The Benefits and Challenges of Distance Education in Teaching Maltese as a Second Language to Adults

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Abstract

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted millions of people's lives around the world. This included the lives of teachers and learners in educational institutions because schools were thought to be hotbeds of infection, and shutting them down between March and June 2020 was therefore deemed to be inevitable. Educational facilities, private tutoring, and lifelong learning centres all have had to comply with the government's directive at the time to suspend, postpone, and/or cancel in-person classes. One group particularly impacted were non-native adults living in Malta, many of whom were learning Maltese as a second language (ML2). Like other educators, many teachers offering ML2 instruction to adults had to shift to an online mode (from mid-March through to the last week of May) in order to complete the 2019–20 ML2 programme. The current study reports on the benefits and challenges encountered by 17 ML2 teachers while teaching online during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and physical school closure. The research applied a qualitative method consisting of one-on-one interviews with 17 ML2 adult educators conducted online. Using the adaptability theory, the researcher sought to investigate the appropriateness of adaptions of ML2 teachers to distance learning approaches during the school shutdown.

Keywords: COVID-19 lockdown, Maltese as a second language (ML2), distance education challenges and benefits, online language teaching, distance language learning

Definition of Terms

- *Second language*: This is abbreviated as L2 and refers to a language that is not the speaker's native/first language but is learned by the speaker over time (Hoque, 2017).
- *Distance education*: Also known as *distance learning*, *remote learning*, *e-learning*, and *online learning*: this involves the physical separation of educators and learners and includes the use of various tools to promote student–teacher and student–student interaction.

Introduction

With the ever-increasing number of foreigners who move to study, work, and live in Malta and the increase in demand for Maltese as a second language (ML2) courses, it is important to examine the benefits and challenges of distance education in teaching ML2 to adults. This is especially of concern following the emergence of COVID-19 and the resultant reliance on online teaching.

In 2017, Malta hosted an international conference in which it explored two major issues critical to the enhancement of distance learning; (a) open education (accessibility of all learning materials needed for achievement of academic outcomes) and (b) digitalization of education (which involves blended learning, e-learning, and the development and impact of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (Camilleri, 2017). The digitalization of education has provided many opportunities for non-native learners to access quality instruction through the development of new pedagogies for digital teaching and learning (Camilleri, 2017). With COVID-19 pandemic forcing teaching institutions to devise innovative, safe, and sustainable distance learning systems, teachers and learners alike have needed to adapt to an online interface as the main mode and platform of instruction.

The Impact of Covid-19 on Education

COVID-19 has caused widespread disruption in the provision of education globally, from the pre-primary level to higher institutions including university, adult learning, and courses at post-graduate levels. The ability and flexibility of these learning institutions became evident in the way they responded to school closures through distance learning using high innovation and technological advancement (United Nations, 2020). During the lockdown,

COVID-19 has forced the shift of teaching and learning to online platforms as the exclusive means of instruction, including online educator's notes and video recordings of lectures, to enable the dissemination of knowledge (Mohamedbhai, 2020).

Mohamedbhai (2020) and Morris et al. (2005) argue that the educator must be pedagogically trained for remote teaching, and learners must be familiarised with the pedagogy of online education to ensure that learning objectives are achieved. According to the European Commission Directorate-General of Communications Networks, Content and Technology report (2019), most learning institutions have been found to be indispensable for training teachers on the learning management system (LMS) engine (equipping them with the requisite skills for using various learning software packages supporting distance learning). Arising from a necessity to use online platforms during COVID-19, most teachers now have a greater knowledge of the value of digital technologies and technological competences as an integral part of their toolbox (Kim et al., 2020). Implementing remedial education, teaching each student at their required standard, and meeting the varying needs of individual students would be challenging in the current circumstances without digital skills and resources.

However, in the quest to move to online platforms to reach teaching and learning objectives, the inequalities that exist in the education sector have become evident, including the unequal access to ICT systems and infrastructure (Saavedra, 2020). The crisis in the education sector due to the pandemic could also be viewed as an opportunity for educational institutions to improve and maximise their ICT operations. Some institutions were already using online platforms, and the transition might have been less of a challenge for them (Dhawan, 2020). However, the pandemic has only added to the difficulties faced by those institutions that were previously not using such systems, resulting in their inability to implement some learning programmes entirely via online modes.

ML2 teachers were expected to continue delivering their course from their home, where the support system may be unsuitable for the accomplishment of the learning objectives (World Bank, 2020). The inequalities in the educational outcomes of different groups of learners using ICT infrastructure and the obstacles faced in implementing learning programmes via online platforms are some challenges faced by institutions and students today.

Teaching a Second Language (L2) to Adult Learners

The present study focuses on ML2 adult learners. Malta provides educational opportunities for immigrants who might present a major challenge to the country's adult education system for language and cultural barriers (Mayo, 2007). By learning ML2, a non-Maltese adult learner can acquire sufficient skills to feel part of Maltese culture and society at large (Camilleri Grima, 2018).

There are various factors which influence adults' second language acquisition (SLA), including the learner's aptitude; personality; motivation; and whether the L2 is closely related to the learner's first language (L1) (Larsen-Freeman, 2018). No matter the factors that influence SLA, Harmer (2007) delineates various advantages for adult learners in acquiring new content: they can engage in abstract thinking, have well-developed learning habits, and possess a spectrum of life experiences on which to relate. They can consider why they are learning something and what they would like to accomplish with their learning. In fact, they can use their experience as a tool to share with others (Malone, 2014) and compare new knowledge and insight to their previous experience (Zhao, 2004).

