

ELUCIDATING LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EMOTIONS TOWARDS INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE REMOTE TEACHING

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the second semester 2019/2020 of the French and Italian as Foreign Languages (FFL, IFL) undergraduate programs in a Malaysian University was conducted online as emergency remote teaching (ERT). According to recent studies, ERT affected students learning performance mainly due to loneliness and lack of interpersonal relations (IR). We aimed to improve post-pandemic distance learning and teaching by analysing students' ERT perceptions and emotions towards IR with peers and lecturers. 78 FFL and IFL students completed two Google Forms surveys on their ERT perceptions and emotions. In each survey, one section focused on IR. The analysis of learners' scores (based on a five-point Likert scale) utilised Paired Sample t-tests and Pearson correlation test conducted via SPSS. Findings showed ERT contradictory effects. ERT had a negative influence on students' psycho-emotional status; they were anxious (3.81 ± 0.78) and lacked self-confidence (3.39 ± 0.84) when interacting with peers and lecturers. However, overall, they were satisfied with their IR with lecturers, who were friendly and encouraging during ERT ($M=4.05 < 4.37$, $SD=0.70 < 1.06$): The higher the value given to IR (with lecturers), the higher the learners' positive emotions (motivation, enjoyment and self-confidence: $r=0.46 < 0.73$, $p < 0.05$) and the final perception and satisfaction of FFL and IFL courses ($r=0.35 < 0.48$, $p=0.00$). Findings have highlighted the significance of the role that lecturers play in students' Foreign Language progress and positive emotions. Consequently, researchers-lecturers improved the quality of the distance teaching-learning environment, giving more relevance to IR dynamics during synchronous classes, to benefit students' learning, motivation and enjoyment.

Keywords: COVID-19; emotions; French and Italian as foreign languages; interpersonal relations; perceptions

Abstrak

Berikutan pandemik Covid-19, program prasiswazah Perancis dan Itali sebagai Bahasa Asing (PBA, IPB) telah dilaksanakan secara atas talian pada semester kedua sebagai alternatif pelaksanaan krisis pengajaran jarak jauh (*emergency remote teaching*, ERT). Berdasarkan kajian terkini, ERT telah mempengaruhi tahap pembelajaran dalam kalangan pelajar disebabkan oleh kekangan kontak sesama manusia (*lack of interpersonal relations*, IR). Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menambah baik sistem pengajaran dan pembelajaran secara jarak jauh selaras dengan fasa pasca pandemik melalui analisis persepsi dan emosi pelajar terhadap IR di antara rakan sebaya dan pensyarah. Sejumlah 78 pelajar PBA dan IPB telah melengkapkan dua borang kaji selidik (Google form) berkenaan dengan persepsi dan emosi mereka terhadap ERT. Setiap borang kaji selidik mengandungi satu bahagian yang memberi fokus terhadap IR. Proses analisis maklum balas pelajar (skala Likert lima-mata) memanfaatkan Pearson dan ujian-t sampel berpasangan menggunakan program SPSS. Hasil penemuan menunjukkan ERT menimbulkan kesan negatif terhadap kestabilan psiko-emosi pelajar; prasiswazah telah mengalami rasa cemas (3.81 ± 0.78) dan kehilangan keyakinan diri (3.39 ± 0.84) apabila berinteraksi dengan rakan sebaya dan pensyarah. Walaubagaimanapun, pelajar berpuas hati dengan tahap IR terhadap pensyarah yang telah memberikan sokongan positif semasa ERT ($M=4.05 < 4.37$, $SD=0.70 < 1.06$); semakin tinggi nilai IR, semakin tinggi tahap emosi positif dalam kalangan pelajar, $r=0.46 < 0.73$, $p < 0.05$, persepsi dan kepuasan terhadap PBA dan IPB ($r=0.35 < 0.48$, $p=0.00$). Hasil kajian ini menekankan kepentingan peranan tenaga pengajar sebagai peransang kestabilan emosi yang optimistik selaras dengan perkembangan keupayaan pelajar bagi menguasai bahasa asing. Oleh itu, kualiti penyampaian pengajaran-pembelajaran secara jarak jauh dapat dipertingkatkan melalui input dinamik IR semasa pembelajaran segerak.

Kata kunci: COVID-19; Emosi; Perancis dan Itali sebagai bahasa asing; hubungan sesama manusia; persepsi

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and Objectives

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the mainstay of teaching modality all around the world was emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al. 2020; Olasile & Emrah, 2020), an approach far from being a well-planned, high-quality distance teaching and learning. Hodges et al. (2020) argue that the temporary nature of ERT, due to crisis circumstances, aims to provide fast and reliable access to instruction until the end of the emergency, when the previous format of instruction is put back in place again.

