Hearing such a question most of us would perhaps think that the answers would probably be negative, that remote training cannot have any advantages. Overall, we received 59 answers. Some of them develop or clarify answers to previous, more targeted and specific questions in the questionnaire. On a closer analysis we find that the vast majority of students do see advantages in remote training, or at least try to see them. Certainly, these advantages are not clear-cut and not always comparable. We attempted to divide the answers into several categories.

a) In the first, largest group (20 answers) we included the answers of students who see in remote interpreter training in consecutive, but above all in simultaneous, an appropriate form of training enhancing their professional opportunities and helping them break into the existing and future interpreting market, where, according to the students, there will be more and more remote interpreting, above all on various interpreting platforms. It is therefore necessary to prepare for this situation and learn to work with these professional interpreting and other commercial platforms. The students even recommend that in a 'normal' situation, that is when training returns to classrooms and booths in interpretation laboratories, they should continue to have the possibility in future to try out remote interpreting on commercial platforms, so that they will know what awaits them on the

interpreting market and will learn to work with virtual booths and ‘soft’ consoles, and thus be prepared for such contracts. Some examples of answers:

Being prepared for upcoming changes on the market.

This will probably be the most sought-after mode of interpretation in the future.

We know now how to face a similar situation in a professional environment. After this, I think it would be nice to maintain a "module" of remote interpreting (consecutive and simultaneous) for future students. In case a similar situation occurs or simply to let them know how a remote situation will work.

We were able to practise another form of interpreting which will prove to be useful to us in our professional future.

In this way we will be prepared for any kind of interpreting assignment, especially nowadays when onsite interpreting is so often avoided.

Getting used to possible future working conditions. Getting familiar with the technology.

I think it is very helpful to learn this form of interpreting as it will probably be more common in the future.

It has prepared us for a world in which remote working has become the norm and it has helped us to be more flexible.

b) The second category contains above all answers of those students (17) who note that the remote format was simply the only possibility under lockdown with the lack of face-to-face classes, to ensure that students received all scheduled teaching hours of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, self-training, mock conferences, and other practical interpreting exercises, including group self-training sessions with fellow students:

The only advantage is that you can keep receiving some training during lockdown.

Definitely the opportunity to keep working when there is no possibility to be on site.

Sometimes students differentiate in their answers between the synchronous and asynchronous forms of training (cf. previous questions in the questionnaire) and the subsequent impact on their state of mind and performance, while highlighting the possibility of exploiting the different platforms used for training:

Thanks to the multiple platforms available it was possible to recreate a class as in university, and to practise even when it was not possible to be all in the same room.

Using such tools as GoReact was convenient because the feedback is more thorough and remote classes overall don't let you waste time on idle chatting.

You can gain knowledge of the various platforms used for remote interpreting. You can be anywhere and still participate in an event.

When it was synchronous, I felt less pressure because it was just me in my room with my computer, so I could focus more and my performance was better.

The next answer may at first sight seem trivial, but it is very pertinent, particularly for multilingual interpreter training, for example in simultaneous interpreting in mock conferences on platforms, when all EMCI students of a given university participate together and where there are a number of speakers and guests:

You know the names of speakers, and can see everybody (from experience with this type of training we know that all participants have a nameplate and the screen layout can be set such that we can really see everybody – as if from a gallery. But obviously with one exception, we cannot see the interpreters in their virtual booths.)

It transpired that more frequent cooperation between universities and trainers in the framework of the EMCI consortium was possible:

More opportunities to practise with other universities/trainers, you get acquainted with online interpreting platforms that might be useful/necessary in the future.

Some students expressed appreciation for the greater commitment and availability of trainers:

Trainers seemed willing to spend more time with students (classes regularly went over time), students who prefer to be less 'exposed' (especially during a consecutive) seemed more comfortable/confident.

Training sessions and communication with the tutors were more intense.