Various strategies can be employed in teaching ML2 to adults. While it is an open question whether children or adults are better for SLA, evidence identifies certain psychological factors that can help adults acquire an L2 more effectively. These include their better and higher intellectual processing, which comprised of explication and induction process, and motor skills (Suryantari, 2018). Adult learners tend to be inquisitive: the questions that they ask need to be addressed comprehensively, so that there is no room for confusion (Pawlak, 2015). Most adult L2 learners usually present with diverse individual and contextual variables; which dictate their approach of confronting the language learning tasks based on the adopted instructional strategies (Pawlak, 2015).

Another strategy that could be employed with adult learners can involve awakening the 'inner child' of the adults in the ML2 learning process. Like children, adults also need to be engaged in language games so they are motivated and enthusiastic to learn (Pawlak, 2015). Adults also tend to prefer an SLA approach where they can draw from their experience; work towards a

specific goal; and take part in didactic activities that are considered being realistic (Torman, 2020).

When the learning process is made enjoyable, adults are able to absorb information and knowledge that is being disseminated and remember it (Pawlak, 2015). According to Camilleri and Camilleri (2017), L2 distance learning is characterised by teaching frameworks that are based on digital games. Language games play a critical role in the reinforcement of morphological and lexical concepts and are a great asset to lessons because they offer the ability to evaluate, practise, implement, and consolidate previous lessons (Torman, 2020). Although, there are few digital resources in Maltese, one can easily play several online language games with certain features of web-based video conferencing tools such as meeting chats, breakout rooms, group chats, content sharing, and whiteboarding (Torman, 2020). One could connect through a video call app such as Zoom, Facebook Messenger, Google Hangouts, and Skype. These platforms enable such elements as video calls, taking a screenshot, use of a screen background to immerse a class in the topic, and screen sharing to play various language interactive games. Screen sharing enhances learners' communication and creative skills and helps them to develop a good relationship with L2, such as *Charades*, *Quiz*, *Show and Tell*, *The Name Game*, *Scavenger Hunt*, *Spelling game*, *Quick Draw*, and other drama games and activities (Ibrahim, 2017).

Teaching and learning L2 with adults must be done in teamwork. When students learn from each other, they are likely to reach their learning outcomes (Pawlak, 2015). To ensure that adult learners work as a team, it is critical that they engage in group work, particularly role-playing in L2 tasks comprising real-life situations such as in a restaurant or in a shop, by communicating in L2, playing charades, telephone conversations, reading and understanding e-books appropriate for their L2 level, summarising tasks, and news assignments (Mohamedbhai, 2020). These tasks contribute significantly to improving their communication, reading and understanding of an L2 and can be assigned online where learners can engage and interact with each other to encourage peer collaboration and learning. When adult learners work together towards the same goals, they should all be in a better place to understand the learning outcomes. This collaborative group work can easily be achieved through distance learning using a group work feature such as Zoom's Breakout Rooms. Participants in the group work rooms can use audio video and screen sharing features (Torman, 2020).

Learners can also listen to and understand a recorded text which can be found online or a text recorded by the teacher through screen recorders such as Loom, Panopto, OBS Studio, Debut Video Capture, ShareX, and Screencast-O-Matic (Ellis, 2020). Distance learning collaboration improves the interaction feature, which is fundamental in SLA (Goo, 2019).

Cognitive interactionists contend that interaction provides useful resources for adult learners to improve and restructure their interlanguage by concentrating on linguistic code features when interacting for context (e.g. Goo, 2012; Mackey, 2012). Negotiated interaction stimulates cognitive learning mechanisms that involve interpreting information and obtaining corrective feedback (Mackey, 2012).

In SLA, interaction has long been attributed an important role (Hall, 2003). It is crucial that learners are given speaking tasks so they can use ML2 by interacting with Maltese people. In fact, many non-Maltese adults learn ML2 often for the purpose of interacting with their Maltese partners, relatives, friends, and work colleagues (see Appendix). The motivation of several adult ML2 learners is to acquire adequate comprehension competency to communicate and socialise in Maltese in the course of their normal life and work in business relationships (Domas, 2004).

Such interaction activities may be conveniently achieved remotely by video conferencing devices, for instance, when learners communicate with each other during lessons, and when teachers assign breakout rooms and group discussions to learners. Other ways to communicate, send text messages and voice messages, and make voice and video calls with native speakers are social media chats and video conferencing apps such as Zoom, Skype, Facebook Messenger, Rooms, WhatsApp, Houseparty, Telegram, Slack, Discord, and Snapchat.

The Challenges of Distance Education

With a distance learning format as the "new normality", numerous challenges have emerged, especially for adult learners. The first challenge is due to problems involving the technological systems used (Torman, 2020). Learners can meet through video conferencing platforms by being in areas where learners have access to a fast internet connection (Torman, 2020). Internet

access is unevenly distributed around the world, which poses challenges for learners attempting to achieve learning outcomes (World Bank, 2020).

Another distance learning issue is the need for strong technological skills to succeed in distance learning. Distance learning applications may not be free for learners who are not, for example, university students, but are receiving private SLA tuition. Video conference tools may often have hidden expenses, such as maintenance and the cost of purchasing computers and other resources necessary to participate in the learning process. A further limitation could arise if the distance learning course uses an asynchronous learning method, as this does not facilitate interactions to improve the learners' ability to communicate (Torman, 2020). Therefore, while there are many benefits, distance learning has some limitations and associated drawbacks. To render distance learning more effective and widespread, it will be necessary to address these aforementioned issues.

The Adaptability Theory

People's lives are driven by change, as they develop physically, cognitively, and emotionally during their lifetime (Martin et al., 2012). The capacity to respond constructively to these changing conditions are regarded as adaptability. Martin et al. (2012) describe adaptability as an individual's ability to adapt, and "constructively regulate psycho-behavioural functions in response to new, changing, and/or uncertain circumstances, conditions and situations" (p. 66).