Mounting evidence in neurology and psychology studies has proven that the pandemic significantly contributed to disorders including anxiety, depression, and stress (EL-Sakran et al. 2022). These psycho-emotional issues have also been observed in education. Mseleku (2020) states that during the pandemic students and teachers were troubled by technological tools and internet accessibility, unfavourable socio-educational environment and mental health issues. Notably, according to recent studies on ERT effects (Nassima & Baya Essayahi, 2022; Cocoradă & Maican, 2021; Erarslan 2021), learners, being confined to their homes, perceived loneliness and lack of interpersonal relations (IR) as major obstacles to their learning. Assuming that the aforementioned issues of COVID-19 syndrome have been at the centre of global scientific interest in the field of language studies, especially in English as a Foreign Language (Erarslan, 2021), there is still a significant research gap needed to be explored in French and Italian as Foreign Languages (FFL, IFL) in Malaysia.

The present paper will focus on learners' emotions and perceptions towards IR, with peers and lecturers, in a full ERT context implemented at Universiti Malaya FFL and IFL undergraduate programs during the second semester of the academic year 2019/2020. Thus, this research aims to improve both the 2020/2021 Foreign Language (FL) distance learning, and the post-pandemic blended teaching and learning, by taking into account the students' opinions based on their personal experience and pedagogical needs.

This study will address the following research questions:

RQ1: How did the remote IR impact students' perceptions and emotions of the FL course?

RQ2: How did the students feel about IR during FL remote course?

In this paper we first introduce the Malaysian study learning context where the ERT was conducted. Then, we present the theoretical framework guiding this paper on students' perceptions and emotions towards IR. Next, we focus on our study methodology and findings.

Finally, we end this research with a discussion of the findings, and a teaching and learning reflection.

1.2 Emergency Remote Teaching of French and Italian as Foreign Languages

In the midst of the first wave of the pandemic, during the second semester the FFL and IFL lecturers of the Universiti Malaya implemented their ERT courses on the institutional platform Spectrum, in a very short time, based on their ongoing understanding of learners' needs. Email and WhatsApp services were chosen as the main communication medium between lecturers and students. All lecturers were available during the planned lesson time and throughout the day. 25% of the lessons were conducted in synchronous live-streamed modality, via Zoom or GoogleMeet, and 75% in asynchronous modality. The pandemic crisis forced the lecturers to promptly adapt traditional teaching materials to remote format and create materials by using advanced technological tools. Students were experienced in the use of the technology. That was not the case for a few lecturers; their lack of online teaching knowledge implied critical issues during the ERT.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Interpersonal Relations, Perceptions and Emotions

Literature on remote teaching and learning provides ample examples of student perceptions of lesson implementation, content, exam assessment as well as interpersonal collaboration. Particularly, the aim of this section is to present a brief framework focusing on the role of IR in the learners' perceptions and emotions of (remote) courses.

Young & Norgard (2006) conducted a study on 913 Texan students' perception and satisfaction of online teaching and learning contexts. According to existing research studies on the impact of remote courses on students' perception and satisfaction, Young & Norgard (2006) concluded that the students preferred uniform online course design and instructions, proper technical support and flexible online courses, as well as learner-learner IR and both timely and good quality learner-teacher interactions. Interactions between student, peers and teachers in distance teaching and learning have been emphasized by several other researchers. For instance, in his study on thirty master's and PhD learners' perception and appreciation of a remote course, Bauk (2015) showed that learner-learner and learner-teacher IR, as well as the instructional (teaching) materials, were the highest rated by the students. Furthermore, most studies on IR focus on the primary impact of the teachers' behavior on students' Foreign Language learning (FLL) and their learning perception. In a fully English as

a Foreign Language distance learning context, Kara (2020) concluded that positive teacher interaction evoked higher perceived satisfaction among learners, while lack of encouragement and moderation for learner-learner IR led to lower satisfaction. In addition, Young & Norgard (2006) argued that,

“The majority of the respondents agreed that interaction between instructors and students is essential for the quality of discussions and the overall sense of community in the class. Students commented that, when instructors did not participate in a timely manner, they felt isolated and unsure if their efforts were correct.” (Young & Norgard, 2006).

Similarly, Yang & Cornelius (2004) and Zeng & Perris (2004) research studies found that students were unsatisfied with their remote courses when IR with teachers was limited and teacher-feedback was delayed. With regard to the students' emotions linked to FL courses, in their study on Foreign Language Classroom Enjoyment (FLCE) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) of 1746 students all over the world, Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) argued that positive (enjoyment) and negative (anxiety) emotions, shared only 13% of their variance despite being negatively correlated. This means that enjoyment and anxiety are two distinct feelings, not just two ends of the emotional continuum; they have two specific dynamics with trends that could converge or diverge occasionally.

The emotion of anxiety is the most studied feeling in FLL (Teimouri et al. 2019; MacIntyre, 2017) and as such it hinders students' learning (Boudreau et al. 2018). As seen in a number of research studies, the experience of coping with FL tasks and exams exudes negative emotional reactions, in form of insecurity and discomfort, leading to anxiety (Gkonou, 2011; Mihaljević Djigunović & Legac, 2008; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Young (1991, 1990) explains that peer interaction and attitudes cause anxiety and impact students' performance in front of their peers. In fact, studies show that student shyness, which hampers communication skills, is often linked to language anxiety (Oflaz, 2019; Ordulj & Grabar, 2018). With the same token, studies also show that online learning may benefit shy students given their reluctance to join in discussions during in-person classes (Cooke-Plagwitz, 2008; Tudini, 2007). Actually, shy students become more involved in remote courses IR (Chun 1994), actively generating and initiating different kinds of discourse. As argued by Majid et. al. (2012), research realised before the pandemic revealed that student anxiety was reduced significantly during remote learning. This is especially true for activities that required oral interaction (Côté & Gaffney, 2021; Grant et al. 2013). The virtual students knew the anonymity of the learners in virtual classrooms as the positive factor that could contribute to an increase in self-

confidence level and the decrease of nervousness” (Valizadeh, 2021).