But students also had the feeling that they themselves put more into the training:

We had to work harder so I believe I made greater progress. At least I hope so. We send in recordings frequently, and so perhaps we make a greater effort to ensure our interpretation is the best possible (because we know the whole interpretation is being recorded and will be sent).

Students learn to be more independent and solve technical issues on their own; they also interpret more often as the booths are not occupied by only some of them – everyone can turn off their microphone and interpret.

I learned to use new platforms and I tried remote interpreting. I think I wouldn't have had this possibility if there were no covid crisis.

Forced to record oneself and listen to one's own delivery.

c) We had more free time. That would sum up the third group of answers (16 in all). A number of students judged positively the fact that they did not have to travel to the university for classes, as travelling takes up a lot of time which can be used differently and better. This applies also to trainers. They can link up to training from home, from the comfort of their own room, have a coffee or tea, perhaps be casually dressed and not wear makeup. Some specific examples:

No commuting time. Doing this in practice might be helpful in the future. No need to leave the comfort of your own home; overall image (clothes, make up, ...) less important.

Focus, feeling like we have more time to read, sleep, even do indoor exercise, general mind and body benefit of not commuting.

You don't need to travel from far away to get to class. Sometimes, you can feel more relaxed, but that is not a) always good b) always true.

You do not lose time going to the university facilities.

Schedule is more flexible.

You are usually in a cosy place and the level of anxiety is reduced.

The chance to be in a more comfortable environment, without having to move from one place to another and to save time in the daily routine.

In a sense, it became easier for the trainers to plan classes; for example, they did not need to look for babysitters. So, I see this aspect of planning as an advantage.

It also frees up more time for the learning process that would otherwise be spent on the way to the university and back.

No time spent on commuting, more trainers or external assessors could be present at once, possibility to prepare the students for new real work situations (possibly the new normal).

We can also find here one clear and explicit ecological view:

You do not waste time going to classes, which is really comfortable for commuters and has a positive impact on oil and energy consumption.

We could sum up this third group of answers as follows:

It gives you more freedom, but I prefer onsite interpreting.

d) The last group (6 replies) is unequivocal and expresses a clear no: there are no advantages in this kind of training. Some answers:

I don't see any advantage in it. Interpretation is about communication and I feel the need to be near the trainer/client.

On the interpreting itself, I don't think I see any advantages.

There was also one very personal reply:

In my experience none. I believe you need more hours of training to really learn and improve your skills, whereas in my case I received far fewer hours of teaching than I would if teaching were on site. Also, teaching should be synchronous, because it doesn't make sense for me to do a consecutive or simultaneous to record and then receive feedback [...] later on a call, where I cannot even remember why I made the decisions I made when interpreting or what I did not understand and why.

This last group of replies gives us an excellent bridge to move on seamlessly to question 28: **“Could you please describe the disadvantages, if any, of remote interpreters' training?”** Here we received 66 replies.

Again, we shall try to sort these, at least provisionally, into three somewhat broadly defined, large categories. The first group addresses more the technical aspects related to remote training, the second deals on the other hand with the subjective feelings of the students, and the third concentrates on the organisation of training and the demands it makes. It is, however, harder to categorise than for question 27, as a number of answers mention together a number of types of drawbacks. For this reason, we shall not indicate the number of replies for each category, as they overlap and for the most part basically take all aspects of disadvantages together.

a) In the first group the disadvantages most often referred to explicitly have been included, namely **technical problems** such as: unstable Internet connections, be it fixed connection or WiFi; background noise or being disturbed by members of the family or roommates; poor quality of sound or image; the need to cope, while interpreting, with further activities related to the use of various functions of a given platform used for the training (switching a microphone on and off, “chatting”, increasing and decreasing volume, launching and ending the recording of one’s own interpretation or of the source speech, etc.):

Internet connection and sound and video quality.

I was worried about all the things I had to monitor; the audio of the files was most of the time difficult to understand; also the WiFi stability was very bad.