Notably, Martin et al.'s (2012) adaptability paradigm is a tripartite model, comprising cognitive, behavioural, and emotional adaptability, which relates to the adjustment of one's thoughts, actions, or feelings when coping with changing, unfamiliar, or unpredictable circumstances. Martin et al. (2012) refer to the life-span principle of control in the conceptualisation of adaptability. This theory implies that life-span development is influenced by a person's ability to play an important role in adapting to environmental conditions and constraints.

There are several important variations between the life-span control theory and the tripartite adaptability system (Martin et al., 2013). In particular, the life-span control theory focusses on goal disengagement (such as striving for a new objective), while adaptability is meaningful to situations where a person cannot disengage and must adapt to meet the task (Martin et al., 2013).

While life-span control depends solely on cognitive and behavioural adaptation, the tripartite model of adaptation often considers emotional adaptation into account (Martin et al., 2013).

Adaptability is often very necessary for teachers, considering that teaching requires flexibility, adapting to and managing continuous change (Heckhausen et al., 2010). This research will explore the extent to which ML2 teachers adapted to distance education during lockdown.

Research Method

To answer the research question '*What are the benefits and challenges of teaching and learning ML2 remotely*?', the researcher collected teachers' comments concerning the advantages and disadvantages of ML2 online learning and their online learners' profiles (see Appendix). A qualitative method was adopted; and closed-ended and open-ended questions were asked during Zoom one-to-one interviews. Each online interview lasted about one hour.

Seventeen teachers aged between 25 and 56 years old were recruited for this study—they all taught ML2 to adults at different levels (i.e. MQF Levels 1, 2, and 3). However, when they ended up teaching synchronised ML2 online lessons due to COVID-19, not all adult learners attended their lessons (see Appendix). The participants mentioned the same reasons provided by the following teacher:

> Unfortunately, some students who are Somali, Ethiopian, Moroccan, and Nigerian stopped attending my lessons due to COVID-19. Some became unemployed and had to return to their home country; others had no idea how to use a computer – perhaps due to age. There were others who could not afford a computer. Besides having no support or a quiet environment, some students told me they needed to look after their children and could not find time for online lessons as their work at home doubled during COVID-19.
>
> (Teacher 16, Interview: 05/08/2020)

As the Appendix shows, out of 28 different nationalities, most ML2 online learners were third-country nationals, including 18 Serbs, 11 Filipinos, 11 Indians, 9 Libyans, 9 Russians, and 8 Pakistanis. Their most common reasons for learning ML2 were to understand their clients/customers/patients; to make new friends; and to talk and joke with their Maltese colleagues who hardly speak any English, especially those working in construction and with

the elderly. There was only one Danish, German, Japanese, Nigerian, Moroccan, and Ethiopian ML2 online learner. The latter's most common reasons to learn ML2 were to help their children with their studies; out of respect for Malta and the Maltese; and for the love of learning new languages. ML2 remote learners contribute to growing industries in Malta, from construction to hotel services, caring services and ICT. However, the most common occupations were receptionists (8), nurses (8) builders (7), carers (7) and students (7). The data also confirm Reljic's (2018) assertions regarding Serbs working mainly in construction, Filipinos and Indians working in health or social services, and Italians and Bulgarians employed in Malta's food sector.

The Appendix shows that several ML2 online learners were males, with 96 males versus 45 females out of 141 ML2 remote learners. As Figure 1 shows, most ML2 distance learners were married, with 86 married learners, 63 of whom were third-country nationals, and male, confirming what Teacher 11 mentioned.

> I have been teaching Maltese as a foreign language for ten years, obviously through trial and error, since I was trained to teach Maltese to native students. In these years, I have noticed that most foreign students are male, non-Europeans who are married, even to Maltese women.
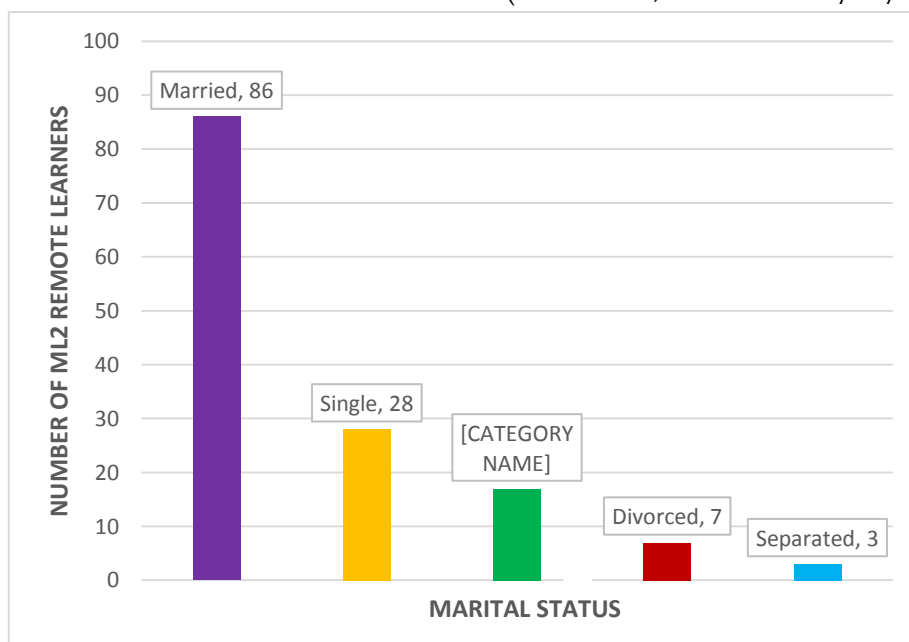>
> (Teacher 11, Interview: 25/07/2020)

Figure 1: The ML2 Remote Learners' Marital Status

The Appendix also shows that the gender difference still holds, as only 8 female learners stated that their motivation to learn Maltese was to help their children. This confirms Van der Slik et al. (2015), who claim that it is still assumed that the mother (i.e. not the father) has to stay at home to look after the children, apart perhaps from her full-time career. This might have been the reason, according to Teacher 10, why more males than females usually have the time to attend ML2 lessons.