On the other hand, unlike negative emotions, the positive one benefit FL learners (Boudreau et al. 2018; Dewaele et al. 2019; Dewaele, 2015), in terms of broadening cognition, tempering negative emotions, promoting resilience, building personal and social resources, and triggering a virtuous circle toward greater well-being and achievement (Shao et al. 2020). Furthermore, anxiety could be prevented by providing positive emotions such as enjoyment (Dewaele et al. 2019; MacIntyre, 2017). As observed, learner-learner and learner-teacher IR are relevant for positive perceptions; they are also important for generating students’ positive emotions. Jin & Zhang (2018) research on the factors influencing Chinese FL student’s enjoyment linked these positive feelings to peer and teacher support. As seen above, Kara’s (2020) research findings yielded that the higher the teacher’s positive attitude towards IR, the higher was the student’s perception and satisfaction of the FL remote course as a whole. Dewaele et al. (2019) found that the role that teachers play in learners’ FLL enjoyment is much more significant than students’ peer interactions. In fact, teacher’s empathy in remote classes positively impacts learners’ motivation (Meyers et al. 2019) and FL progress (Hao, 2016). Conversely, a negative teacher behavior, a weakness of teaching methods and of classroom dynamics during FL lessons, may increase students’ negative emotions, perceptions and satisfaction (Cocoradă & Maican, 2021).

2.2 The Role Played by the Interpersonal Relation in Learners’ Perceptions and Emotions of a Pandemic Emergency Remote Teaching

There has been significant scientific interest in students’ remote learning perceptions and their emotions during COVID-19, based on the stressful circumstances that forced students into distance learning and the high level of anxiety linked to learning at home (Russell, 2020). In fact, studies showed that ERT was negatively perceived by students and was a cause of psychological distress (Bao & Hasan, 2020). This was the case in a study conducted by Granjon (2021) that focused on the ERT perception and satisfaction of 7000 students of University of Lorraine; French learners rated very negatively their ERT and examination assessment experience. However, research in the field has also shown that students’ positive and negative emotions are both linked to ERT. In a study conducted by Cocoradă & Maican (2021) during the pandemic on 207 Romanian student’s ERT perceptions and emotions, the authors found consistent results with the pre-pandemic study of Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014): Enjoyment and anxiety were inversely correlated as well as yielded their own trends and dynamics; moreover, positive emotions (enjoyment) prevented stressors (anxiety).

Studies on ERT emotional effects showed common main findings. According to studies

by Cocoradă & Maican (2021), Kennel et al. (2021) that targeted 3662 French students' emotions during ERT, and Benassaya (2021) on emotions of 73 Thai learners of FFL, learners' difficulties and anxiety during ERT were linked mainly to technological disruptions, an overload of given assignments and tasks, and lack of IR learner-learner and learner-teacher. The significance of IR in ERT is confirmed also in Dronova & Kurmangalieva (2021) research on 203 Russian undergraduate students' pandemic ERT perceptions. The authors observed that humour and funny interactions between learners, peers and teachers increased empathy in the FL courses. Nassima & Baya Essayahi (2022) study yielded that 59.4% of Spanish students considered loneliness, oral interaction restrictions, confinement to the house and lack of physical social contact as some of the major obstacles of e-learning Arabic as a FL. Additionally, as stated by Cocoradă & Maican (2021) and Kennel et al. (2021), students were dissatisfied with teacher feedback, which is immediate in a physical environment but delayed when fully online. In these ERT contexts, virtual synchronous classes (videoconferences) probably would not have been able to overcome the lack of the students and teachers' physical presence and social contact. As Jacquinot-Delauney (2001) states, if there is no physical presence, there is no authentic communication. Thereby, remote courses may impact learners' feelings of isolation and frustration, which, in turn, could negatively impact their learning motivation (Kruger-Ross & Waters, 2013; Wei & Chen, 2012). Conversely, according to this line of thinking, physical (face-to-face) courses positively influence the learner's course enjoyment, especially when speaking in FL with peers and teachers (Sahin Kizil, 2017).

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Surveys on Learners' Perceptions and Emotions

Two online surveys were used to collect data in this study: One, on perceptions and satisfaction, the other on positive and negative emotions experienced by French and Italian program learners of the Universiti Malaya with regards to ERT. This paper will present the overall results of the surveys, nevertheless it will mainly focus on the students' perceptions, satisfaction and feelings of their interpersonal relations with peers and teachers.

Since learners were familiar with Google Forms, we decided to use this platform to design the two online questionnaires. The pilot survey, conducted to ensure coherence and relevance of the items, was completed by five external FL students who had attended an ERT during the pandemic. Their comments were used to develop the final survey versions.