The main disadvantage was my laptop and Internet connection, it didn’t work properly very often and it couldn’t handle KUDO, sometimes I wanted to throw it out of the window. It worked with other platforms though.

Possibility of technical problems, more difficult to connect.

You are not in the right environment (alone and in a booth), I could hear additional noises like cars in the streets and my roommates moving around. You are constantly worried about the functioning of the platform and your Internet connection.

Classes were shorter because we lost time getting ready and they were much more tiring than usual classes. Sound and image were not the best most of the time.

b) In the second category, subjective psychological and social factors have been included which students indicate as important in remote training, and their impact on the students’ wellbeing: greater stress and fatigue; depression, social isolation and the impossibility of personal contact or direct cooperation with colleagues in the booth, or with trainers; less empathy with the topic being interpreted; and loss of context. A few replies to illustrate:

Remote is very tiring, more demanding psychologically and more stressful.

Not seeing the booth mate is a major disadvantage.

As mentioned already, the increased exhaustion, feeling much more drained than after onsite sessions.

Communication becomes very inanimate, sterile, and it’s even harder to move away from an academic approach and adopt a more pragmatic and professional approach.

Stress factors. Screen time during classes and during preparation take up the whole day, and that has a very bad effect on concentration.

I missed the personal contact with other students and with the trainer. Remote training makes me feel as if I'm losing this contact.

Looking at a computer screen all day is very tiring, as is using headphones. I think that human relations with trainers and peers are the essence of every university experience and nobody would want to miss it.

Much more exhausting and overwhelming. Much less socialisation. Tendency to take fewer breaks, and spend less time outside.

It also causes much more damage and fatigue to your eyes and ears.

We used to feel extreme digital fatigue and really missed human interaction.

I also couldn't concentrate very well when I was doing my homework (interpretation recording) and it took me much more time than interpreting on site, it was a bit frustrating and boring. I preferred online classes.

I found it harder to concentrate at home. It was unusual to interpret for an audience one sees only on a screen and therefore cannot interact that well with.

One misses the social contact, one doesn't see the reaction of other students to a particular speech (how they feel about it, whether they feel about it in a similar way), one has the feeling of interpreting for 'nobody' and misses a real listener; one doesn't practise using the booth.

c) The third group of replies deals with the **process of training** as such, that is, the content and organisation of individual training blocks (consecutive and simultaneous interpretation – and also whether training was done synchronously or asynchronously). Reference is also made to problems encountered by the trainers. A number of similar answers can be found in the context of other questions in the questionnaire we are analysing. Therefore, we will mention here just a few examples:

Not all trainers were comfortable using online platforms. Setup seemed to take a lot of time.

If you practise in a smaller group, you need to record speeches for the others who will do the same for you, but that takes time.

It is less effective, so you need more hours and always (or almost) with synchronous teaching.

You lose part of your teamwork training, and learning 'alone' isn't the same as being together with your classmates, learning from each other's good examples and errors.

Sometimes students' views varied considerably:

In CONS Interpreting you can't observe the people listening to you or sometimes put a question for clarification

As far as CONS is concerned, there were no additional problems, but regarding SIM I believe that the feedback is less precise, since the teachers have to listen to many versions after the lesson and

just give general remarks on your performance, whereas in class they can stop you and go into detail.

As for CONS, I think we most certainly missed some part of the presentation aspect of training.

In other respects, I do not see any difference for SIM classes.

The following two extensive replies from students are in our view perhaps the best characterisation of the difficult, unresearched and far-reaching issue of remote interpreter training. With them we can conclude our analysis of question 28:

The worst is the psychological part. You never know if the interpreting was as hard for your friends as for you, you don't get to speak to them that often. The written feedback is always less encouraging. Teachers can never know if you're struggling with the technology or with the interpreting itself. You have to work harder because you usually get more recordings to interpret than during a regular class.