> Online or not, I keep noticing that men more than women have the luxury to attend evening lessons. Women need to stay at home, looking after the kids and cooking in the evening.
>
> (Teacher 10, Interview: 25/07/2020)

Seventy-two ML2 remote learners were between 30 and 39 years old; thirty-seven learners were between 40 and 49, twenty-nine learners were between 20 and 29, only two learners were between 50 and 59, and only one learner was between 60 and 69, as Figure 2 shows. These data support McDowd and Shaw (2000) concerning the increasing difficulty most seniors experience in acquiring technological skills.
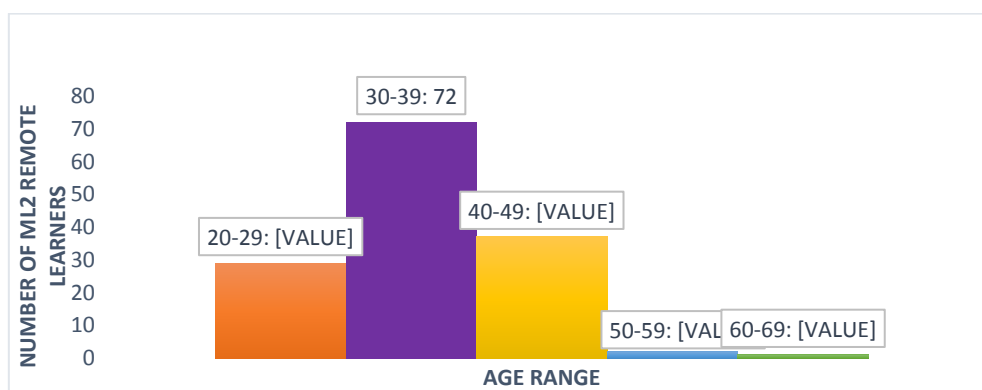

Figure 2: The Remote ML2 Learners' Age Range

Research Tool

In this study, the researcher conducted an online one-on-one interview with seventeen teachers, addressing ML2 teachers' viewpoints on the benefits and challenges of distance learning. The teachers' views identified their technical and pedagogical attitudes towards distance education.

Research Procedure and Ethics

Seventeen hours of digital online interviews were conducted from mid-July to August 2020. The concept of anonymity was not inherent in this study, as all participants were known to the researcher. However, the participants knew that they would be anonymised for this research.

All participants were volunteers. The rationale for selecting these teachers is that they provided ML2 online lessons to non-Maltese adult learners during lockdown. Before recruiting the participants, the researcher sent them the consent forms and information documents endorsed by the Research Ethics Office of the University of Malta.

Results and Discussion

To answer the study research question, this section presents the benefits and challenges of distance education in ML2 according to the 17 educators.

Benefits of Distance Learning

Fifteen out of seventeen teachers reported that since the beginning of the pandemic, they are currently more adept to provide virtual teaching, as the following teacher said:

> I was using Teams for the very first time. An ICT teacher helped me to use it through a telephone conversation. Gradually, I was realising how easy it is to use it, and since I had no problems with Maltese lessons; I wondered if distance education should be the norm for teaching adults!
>
> (Teacher 3, Interview: 22/07/2020)

Eight participants used Zoom, five teachers used Teams, and four used Skype as virtual teaching and learning platforms. These platforms enabled teachers to assist and clarify any morphological concepts that confused their learners. Twelve participants found that distance education with adults is more effective than classroom teaching (Tofade et al., 2013), as Teacher 8 claimed:

> Online teaching made me realise how much better I can reach my students! I could see the students' faces well and they are closer to me than in class. I found it really helpful that I could see the students' names, as I usually forget their names. In this way, I was calling them

by their name and they were participating more. I think that online teaching should be used for adults. It is more productive because it saves a lot of time for teachers and learners.

<div align="right">(Teacher 8, Interview: 24/07/2020)</div>

Fourteen teachers indicated that thanks to distance learning, all ML2 learners with distinct personalities participated during lessons. The reason for this is that even learners who rarely ask questions in class felt comfortable enough to participate. A participant reported the following:

Two students are very shy and I hardly hear them say anything in class. They just sit down quietly and never reply to my questions, even when I ask them something directly. So you can understand me, how surprised I was when they started responding to my questions and participate more during our online lessons. Sometimes they were even using Zoom's reaction and chat functions.

<div align="right">(Teacher 17, Interview: 05/08/2020)</div>

These 14 teachers reported that more students are comfortable participating behind the screen than in a classroom (Huang et al., 2020). Hence, these teachers identified that the online learning environment gave learners the opportunity to interact with their peers and teacher; and by doing so, their ML2 speaking level has been improving based on their increase in communicative competencies and use of vocabulary. These teachers reported the consistent use of the 'interaction' feature during online teaching and learning, which is fundamental in SLA (Glaser, et al., 2019).

Fifteen educators stated that distance education brought about a reduction in classroom time-wasting, and delays caused by students getting ready for their classwork tasks. An experience that might require the teacher to spend around 35 minutes in a classroom setting due to disruptions such as adult learners arriving late for their lessons or leaving earlier, answering a phone call, and deviating in conversation from the core subject of the lesson; in the distance learning setting took less than five minutes. Similar views were reported by a study conducted by Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) to the extent in which the online platforms for distance learning provide teachers with opportunities to take strategic measures aimed to create a setting that is more conducive to learning. An educator explained what follows:

Finally! What a relief! Online teaching gives us, teachers, a lot of control by just clicking on the mute button next to the students' faces. I just mute the students when their dog is barking, or their baby is crying, or their children are shouting in the background, or receiving a telephone call, or when there is a student who is so keen to learn, that repeats annoyingly every single word I say in Maltese.