A five-point Likert scale was created to assess the items on the surveys from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). FFL and IFL students were sent WhatsApp links in June 2020

to complete these questionnaires anonymously and voluntarily. Learners gave permission for the generated data to be used for this study by agreeing to submit the questionnaires.

3.1.1 The survey on Emergency Remote Teaching perceptions

The perception and satisfaction survey were adapted from Young & Norgard (2006) questionnaire on remote perceptions of FL learners. Their questionnaire was a synthesis of existing literature:

“The purpose of the present study was to take the information obtained from the research literature on students’ perceptions of their online courses, synthesize it, and develop a student survey. [...] A survey was developed to determine [...] students’ perceptions preferences regarding online course content and design, interaction, technical support, and preference for online courses vs. face-to-face courses.” (Young & Norgard 2006).

Our survey looked at four categories with five statements each for a total of 20 items (see *Appendix 1*).

Category 1: Student perception of the course structure/design, online tools, synchronous/asynchronous lessons or a balance of both.

Category 2: The appreciation of course IR with peers, teachers or both.

Category 3: Course *task value* (TV), as regards the content and the assessment. According to Eccles & Wigfield (2002), TV is the students’ judgement of how interesting, important, and useful a course is to them.

Category 4: Learner preference regarding remote versus physical (face-to face) courses, learner online learning autonomy and satisfaction.

3.1.2 The survey on Emergency Remote Teaching emotions

The questionnaire was adapted from Dewaele & MacIntyre’ (2014) study mentioned above that focused on *Foreign Language Classroom Enjoyment* and *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety*. Our full survey on ERT emotions is shown in the *Appendix 2*.

With respect to the learners’ ERT positive emotions, *Category 1* consisted of four subcategories and 21 statements.

Subcategory 1: Self-confidence related to learners’ strengths, creativity and laughing at their own mistakes.

Subcategory 2: Learners’ distance course enjoyment.

Subcategory 3: Learners’ motivation in following the remote classes.

Subcategory 4: Learners' positive feelings regarding IR with peers and teachers.

Category 2, the learners' ERT negative emotions, consisted of three subcategories which in turn had 13 statements.

Subcategory 5: Feelings of anxiety associated with student performance during online lessons.

Subcategory 6: Lack of self-confidence due to learner's performance in the target FL skills.

Subcategory 7: Frustrations resulting from technological problems and internet availability.

3.2 Database Analysis Proceeding (Instruments)

Our data analysis utilised two statistical tests, Paired Sample t test and Pearson linear correlation test, conducted via SPSS Version 23. The statistical approach used was descriptive; the findings were presented as mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). Meanwhile, the two-tailed p value ($p \leq 0.05$) was considered as statistically significant.

Since the variance between the findings of the two population, students of French and students of Italian languages, was not statistically significant, we decided to describe the overall findings of the 78 respondents, all together.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Sample

The 78 students of FFL (50%, N=39) and IFL (50%, N=39) undergraduate programs completed the ERT perceptions and emotions surveys. As we have seen above, the student's participation was voluntary. Given that most of the students were enrolled in the first or the second year (74.40%, N=58), they rated their mastery of the target FL above all as low intermediate (A2) or intermediate (B1) level (82%, N=64). As for the students' sociocultural information, learners were mainly females (87%, N=68) and Malay (63%, N=49), followed by Chinese (22%), Kadazandusun (5% each), Indian (5% each) and other ethnicities (5% in total: Bisaya, Dusun, Sungai and one Bruneian). With regard to the students' linguistic background, the learners were all English speakers. They spoke between three and eight native and foreign languages, just over half (55%, N=43) spoke four or five languages.

4.2 Overall Findings on Learners' Perceptions, Satisfaction and Emotions of the Emergency Remote Teaching towards Interpersonal Relations

The first research question to be answered in this paper is how the IR experienced during the FL remote course impacted learners' perceptions and emotions. The results are shown in the

next stages.

4.2.1 Findings on learners' perceptions and satisfaction survey

Our data revealed that there is an equal and moderate overall score of the four items in the perception questionnaire. According to *Table 1*, the overall mean is 3.59, the mean difference is 0.39, and the Likert distribution is congruent (SD; Difference SD=1.14). The highest scores are the course *structure/design* as well as the *IR*. Meanwhile, the online course *satisfaction* scored the lowest mean.

Table 1. Overall findings of students' perceptions and satisfaction of FFL and IFL online course (means in descending order)

Category	M	SD
Online Course Structure/Design	3.74	0.55
Online Course Interpersonal Relation	3.70	0.63
Online Course Task Value	3.56	0.65
Online Course Satisfaction	3.35	0.43

The lower learner's *satisfaction* of the remote course is corroborated by the Paired Sample t test findings: The most consistent means variance involves, on the one side *satisfaction*, and on the other side *structure*, *IR* and *TV* (*satisfaction/structure*, $t=-5.45$; *satisfaction/IR*, $t=-5.27$; *satisfaction/TV*, $t=-3.06$; $df=77$, $p=0.00$).