It's more stressful because there are so many more variables ("is the Internet connection going to be ok", "passing of the mike doesn't work", "I don't see my partner in the booth"). At the same time, it doesn't give you the adrenaline rush the booth does and it feels as if you are not tense enough because of it (I hope this makes sense). Further, socialising, which usually helps when you suffer stress about something, is absent in remote training. It's much easier to let your attention drift during the class if it's not your turn to interpret.

6. Exams – Questions 29-41

The final part of the questionnaire (items 29 to 41) focused on the organization of the exams.

Intermediate/first-year exams were held on site, according to 42.9% (27 of the 63 respondents), and remotely according to 60.3% (38 respondents), with speeches both live (48.4%, 30 respondents) and prerecorded (77.4%, 48 respondents). Figures indicate hybrid solutions were adopted in a few cases.

Regarding final exams – one of the biggest challenges of the past academic year – 80.4% of the respondents (56) answered that they were organized remotely with mainly prerecorded speeches (consecutive – 73.1%; simultaneous – 88.5%).

When asked whether they felt any additional stress related to technology when exams were carried out via the platform, 78.6% of the students answered “yes” (more precisely, 44 students felt additional stress because of technology, and 12 did not) and gave several reasons for this:

- the fear of Internet breaking down, as well as of potential (and even unexpected) problems with the platforms and/or devices used;
- the presence of factors that do not depend on one's abilities or training (related to technology or to the student's working environment: e.g. risk of external noises);
- the fear that the additional technology stress could lead to a worse result than in normal conditions;
- the review, before the exam, of all the problems that might occur;
- the number of elements to consider at the same time (WiFi, camera, mic etc.);
- the feeling that one's result might depend on technology;

- the lack of reaction from the audience and the feeling that one is not professional working from one's home;
- the fact that speeches were prerecorded and predownloaded;
- the inability to prepare/brainstorm with colleagues;
- not seeing the person delivering the speech and missing nonverbal communication clues (probably in those cases in which audio records were used);
- previous failures of KUDO and the quick adoption of Zoom as a platform for the exam.

Quite interestingly, as an answer to this question, students also mentioned a few elements that relieved their stress: the trainers' empathy and understanding (in other words, confidence that, in case of a problem, the candidate would not be a 'suspect'); previous remote training; familiarity with the platforms used; and measures taken to diminish technical risks.

When asked whether they found it more relaxing not to perform in front of a jury, 56.4% of the candidates answered "no": 31 students said they did not feel more relaxed because there was not a jury in front of them, and 24 said it was more relaxing. The aspects students highlighted in this respect are diverse. Among the advantages:

- the possibility to relax between the tests;
- the possibility to better control stage fright;
- it is less stressful compared to technological pressure;
- it is easier to concentrate on interpreting and to imagine this is just another exercise;
- it is relaxing to be in a familiar space;
- it is less stressful to address only one person;
- knowing the performance would be listened to only later;
- feeling less "*observed*";
- not seeing the person for whom one is interpreting can relieve stress.

As for the disadvantages:

- the artificial atmosphere and the fear of technical issues;
- the fact that one is listened to, but also watched ("*When you're in the booth, in class the jury usually more LISTENS than WATCHES you but online it felt differently*");
- an environment different from the usual one;
- the lack of communication with the speaker and the audience (This was by far the most common disadvantage mentioned. In the words of one respondent: "*I would have preferred to see them; it would have helped me to go the extra mile while making my interpretation as understandable and communicative as possible*");
- the risk of feeling too relaxed;
- the stress of a different type;
- talking to a "*black screen*" (probably for those who worked with audio recordings).

As can be seen from these two lists, one element can be a stress reliever for one person and a stress factor for the other, so a lot depends on candidate personalities and on details such as the use of video versus audio recordings, the visible presence of a listener, and

synchronous versus asynchronous assessment. Also, several respondents said that it made no difference whether the jury is present or not, or that it is not clear whether the presence/absence of the jury had an impact on their performance. Last but not least, it is interesting to note that technology seems to be more stressful than the jury during exams.

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