(Teacher 13, Interview: 01/08/2020)

Twelve teachers indicated that they no longer required to make use of live lessons. Since the pandemic, adult learners have been able to watch a recorded lesson when they have some free time and keep contact with the teachers; and these teachers have managed to address their learners' problems in a timely fashion.

Distance Education Challenges

Although most participants mentioned distance education benefits, some teachers mentioned distance education challenges.

Five teachers stated that remote learning was so unfamiliar to their adult learners that they were having a hard time coping with it due to their lack of technological knowledge, necessary for e-learning. According to Huang et al. (2020), distance learning demands a high level of technological competence for it to function optimally. Teachers and students must know how to work with technology. These five teachers reported that sometimes they spent most of their lessons figuring out how they could provide their tuition to all their students (Flack et al., 2020). A teacher claimed:

Many learners coming from Africa even missed lessons of Maltese as a foreign language due to inadequate internet connection, no computer at home, or their lack of technical skills.

(Teacher 14, Interview: 01/08/2020)

Seven teachers experienced a substantial challenge in creating excellent online lesson plans because they had difficulty transposing traditional planning materials to online format. They admitted that they had a hard time balancing what they taught their students and what the students understood at the end of each lesson. These teachers were carrying the double burden of the need to strategise on their teaching approaches at the same time as covering content within the designated period (Hodges et al., 2020).

Fourteen teachers explained that they were now more aware of inequities in the education system. Not all their ML2 learners had the same access to technological tools. This finding is consistent with the findings reported by Jena (2020) who noted that there is a dire need to support immigrant learners who have a low income so they can have the relevant devices and internet access. Similar to what Teacher 16 expressed, another teacher indicated the following:

> Most students coming from developing countries didn't turn up for my online lessons. I didn't expect them to attend online lessons because I know that they can hardly afford a living let alone a computer and a good internet connection! There isn't equality in our education system.
>
> (Teacher 4, Interview: 23/07/2020)

Fifteen teachers also raised issues about their self-care. Research has shown that it is essential to maintain one's physical and mental health as a teacher (Koplik, 2017). However, these participants stated that with distance education, they were becoming physically and mentally exhausted because of their work. They would often get exhausted on their own account, and also due to distance education; they sometimes felt overwhelmed with urgent tasks, planning for sessions, preparing notes and assignments to forward to students, transferring their traditional resources to digital ones, and also facing increased pressure; besides looking after their family, pets, and trying to find some time for themselves, their friends, and to address their personal issues.

These participants reported that they devoted much of their time familiarising themselves with the technology needed to reach their students when they taught remotely during lockdown. They were also suffering from mental stress because of the overwhelming workload they faced. Sometimes it was very difficult for them to find a quiet place at home as they have babies, children, and pets needing their attention even while remote teaching. Therefore, they found the distance education system demanding in terms of their personal life, as the following teacher explained:

> How can I ever take care of myself while teaching online? I am learning how to teach online and wasting a lot of time preparing for

my online classes and familiarising myself with Teams. I feel so stressed, frustrated, and lonely. Besides eating unhealthy food, I stopped attending Zumba classes and gained weight. I'm always wearing a shirt over my pyjamas and house slipper when teaching online! I lack any support at home, as my lazy husband definitely won't help me with our three young kids who are always jumping and running around while I'm trying to teach remotely.

(Teacher 5, Interview: 23/07/2020)

WHO (2020) states that a person's health incorporates their physical, mental, and social welfare. These 15 teachers stated that they were not getting enough hours of sleep, or even the chance to exercise when they were teaching remotely. These things contribute to a person's health, and that these participants were missing them was a threat to their wellbeing (Koplik, 2017).

Adaptability

When being asked about how well the participants adapted to distance education, several teachers said that they did their utmost to adapt to this situation. Twelve teachers stated that they always do their best to adjust to the learners' specific and changing needs by being flexible and adapting the pace of the lessons, especially since some students did not know how to use the technological e-learning tool. They even adapted tasks for specific learners or sought various tools to better describe or highlight important points by using the chat, hands up, and whiteboard functions. A teacher expressed what follows:

I do anything to reach my students. I tried to adapt to online teaching of Maltese as a foreign language and help my students who are older than me, with technological issues.

(Teacher 2, Interview: 22/07/2020)

Thirteen educators agreed that in using distance learning during lockdown, they often worked successfully with their technical colleagues who teach ICT. These teachers reported that they had to communicate frequently with their colleagues, to learn for instance how to record their online lessons to relay to their learners who were sick, or had internet connection issues, and missed a new ML2 concept. All participants claimed that they were prepared to end a lesson early, reschedule their online lesson, or condense material into less time when they had internet connection issues.

Six teachers stated that although they are constantly engaged in professional learning sessions, and are required to continuously incorporate new knowledge into their teaching practice, they did not learn how to use – or have ever used – Zoom or Microsoft Teams, or any other virtual platform to teach ML2 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the ability to adapt successfully to the inherent novelty, change, and ambiguity that characterises teaching is a very necessary skill for teachers.

All participants reported that teaching ML2 remotely to adults was unfamiliar to them and their learners. On the other hand, the participants' comments regarding the issues and benefits of ML2 distance education were not specifically related to ML2, as the following participant well explained:

> I did not find any problems to teach Maltese as a foreign language to my online students. With a suitable Internet connection, I could listen well to my students and give them immediate feedback when their pronunciation was not correct and then they repeated after me with the right pronunciation. I could easily correct their writing tasks and send them to the students. My major problems were more technological, as I was using Zoom for the very first time, and I did not receive any training on it. Now that I know how to use Zoom, I believe we should continue to teach Maltese to adults remotely. I am surely going to keep on delivering online private classes.
>
> (Teacher 6, Interview: 23/07/2020)

According to the participants, to cope successfully with ML2 remote teaching and learning, it is important to (i) control one's thinking to identify correlations between the current pedagogy and familiar pedagogy (cognitive adaptability), (ii) manage one's behaviour by contacting a supportive colleague who has more technological knowledge and essential techniques in this pedagogy (behavioural adaptability), and (iii) regulate emotions such as frustration, fear, and anxiety (emotional adaptability). The participants' responses concerning their adaptations to this new context corresponds with Martin et al.'s (2012) tripartite model of adaptability as the teachers needed to adapt their thoughts, behaviour, and emotions while teaching ML2 remotely.