The highest appreciation of the *IR* category is confirmed by a Pearson correlation test. Indeed, *IR* is linearly linked with the other three sections: appreciation of *TV*, course *structure/design* and ERT *satisfaction* increased when *IR* is given a higher value (*IR/TV*, $r=0.48$; *IR/structure*, $r=0.42$; *IR/satisfaction*, $r=0.35$; $p=0.00$). Comparably, course *satisfaction* is higher with a higher *TV* rating ($r=0.35$, $p=0.00$).

4.2.2 Findings on learners' emotions survey

Overall findings on learners' emotions as a whole.

Similar to the survey on perceptions, the data analysis showed various analogies among the two learners' emotional categories, *positive* and *negative*. The Likert score and overall means of positive and negative emotions (3.65 ± 0.58) and (3.68 ± 0.63) respectively were similar, with a mean difference of 0.03, indicating an equal distribution of the Likert scores in both emotions (Difference SD=1): *positive emotions/negative emotions*, $t=-0.28$, $df=77$, $p>0.05$ (0.78).

Nonetheless, Pearson test yielded a moderate inverse positive/negative feelings relation: the higher the learner's scores on positive emotions, the lower the scores on negative ones, and vice versa (positive emotions/negative emotions: $r=-0.26$, $p=0.02$).

Findings on learners' positive and negative emotions subcategories.

Based on the mean differences between the positive and negative emotion subcategories (see Table 2), the t test revealed that although students possessed great motivation to attend the FL classes, as well as positive feelings for the IR, they showed minimal enjoyment during the ERT, and felt overwhelmed (frustration) due to their internet connectivity and technical issues. Additionally, they experienced anxiety due to the fear of their learning performance.

Pearson test corroborated the negative (inverse) intergroup correlations: Learners that enjoyed the ERT, felt a lower level of anxiety and frustration, and vice versa; similarly, the higher the motivation and the learner-learner and learner-teacher IR appreciation, the lower the student's lack of self-confidence, and vice versa.

Table 2. Overall findings, most relevant mean-variance, and correlation results of learners' positive and negative emotions subcategories on distance learning

Paired	Overall findings (N=78)			Paired sample t test (df=77)		Pearson correlation test	
	M±SD	DM ¹	DSD ²	t	p	r	p
Motivation	4.02±0.63	0.63	1.05	4.57	0.00	-0.27	0.01
Lack of SC ³	3.39±0.84						
Enjoyment	3.21±0.87	-0.80	1.24	-5.01		-0.31	0.00
Frustration	4.01±0.89						
Enjoyment	3.21±0.87	-0.60	1.17	-4.16		-0.23	0.01
Anxiety	3.81±0.78						
Positive feelings of IR	3.79±0.64	0.40	1.06	2.89		-0.25	0.01
Lack of SC ³	3.39±0.84						

¹Difference mean

²Difference SD

³Self-Confidence

Findings within the category of the positive emotions.

According to Table 3, the mean scores of the aforementioned positive emotions were higher, with a medium size mean difference (Difference mean=0.81; Difference SD=1.38).

Students were particularly motivated for the remote FL course and appreciative of the learner-learner and learner-teacher IR.

Table 3. Overall findings (means in descending order) within learners' positive emotions category on distance learning

Results within learners' positive emotions categories	M	SD
Motivation	4.02	0.63
Positive feelings of IR	3.79	0.64
Self-Confidence	3.60	0.59
Enjoyment	3.21	0.87

Pearson test yielded that motivation, IR positive feelings, self-confidence and enjoyment were correlated and increasing uniformly ($r=0.46<0.73$, with a shared variance between 21.16% and 53.29%, this means with a small-medium effect strength; $p<0.05$). For instance, the higher the student's rating of the IR, the higher the value given to motivation, self-confidence and course enjoyment.

4.3 Findings on Learners' Perceptions, Satisfaction and Emotions of the Remote Course Interpersonal Relations

In order to answer the second research question, this section aims to show the findings linked to the learner's rating of the two IR (sub)categories based on the survey of perceptions, and survey of emotions.

4.3.1 Findings on learners' appreciation of interpersonal relations category (5 items)

Table 4 indicates the participants' ratings of the five IR category items. Students were appreciative for their communication with lecturers (item 8), mainly because of the lecturers' attitude. Indeed, lecturers were able to respond to students accordingly (item 9) in return, students were able to obtain the relevant information they needed (item 10). Statistically, the Pearson test showed positive correlations within the category ($r=0.28<0.59$, $p=0.00<0.01$) and the most significant correlation involved items 9 and 10 ($r=0.59$ moderate/high correlation strength, $p=0.00$).

Furthermore, learners expressed their positive agreement with item 6 stating that distance course promoted interaction in course content and assignment, while they moderately agreed with item 7 indicating that synchronous lessons modality facilitated the relations between peers.

