Student evaluation of teachers' pedagogical skills during the first COVID-19 period

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Abstract. With the COVID-19 outbreak at the beginning of 2020, many language teachers worldwide who were successfully implementing face-to-face teaching had to abruptly switch to online education, which was not something they were trained for or had experience with. Were they successful? The present study asked students from Turkey (TUR), Poland (POL), the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) to evaluate their teachers' professional adaptation and success during the first emergency online teaching semester. The results of the study showed that there were important similarities in the ways students in the examined four countries approached and evaluated the level of professionalism of their teachers in the first COVID-19 period regarding their teachers' computer literacy, online teaching skills, creation of materials appropriate for online teaching.

Keywords: online teaching, teacher computer skills, COVID-19, student evaluations.

1. Introduction

With the COVID-19 outbreak at the beginning of 2020, many Language Teachers (LT) around the world who were successfully implementing face-to-face teaching had to abruptly switch to online education, which was not something that many were trained for or had experience with. Some of the technology standards for LT (Healey et al., 2011) and the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge

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(Mishra & Koehler, 2006) had been established, but LT varied in their stages of technology adoption. Their awareness, confidence, learning, creative application, and adaptation to new contexts differed (Knezek & Christensen, 2008). However, because of COVID-19, LT had to change their teaching methods, materials, and classroom interactions within weeks.

Were LT successful in adapting to the online teaching environment? Answering this question is crucial since the new developments in the organisation of education triggered the need to rethink the teaching profession in terms of competencies, means of instruction, and strategies for coping with processes that affect teaching.

Aiming to contribute to this strand of research and following studies (Rafiee & Abbasian-Naghneh, 2019) showing that LT, students, and infrastructure are all essential for the successful use of online tools, the present study aims to uncover how students evaluate their teachers' professional adaptation during the emergency COVID-19 period. The specific research question we aim to answer is: how do university/high school students evaluate the pedagogical skills of their teachers during the first COVID-19 period?

2. Method

2.1. Data collection

The data were collected in TUR, POL, RNM, and B&H using questionnaires in English specifically developed for this study and comprising two parts. 'Part A: Background' included questions eliciting information about the students (e.g. age, gender), while 'Section B: Evaluation' had four Likert scale questions (19 items) aiming to uncover students' assessments of their instructors' computer literacy, teaching, roles, and interaction skills during the emergency COVID-19 period. Students' questionnaire submissions were anonymous, and they were given specific definitions of teacher roles and criteria to evaluate their teachers' online teaching skills (see the lists in Q3 and Q4).

2.2. Data analysis

Responses to the questionnaires were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, keeping in mind country and context-specific peculiarities.

2.3. Participants

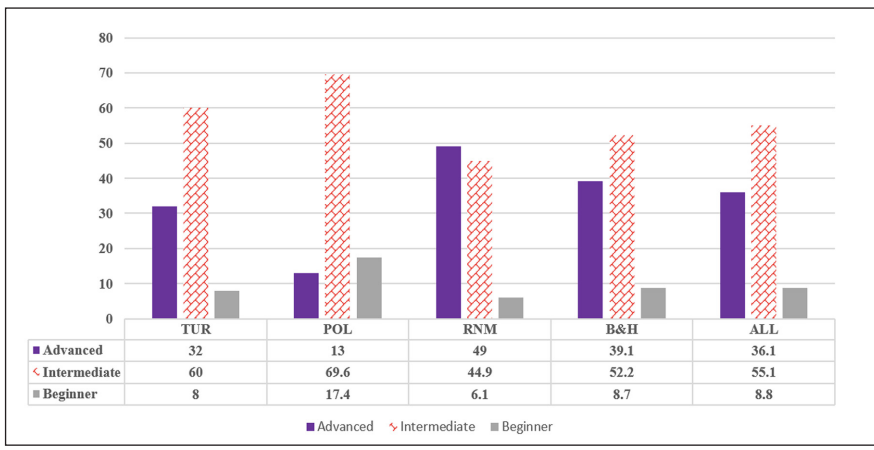
A total of 216 (87 M, 128 F, one not given) high school/university students aged 16-22 participated in this study. There were 75 (34.7%) TUR, 23 (10.6%) POL, 49 (22.7%) RNM and 69 (31.9%) B&H participants.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Q1. How do you evaluate your teachers' computer literacy?

Question 1 related results show that, despite some numerical differences, students in the examined countries evaluated their teachers' computer literacy similarly. Only a few participants stated that their teachers' literacy was 'beginner', while most of them ticked either 'intermediate' (55.1%) or 'advanced' (36.1%) (Figure 1). This is an interesting finding because regardless of LT's background and/or previous knowledge, they were evaluated as proficient users of the new technology required for the successful delivery of online classes by their students.

Figure 1. How do you evaluate your teachers' computer literacy?