Limitations of the Study

There were some limitations to this study. In a qualitative investigation, one needs to depend on the participants' comments (Queirós et al., 2017), which are a reflection of the individual's interpretation of an event or activity rather than objective views. However, one is to also acknowledge that a qualitative study does not aim to generalise its findings but to gain deeper insight into the perspectives of the participants. Further, the researcher did not directly observe these lessons and thus totally depended on the teachers' (subjective) comments.

Other limitations were the small number of participants and the timeframe. The study duration was very short, as it was referring to ML2 distance education taking place from mid-March to May in 2020.

Conclusions and Recommendations

COVID-19 is a pandemic that has transformed how people operate around the world. In the quest to control the spread of this virus, many countries closed schools between March and June 2020 because scientists determined that it spreads more rapidly in crowded places.

Adults learning ML2 have been forced to look for alternatives to continue with their ML2 study, while their educators have been forced to adopt distance education to ensure that learners achieve the ML2 course objectives. In this study, seventeen teachers have shown that they made significant efforts to embrace the visual and audio-conferencing tools and reported the positive and negative aspects of distance learning. Most of them indicated that distance education should be the means used to teach ML2 to adult learners, especially due to time convenience. However, the participants also reported some disadvantages such as added working hours, stress, and internet connection issues. The participants reported that they intend to carry on using these effective modalities and programmes when they return to a traditional face-to-face classroom setting, so they continue to enjoy several benefits of the digital approach to their work. This clearly opens up a discussion on the feasibility, effectiveness and potential of adopting blended approaches to the teaching and learning of ML2 in adult education classes.

The participants in this study commented more about the benefits and challenges of distance education than on remotely teaching and learning ML2

per se. According to these teachers, there were no problems encountered in delivering their ML2 lessons remotely, compared to doing so in person; besides some technical issues. They noted only the benefits and issues of online teaching, that could be related to most instructional contexts. For example, among the advantages reported was familiarising oneself with technological tools; and among the disadvantages was the consequent stress. However, these benefits and problems are not specific to ML2.

A study on distance education for ML2 in which the researcher conducts observations of several remote lessons is called for to enable a wider lens on the benefits and challenges related to distance education for ML2 using different data collection methods. It would be helpful for the research to be longitudinal, with the researcher observing a greater number of study participants using distance education to teach ML2. Obtaining the perspectives of other stakeholders including the views of educational leaders and the students themselves would also enrich local and international evidence-based research on the topic.

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX
The ML2 remote learners

Teachers' Online Learners versus Classroom Learners	Learner's Nationality	Gender (M/F)	Age	First Language (L1)	Marital Status	Job	Reasons for Learning ML2
Teacher 1 4 out of 5	Indian	F	35	Hindi	single	nurse	"to understand my patients"
	Serb	F	37	Serbian	single	maid	"to understand my clients"
	Syrian	M	38	Levantine Arabic	married	builder	"to understand my colleagues' jokes"
	Venezuelan	M	32	Spanish	divorced	receptionist	"to find a better job"
Teacher 2 9 out of 10	Bulgarian	M	38	Bulgarian	in a relationship	chef	"to understand better the Maltese people"
	Filipino	M	23	Tagalog	single	care worker	"to feel a sense of belonging in Malta"
	Italian	M	42	Italian	married	barista	"to communicate better with the Maltese"
	Libyan	F	32	Libyan Arabic	married	manageress	"to help my children with their homework"
	Serb	M	31	Serbian	single	builder	"to talk and joke with my Maltese colleagues who hardly know a word in English"
	Serb	M	38	Serbian	in a relationship	doctor	"to understand my patients, especially the elderly"
	Serb	M	57	Serbian	married	house painter	"to understand my Maltese wife"
	Serb	M	49	Serbian	married	surgeon	"to understand my patients"
	Somali	M	47	Somali	divorced	cleaner	"to get more clients"
Teacher 3 8 out of 10	Indian	F	27	Hindi	married	nurse	"to help my children with their learning of Maltese and to understand better the Maltese society, its culture and the way the Maltese think and behave"
	Libyan	M	39	Libyan Arabic	married	hotel manager	"to integrate better"
	Moroccan	M	23	Moroccan Arabic	in a relationship	student	"out of respect for the host country, Malta and the Maltese"
	Russian	M	45	Russian	married	doctor	"I definitely need it for work"
	Russian	M	46	Russian	divorced	surgeon	"to hopefully be understood by my patients and their relatives"
	Serb	F	32	Serbian	separated	receptionist	"to make new friends"
	Serb	M	27	Serbian	in a relationship	salesman	"to understand what the customers want"
	Ukrainian	M	31	Ukrainian	in a relationship	waiter	"to joke more with my colleagues"
Teacher 4 4 out of 10	Italian	M	20	Italian	single	chef	"to integrate better in the village where I wish to keep on living"
	Pakistani	M	25	Urdu	married	nurse	"to give a helping hand to the elderly"
	Palestinian	M	34	Levantine Arabic	married	builder	"to find a more suitable job"
	Serb	M	31	Serbian	in a relationship	clerk	"to hopefully understand my girlfriend's parents"