Table 4. Student perceptions of FFL and IFL online course IR (means in descending order)

Appreciation of Interpersonal Relation with peers and lecturers			
Item	Statement	M	SD
9	The instructors replied to my questions in a timely fashion.	4.05	0.70
10	I received enough feedback from my instructors when I needed it.	3.91	0.87
6	My online courses were set up so that I could interact with my classmates during the lesson about course content and assignments.	3.80	0.73
8	I had numerous interactions with the instructor during the class.	3.53	0.98
7	In live online webcam interaction lessons, I found it easy to interact with my fellow students.	3.22	1.06

4.3.2 Findings on learners' positive feelings of interpersonal relations subcategory (8 items)

Similar to the *IR* perceptions, respondents experienced significant positive feelings in regard to the relation with their lecturers: Teachers provided valid support (item 17), friendship (item 16) and encouragement (item 15).

Correspondingly, students appreciated their peers' attitude during the course (item 14). However, if on one hand, learners seemed to appreciate the *IR*, on the other hand, contradictorily students yielded a moderate appreciation of the remote class dynamics and environment (in scores descending order: Items 18, 19, 7 and 10). This gap may be explained by the negative impact of the confinement on students' feelings of social isolation (see section 4.4.1 and 4.4.2). See Table 5.

Table 5. Overall findings (means in descending order) of the learners' positive feelings of IR with peers and lecturers during the distance learning

Findings within learners' Interpersonal Relation positive feelings			
Item	Statement	M	SD
17	The teachers are supportive during distance foreign language class.	4.37	0.72
16	The teachers are friendly during distance foreign language class.	4.29	0.82
15	The teachers are encouraging during distance foreign language class.	4.26	0.76
14	The peers are nice during distance foreign language class.	4.01	1.00
18	There is a good atmosphere during distance foreign language	3.67	0.92

	class.		
19	We form a tight group during distance foreign language class.	3.44	1.08
7	I'm a worthy member of the distance foreign language class.	3.18	1.00
10	Distance foreign language class is a positive environment.	3.11	1.02

4.4 Discussion: Emergency Remote Teaching and Interpersonal Relation Effects and Contradictions

The present study aims to improve post-pandemic distance learning and teaching by analysing students' ERT perceptions and emotions towards IR with peers and lecturers.

The database analysis results indicate that learners' positive and negative emotional variance was not significant. However, in accord with studies prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cocoradă & Maican, 2021; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), every student felt primarily positive or negative emotions, which seemed to be inversely correlated with each other. Indeed, this balance between positive and negative feelings, is consistent with the ERT contradictory effects, as revealed in recent research. Though ERT held a relatively negative impact on learners' psychological and emotional states possibly as feelings of frustration and anxiety, it somehow did not affect their FL e-learning motivation and appreciation of course design/structure which stayed relatively high, in spite of the constraints of the pandemic.

The following sections of the study will discuss the contradictions linked to IR appreciation, feelings and impact to the learners' perceptions and emotions.

4.4.1 Contradictory Impact of the Interpersonal Relations on Students' Perceptions and Emotions

In response to the first research question (RQ1: How did the remote IR impact students' perceptions and emotions of the FL course?), our findings underlined the contradictory impact of the IR on both learners' perceptions and emotions.

Regarding the positive influence of IR, the general satisfaction with ERT (questionnaire on learners' perceptions) is linked with both the overall appreciation of remote class design, content and exam assessment, as well as the IR with lecturers. Indeed, considering the survey results of learner's perceptions in questions 6, 7 and 8, students showing a higher score of learner-teacher relationship had a higher level of final satisfaction (with an overall range mean satisfaction between 4 and 4.20). Furthermore, according to our literature review (Cocoradă & Maican, 2021; Kara, 2020; Dewaele et al. 2019; Meyers et al. 2019; Jin & Zhang, 2018; Hao, 2016; Bauk, 2015), the present paper found that IR plays a significant role in generating distance learning positive perceptions and emotions. Indeed, the three sections of the survey

on learners' perceptions (IR, course structure/design and TV), and the four dimensions of the survey on learners' emotions (IR positive feelings, motivation, enjoyment and self-confidence) were linearly correlated with each other: The higher the IR appreciation (perceptions) and feelings, the higher the perceived appreciation of TV and of the course structure/design, as well as the motivation and the feelings of course enjoyment and self-confidence. Finally, in line with pre-COVID studies (Côté & Gaffney, 2021; Grant et al. 2013; Majid et. al. 2012; Cooke-Plagwitz, 2008; Tudini, 2007; Chun, 1994) and with pandemic ones (Valizadeh, 2021), lecturers-researchers observed that most shy students did indeed benefit from synchronous lessons, becoming further involved in the IR, despite keeping their webcams off during most of the online courses.

The learner's main negative feelings were related to frustration, anxiety and lack of self-confidence. The distress (frustration) was caused by technological device disruptions (item 25: 4.29 ± 0.94) and poor internet connections (item 26: 3.73 ± 1.20). The students' FL anxiety and lack of self-confidence, appeared especially when they had to compare their FL skills with peers (lack of self-confidence subcategory, item 23: 4.24 ± 0.88), while speaking with lecturers (anxiety subcategory, item 24: 4.04 ± 1.09) and showing their face on cam during synchronous lessons (lack of self-confidence subcategory, item 31: 3.68 ± 1.24). These results showed negative IR impact on the (lack of) self-confidence, anxiety and, overall lower enjoyment of the remote course. These findings are in line with our theoretical framework underlying the negative influence of the pandemic FL remote course on students' feelings of isolation and lack of physical interpersonal contact (Benassaya, 2021; Cocoradă & Maican, 2021; Erarslan, 2021; Kennel et al. 2021; Sahin Kizil, 2017; Kruger-Ross & Waters, 2013; Wei & Chen, 2012; Jacquinet-Delauney, 2001).