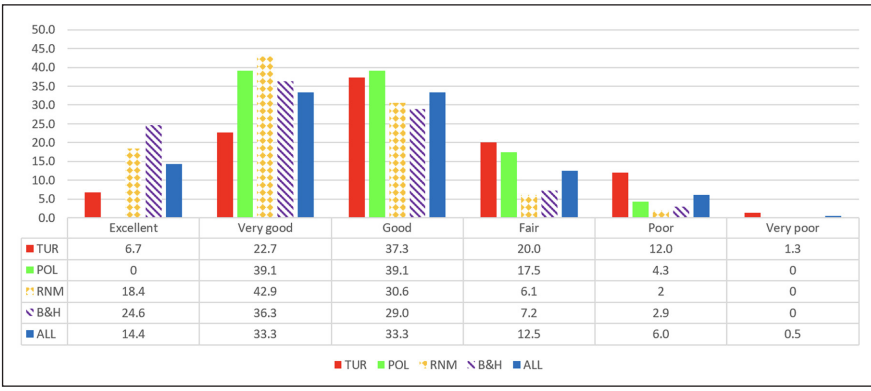
	TUR	POL	RNM	B&H	ALL
Advanced	32	13	49	39.1	36.1
Intermediate	60	69.6	44.9	52.2	55.1
Beginner	8	17.4	6.1	8.7	8.8

3.2. Q2. How do you rate your teachers' online teaching skills?

When students were asked to evaluate the online teaching skills of their teachers, 66.6% of them chose 'good' or 'very good', and 14.4% selected 'excellent'

(Figure 2). The high percentage (81%) of the positive students' evaluations can be related to the results of Question 1. It could be argued that LT were successful in online teaching because they had good computer literacy skills and applied them while teaching online.

Figure 2. How do you rate your teachers' online teaching skills?



	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor
TUR	6.7	22.7	37.3	20.0	12.0	1.3
POL	0	39.1	39.1	17.5	4.3	0
RNM	18.4	42.9	30.6	6.1	2	0
B&H	24.6	36.3	29.0	7.2	2.9	0
ALL	14.4	33.3	33.3	12.5	6.0	0.5

3.3. Q3: How would you rate your teachers' roles when you compare face-to-face teaching with online teaching?

Question 3 asked participants to rate the roles LT played during the first online period and indicate the extent to which these roles differed from in-class teaching. Students were given ten categories and asked to rate the roles on a scale of one (completely different) to four (exactly the same).

The list below shows that students, who have been provided with the specific definitions of ten teacher roles, predominantly believed that the teachers' roles in online teaching were either somewhat the same or exactly the same as the ones in face-to-face teaching.

- A role model in the use of digital tools for learning=62%.
- Adviser=79.2%.
- Assessor=77.7%.
- Facilitator=73.1%.
- Feedback provider=75.5%.
- Manager of class=64.4%.
- Material provider=83.4%.
- Motivator=58.3%.

- Organiser of learning=69.9%.
- Supporter=72.3%.

These results might lead to the conclusion that teachers successfully played the roles they typically perform in class in the new teaching environment despite the abrupt shift and lack of preparation. The findings support a study conducted by UNICEF (2021) in RNM, which showed that 68% of the students rated positively the support they received from their teachers during the online period.

3.4. Q4: How would you evaluate your teachers' work during this online teaching period?

Question 4 was a Likert scale item with seven statements asking students to assess their teachers' performance from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). The list below shows that all criteria were evaluated with 'agree' or 'strongly agree' by at least 53.7% of the students. The instructors (are):

- competent in online teaching (agree and strongly agree=58.8%);
- easy to reach (A&SA=63.9%);
- effective in dealing with potential content difficulties (A&SA=57.8%);
- encourage student participation during online classes (A&SA=55.6%);
- regularly hold synchronous classes (A&SA=53.7%);
- regularly send the necessary materials (A&SA=82.9%); and
- effectively use digital tools to support learning (A&SA=63%).

The high positive evaluation of the 'regularly send the necessary materials' criterion demonstrates that LT tried to compensate for the lack of face-to-face contact by regularly sending students study materials. Also, 63.9% and 63% of the students stated that their teachers were easy to reach and used the available digital tools to support students' learning. These results parallel the findings of two reports published by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK, 2020, 2021) in TUR and by Rahić et al. (2021) in B&H. The reported students' reactions to the ad hoc online teaching and testing during the first COVID-19 period in these documents were also mainly positive. Students pointed that their teachers rapidly accommodated/integrated into the new distance education system, and it was easier to reach them and the course materials.

Student evaluations related to the remaining four criteria were still positive but varied between 53.7% and 58.8%. The lower positive evaluations for the 'competence in online teaching', 'effectively dealing with potential content difficulties',

'encouraging student participation during online classes', and 'regularly holding synchronous classes' criteria show that holding regular synchronous classes and handling content difficulties or encouraging students to participate during online teaching were more challenging topics for the LT in the examined countries.

4. Conclusions

The study results show important similarities in how LT in TUR, POL, RNM, and B&H are perceived and evaluated by their students.

Differently from some other studies (cf. Miloshevska et al., 2020) arguing that online teaching was overwhelmed with different problems, our findings show that:

- students' evaluations of LT's computer literacy and online teaching skills mainly were positive in the examined countries;
- teacher roles mostly remained the same as in the face-to-face teaching environment; and
- despite the hardships of the COVID-19 crisis, LT tried to support their students' learning by being easy to reach and regularly prepared good quality materials that they shared with their students.

In contrast, according to their students, holding regular synchronous classes, managing content difficulties, or encouraging student participation during online teaching were topics that LT were less successful with in the examined countries.

Despite the rigour with which the data collection and analysis procedures were carried out, the results of the current study cannot be generalised as data were collected from only a limited number of students in our four countries. Studies with other groups of students might lead to different results. Also, for a more complete picture of the difficulties faced by LT during the first COVID-19 period, data from the LT should be added and analysed.

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