Teachers' Online Learners versus Classroom Learners	Learner's Nationality	Gender (M/F)	Age	First Language (L1)	Marital Status	Job	Reasons for Learning ML2
Teacher 5 4 out of 6	Indian	M	31	Hindi	married	nurse	"to help whoever needs me"
	Russian	M	52	Russian	divorced	surgeon	"to understand and be understood better by my patients"
	Swedish	M	26	Swedish	single	affiliate manager	"to make new friends"
	Ukrainian	M	23	Ukrainian	single	doctor	"to understand my patients better"
Teacher 6 6 out of 6	Bulgarian	M	31	Bulgarian	in a relationship	waiter	"to make life easier"
	Burkinabe	M	36	French	married	furniture assembler	"to understand my clients better"
	Nigerian	M	43	English	married	house painter	"out of respect for Malta"
	Syrian	M	53	Levantine Arabic	married	builder	"to understand my Maltese colleagues' jokes"
	Ukrainian	M	31	Ukrainian	in a relationship	customer advisor	"for better connections"
	Venezuelan	F	44	Spanish	married	maid	"to be understood by my clients"
Teacher 7 5 out of 6	Filipino	M	27	Tagalog	in a relationship	carer	"to understand the elderly"
	Greek	M	26	Greek	single	student	"for further studies"
	Palestinian	M	35	Levantine Arabic	married	carpenter	"to have more clients"
	Russian	M	34	Russian	married	shop attendant	"to understand my clients"
	Serb	M	24	Serbian	single	builder	"to improve integration"
Teacher 8 14 out of 18	Cypriot	F	26	Cypriot Greek	in a relationship	student	"for further studies"
	Danish	F	47	Danish	divorced	games presenter	"to help my children with their studies"
	Ethiopian	F	37	Amharic	married	cleaner	"to help my kids with their homework"
	German	F	64	German	married	payments analyst	"I love to learn languages"
	Greek	M	38	Greek	married	cook	"to understand my colleagues"
	Indian	M	38	Hindi	married	nurse	"to understand my patients and be understood by them"
	Libyan	M	45	Libyan Arabic	married	sales manager	"to help me participate more in society"
	Libyan	M	46	Libyan Arabic	married	auditor	"to integrate better in the Maltese society"
	Pakistani	M	48	Urdu	married	bus driver	"to undertand better the complaints of the passengers"
	Pakistani	F	31	Urdu	married	nurse	"to joke in Maltese with patients"
	Palestinian	M	39	Levantine Arabic	married	paint sprayer	"to understand my Maltese colleagues better"
	Serb	M	41	Serbian	married	plumber	"to have more clients"
	Serb	F	42	Serbian	married	receptionist	"to integrate better in the Maltese community"
	Serb	M	31	Serbian	single	bartender	"to achieve economic and social integration"

Teachers' Online Learners versus Classroom Learners	Learner's Nationality	Gender (M/F)	Age	First Language (L1)	Marital Status	Job	Reasons for Learning ML2
Teacher 9 15 out of 17	Chinese	M	41	Chinese	married	chef	"to find my way around in Malta"
	Chinese	F	35	Chinese	married	beauty therapist	"to have more clients"
	English	F	35	English	separated	clerk	"to make new friends"
	Filipino	M	37	Tagalog	married	elderly carer	"to understand better the elderly"
	Filipino	F	44	Tagalog	in a relationship	hairdresser	"because foreign languages make you smarter!"
	Filipino	F	36	Tagalog	married	house helper	"to keep my Maltese husband happy"
	Japanese	F	27	Japanese	single	student	"I love learning new languages"
	Korean	M	21	Korean	single	games presenter	"to survive in an entirely new culture"
	Libyan	M	46	Libyan Arabic	married	supervisor	"knowing Maltese looks awesome on my CV!"
	Pakistani	M	32	Urdu	married	bus driver	"to understand what the surrounding people are saying"
	Pakistani	F	29	Urdu	married	nurse	"to understand the elderly patients"
	Palestinian	M	20	Levantine Arabic	single	electrician	"to have more clients"
	Serb	F	29	Serbian	in a relationship	clerk	"to learn useful phrases"
	Somali	M	40	Somali	married	builder	"to joke with my colleagues"
	Somali	M	34	Somali	married	material handler	"to talk and understand my Maltese colleagues"
Teacher 10 15 out of 16	Chinese	M	33	Chinese	married	researcher	"to appreciate a new culture and cuisine"
	Filipino	F	28	Tagalog	single	carer	"to help whoever needs me"
	Filipino	F	43	Tagalog	married	housekeeper	"Maltese people appreciate you more when you talk in Maltese"
	Filipino	F	36	Tagalog	married	nanny	"to talk in Maltese with my children and others"
	Korean	M	20	Korean	single	student	"for the love of languages"
	Libyan	M	32	Libyan Arabic	married	resort manager	"I am interested in Maltese grammar"
	Pakistani	M	45	Urdu	married	bus driver	"to understand my colleagues"
	Russian	F	41	Russian	married	receptionist	"to understand my neighbours, especially when they are yelling at each other"
	Serb	M	31	Serbian	married	clerk	"to know my wife's language"
	Serb	M	37	Serbian	married	construction cleaner	"to understand what the other Maltese workmen are saying"
	Somali	M	37	Somali	married	cleaner	"for work"
	Somali	M	26	Somali	married	kitchen assistant	"to understand my colleagues better"
	Somali	M	37	Somali	married	cleaner	"to understand Maltese manners"
	Syrian	M	35	Mesopotamian Arabic	married	tile layer	"to have actual conversations with my colleagues"
	Swedish	M	39	Swedish	divorced	customer support agent	"to pick up diving"