4.4.2 Contradictory Learner's Perceptions and Emotions of Interpersonal Relations

In response to the second research question (RQ2: How did the students feel about IR during FL remote course?), as per the present study, and literature review (Dronova & Kurmangalieva, 2021; Kara, 2020; Dewaele et al. 2019; Bauk, 2015), students were particularly appreciative of the learner-lecturer communication; notably, for lecturer satisfactory guidance and support. As a result, students could overcome the obstacles of their synchronous classes, requested an increase in live streamed lessons (more than the previous 25%) and, overall, were satisfied with the IR (students' perception of the online course IR: 3.70 ± 0.63 ; students' positive feelings of the IR: 3.79 ± 0.64).

However, as we have seen, the analysis within IR perception and emotion (sub)categories highlighted that, in webcam classes, students were less appreciative relating

to the IR with their peers. There are two factors that may explain this gap: The ERT pandemic effect and the characteristics of the medium of teaching.

ERT pandemic effect: Learners stated a moderate appreciation of the remote class dynamics and environment (*IR feelings* subcategory of the survey on emotions: Items 7, 10, 18 and 19). In line with the majority of recent studies on FL learners' perceptions and emotions during the pandemic ERT (Nassima & Baya Essayahi, 2022; Benassaya, 2021; Cocoradă & Maican, 2021; Erarslan, 2021; Kennel et al. 2021), the learners in this research study were unhappy with their distant social interactions.

Characteristics of the teaching medium: The lack of proper design and planning in ERT impacted individual students in various ways, by facilitating communication for some, while hindering others (Chun, 1994). Our findings highlighted a few students' hesitations. In fact, the survey on perceptions yielded contradictory scores of items 6 (My online courses were set up so that I could interact with my classmates during the lesson about course content and assignments: $M=3.80$) and 7 (In synchronous live online webcam interaction lessons I found it easy to interact with my fellow students: $M=3.22$, moderate score), as illustrated by the item 6/item 7 t value ($t=5.09$, $df=77$, $p=0.00$). The survey on emotions showed similar contradictory results: Learners appreciated peer to peer attitude (item 14), however, as discussed above, did not necessarily find their learning environment positive or dynamic. As a consequence of these uncertainties, students found communicating with their peers in synchronous webcam classes more difficult than through other tools such as WhatsApp (mentioned in the final learners' 'Remarks and comments' section of both perceptions and emotions surveys). Furthermore, they disagreed with the course structure/design category item in the survey on perceptions that states "I prefer a course structured with mainly synchronous lessons" (item 3: $M=3.02$, the lower mean of the category, $SD=0.96$).

This discussion confirms the limitations of the French and Italian ERT course design. ERT failed to provide a well-balanced synchronous/asynchronous course and the lecturers failed to promote learner-learner interaction during synchronous activities.

5.0 CONCLUSION: TEACHING & LEARNING IMPLICATIONS

Findings of this paper have highlighted the significance of the role that teachers play in remote teaching and learning, reassuring students' FL progress and promoting learners' positive emotions. As Dewaele et al. (2018) argued, learners' positive emotions increase FLL achievements, motivation and performance, as well as prevent negative feelings like anxiety. Consequently, the authors empathised that teachers should work to boost learners' enjoyment rather than try to avoid learners' anxiety during the FL classes.

Hence, FFL and IFL lecturers-researchers took action to solve the limitations of the remote course design of the academic year 2019/2020, and successfully improved the quality of their online and blended teaching beginning of the academic year 2020/2021, as a result of the global pandemic evolution. In fact, remote teaching programs were reduced and materials were refined into simpler, fewer tasks; many breaks during lessons and shorter teaching hours. In an effort to improve IR in an online environment, the number of synchronous webcam lessons increased from the earlier 25%. The preferred platform to work on became Zoom, a platform that allows for more pair and group work in breakout rooms and gives the lecturers the ability to monitor learners working on their tasks. As a result of the interpersonal learner-learner and learner-lecturer collaboration during live streamed classes, students became more involved in their FL learning, motivation and enjoyment. Though students' learning autonomy improved over the previous semester, they still needed to be constantly nurtured and supported. Moving forward, in the post-pandemic blended FFL and IFL courses, lecturers should monitor their students via Zoom (synchronous teaching modality) and WhatsApp (asynchronous lessons) formats, interact with their learners and provide them on-going feedback.

As the results and discussion elucidate, the first semester of 2020/2021 was a more positive teaching and learning experience for teachers and students alike. Despite persisting issues such as technological problems and internet disruptions that still need to be addressed, teachers and learners handled previously encountered difficulties with newly acquired knowledge and skills. This, in turn, increased both teacher and student self-confidence.