Teachers' Online Learners versus Classroom Learners	Learner's Nationality	Gender (M/F)	Age	First Language (L1)	Marital Status	Job	Reasons for Learning ML2
Teacher 11 14 out of 17	Burkinabe	M	44	French	married	dishwasher	"to continue to live in Malta"
	Burkinabe	M	39	French	married	handy person	"to read and understand the street signs and other signs"
	Burkinabe	M	36	French	married	builder	"to continue to live in Malta"
	Chinese	M	45	Chinese	married	massage therapist	"to understand my Maltese clients better"
	Cypriot	F	25	Cypriot Greek	single	analyst	"to enjoy the benefits of being bilingual"
	Czech	F	30	Czech	single	waitress	"my boss told me that I should learn Maltese"
	English	F	21	English	single	receptionist	"to find a better job"
	Filipino	F	39	Tagalog	married	carer	"to understand the elderly patients"
	Korean	M	31	Korean	in a relationship	student	"to make new friends"
	Libyan	M	46	Libyan Arabic	married	general manager	"to do more business with the Maltese"
	Serb	M	43	Serbian	separated	construction labourer	"to understand my colleagues' jokes"
	Serb	M	37	Serbian	married	truck driver	"to understand what the Maltese are saying when socializing among each other"
	Somali	M	38	Somali	married	general labourer	"to find a better job"
	Venezuelan	F	22	Spanish	in a relationship	dishwasher	"to understand what the other Maltese workers are saying amongst each other"
Teacher 12 3 out of 5	Libyan	M	36	Libyan Arabic	married	sales manager	"to appreciate how my language influenced Maltese"
	Russian	F	41	Russian	married	receptionist	"to understand my neighbours, especially when they are yelling at each other"
	Serb	M	37	Serbian	married	construction cleaner	"to understand what the other Maltese workmen are saying"
Teacher 13 10 out of 10	Burkinabe	M	42	French	married	maintenance operative	"to integrate better in Malta"
	Burkinabe	M	35	French	married	kitchen assistant	"to live in Malta for good"
	Burkinabe	M	20	French	married	site cleaner	"to understand my colleagues"
	Chinese	M	31	Chinese	in a relationship	manager	"to show respect to the host country"
	Cypriot	F	21	Cypriot Greek	single	student	"to make new friends"
	Czech	F	30	Czech	single	waitress	"to understand the Maltese better"
	Indian	F	33	Hindi	married	chef	"to understand the Maltese culture"
	Indian	M	31	Hindi	married	iGaming infrastructure architect	"to make connections"
	Russian	M	40	Russian	married	team leader	"I am interested in the Maltese language"
	Somali	M	32	Somali	married	kitchen porter	"to understand Maltese anger and complaints"

Teachers' Online Learners versus Classroom Learners	Learner's Nationality	Gender (M/F)	Age	First Language (L1)	Marital Status	Job	Reasons for Learning ML2
Teacher 14 4 out of 14	Czech	F	36	Czech	married	receptionist	"to communicate better with my husband"
	English	F	36	English	single	marketing coordinator	"a better chance to get a promotion"
	Spanish	F	27	Spanish	in a relationship	childcarer	"to be able to communicate with Maltese children"
	Vietnamese	F	47	Vietnamese	married	waitress	"to make new friends"
Teacher 15 6 out of 13	Indian	M	46	Hindi	married	technical project mng.	"to understand the Maltese way of thinking"
	Indian	M	37	Hindi	married	delivery man	"to show my interest and commitment to Malta"
	Indian	M	41	Hindi	married	nurse	"to get by better in Malta"
	Italian	F	32	Italian	married	chef	"as my children are learning it too"
	Libyan	M	34	Libyan Arabic	married	marketing manager	"to enjoy secret codes with my wife when going abroad"
	Somali	M	42	Somali	married	waste collection operator	"to hopefully find my dream job"
Teacher 16 3 out of 20	Filipino	M	24	Tagalog	single	care worker	"to express things difficult to express in my native language"
	Indian	M	41	Hindi	married	shop assistant	"to make me a more articulate person"
	Russian	F	35	Russian	divorced	account executive	"to understand what my Maltese colleagues are saying"
Teacher 17 20 out of 20	Chinese	M	40	Chinese	married	cook	"I am required to learn Maltese"
	Czech	F	33	Czech	single	content writer	"I enjoy the challenge of learning a new language"
	Filipino	M	48	Tagalog	married	store keeper	"I like the sound of Maltese when it is spoken"
	Indian	M	31	Hindi	married	nurse	"I'm a linguaholic and enjoy learning them"
	Indian	M	44	Hindi	married	kitchen helper	"to help people in need"
	Libyan	M	38	Libyan Arabic	married	manager	"to understand my language and culture better"
	Pakistani	M	33	Urdu	married	nurse	"to keep my mind healthy"
	Pakistani	M	43	Urdu	married	restaurant manager	"to help me understand how Maltese people think"
	Russian	M	25	Russian	single	receptionist	"to show respect to the country that is hosting me"
	Swedish	F	26	Swedish	single	head of department	"to understand the Maltese and be understood"
	Syrian	M	34	Levantine Arabic	married	plumber	"to find a new job"
	Ukrainian	M	32	Ukrainian	single	customer advisor	"I am interested in the linguistic aspects of Maltese"
	Ukrainian	M	33	Ukrainian	single	online presenter	"to make new friends"
	Swedish	F	26	Swedish	single	head of iGaming operations	"to understand the Maltese and be understood"
	Venezuelan	F	35	Spanish	in a relationship	customer officer	"to make new friends"

Teachers' Online Learners versus Classroom Learners	Learner's Nationality	Gender (M/F)	Age	First Language (L1)	Marital Status	Job	Reasons for Learning ML2
Teacher 17	Vietnamese	F	31	Vietnamese	married	maid	"to find a better job"
	Vietnamese	F	27	Vietnamese	married	nail technician	"to understand better what my clients want"
	Venezuelan	F	47	Spanish	married	childcarer	"to help the children with their Maltese"
	Venezuelan	F	34	Spanish	single	childcarer	"to find my future Maltese husband!"
	Vietnamese	F	33	Vietnamese	married	cleaner	"to get a promotion"