In the future, we suggest further investigations on the role played by IR in the blended post-pandemic FL courses. In addition, investigations should be conducted with a larger sample of participants to ensure reliable research findings. These studies could help understand the differences and/or improvements between learner's IR perceptions and emotions of a pandemic (ERT) and post-ERT FL course.

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8.0 APPENDICES**APPENDIX 1**

Survey on Student' Perceptions of FFL and IFL Online Course, adapted from Young & Norgard (2006)

Category 1		Appreciation of the Online Course Structure/Design
Item	Statement	
1	I prefer all online courses to follow a consistent structure so that navigation does not change from one online course to another.	
2	I prefer my lecturers to use the same tools (apps, platforms, etc.).	
3	I prefer a course structured with mainly synchronous lessons.	
4	I prefer a balance between synchronous and asynchronous (online tasks and assignments without live webcam interaction).	
5	The tools (apps, platforms, etc.) used by my instructors were suitable for the tasks assigned.	
Category 2		Appreciation of the Online Course Interpersonal Relation
Item	Statement	
6	My online courses were set up so that I could interact with my classmates during the lesson about course content and assignments.	
7	In live online webcam interaction lessons, I found it easy to interact with my fellow students.	
8	I had numerous interactions with the instructor during the class.	
9	The instructors replied to my questions in a timely fashion.	
10	I received enough feedback from my instructors when I needed it.	
Category 3		Appreciation of the Online Course Task Value
Item	Statement	
11	The materials in my online courses were adequate to support the course goals (appropriate to content and aim of the lesson).	
12	The assignments in my online courses helped me master course content.	
13	The exams in my online courses provided an accurate assessment of my knowledge of course content.	
14	The exams were well balanced in numbers and time allocated.	
15	The free access to materials made it easier for me to accomplish the tasks set for the assignments and the exams.	

Category 4 Online Course Satisfaction	
Item	Statement
16	I think I learn more in online courses than in traditional face to face courses.
17	Online courses are more difficult content-wise than traditional face-to-face courses.
18	Overall, I am satisfied with my distance learning courses during his second semester.
19	These courses contributed to my competence in the target language.
20	These courses helped me to become a more independent learner.

APPENDIX 2

Survey on Student' Emotions of FFL and IFL Online Course, adapted from Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014)

The Distance language Learning Positive Emotions scale		
Item	Subc. ¹	Statement
1	SC	I can be creative in the distance foreign language class.
2	SC	I can laugh off embarrassing mistakes in the distance foreign language class.
3	EJ	I don't get bored in the distance foreign language class.
4	EJ	I enjoy the distance foreign language class.
5	SC	I feel as though I'm a different person during the distance foreign language class.
6	SC	I learnt to express myself better in the foreign language.
7	IR	I'm a worthy member of the distance foreign language class.
8	MO	I learnt interesting things.
9	SC	In distance foreign language class, I feel proud of my accomplishments.
10	IR	Distance foreign language class is a positive environment.
11	MO	It's cool to know a foreign language.
12	EJ	Distance foreign language class is fun.
13	SC	Making mistakes is part of the learning process.
14	IR	The peers are nice during distance foreign language class.
15	IR	The teachers are encouraging during distance foreign language class.
16	IR	The teachers are friendly during distance foreign language class.
17	IR	The teachers are supportive during distance foreign language class.
18	IR	There is a good atmosphere during distance foreign language class.

19	IR	We form a tight group during distance foreign language class.
20	MO	I am happy to attend synchronous (online live webcam) lessons.
21	EJ	We laugh a lot during distance foreign language class.
The Distance language Learning Negative Emotions scale		
Item	Subc. ¹	Statement
22	AX	Even if I am well prepared for the distance foreign language class, I feel anxious about it.
23	LC	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do during distance foreign language class.
24	AX	I can feel my heart pounding when the teacher calls me to respond in distance foreign language class.
25	FR	I get frustrated when the tools (apps, platforms, etc.) provided by my instructors don't work on my devices.
26	FR	I feel left out because I cannot attend distance foreign language classes in the same way as my fellow students due to problems with my internet connection and my devices.
27	AX	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my distance foreign language class.
28	AX	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in distance foreign language class.
29	LC	It embarrasses me to volunteer to answer in my distance foreign language class.
30	AX	My lack of e-learning experience makes me feel anxious during distance foreign language class.
31	LC	It embarrasses me to show my face in online live webcam lessons.
32	AX	I feel overwhelmed by the quantity of tasks I must accomplish during distance foreign language class.
33	LC	I don't worry about making mistakes in distance foreign language class (reverse-code).
34	LC	I feel confident when I speak in distance foreign language class (reverse-code).

¹Subc.: Subcategory

SC: Self-Confidence (Subcategory 1)

EJ: Enjoyment (Subcategory 2)

MO: Motivation (Subcategory 3)

IR: Positive feelings of Interpersonal Relation (Subcategory 4)

AX: Anxiety (Subcategory 5)

LC: Lack of Self-Confidence (Subcategory 6)

FR: Frustration (Subcategory 7)