

Review research paper

**EMPOWERING TEACHERS AND STUDENTS TO COPE WITH  
THE STRESS OF ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING:  
FINDINGS FROM A PILOT PROJECT ON PSYCHOSOCIAL  
SUPPORT IN THE LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION  
CLASSROOM**

Sonja Kitanovska-Kimovska, Katarina Gjurchevska Atanasovska,  
Solzica Popovska, Vladimir Cvetkoski

Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Faculty of Philology, Department of Translation and Interpreting,  
Skopje, North Macedonia

**Abstract.** *In times of crisis, emergency education makes significant contributions to individuals and societies by providing a sense of normality (Johannes 2012). As teachers facilitate the learning process and are expected to support students emotionally, Muldong, Garcia & Gozum (2021) suggest that work-from-home teachers should be provided with psychosocial support to address the mental and emotional stress caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. El-Monshed, El-Adl, Ali and Loufy (2021) and Carreon & Manansala (2021) suggest that educational institutions should also take measures to improve students' mental health and academic performance and make it a priority in the current context.*

*This paper reports the findings of a project on psychosocial support at Blaze Koneski Faculty in Skopje from March to June 2021 involving 15 language and translation teachers and 121 students. The teachers attended a series of workshops guided by a trained clinical psychologist. The workshops aimed at providing immediate psychosocial assistance to teachers to cope with the stress of the pandemic, to sensitise teachers to the students' needs in an emerging crisis and to empower them to employ new ways of student engagement in the online classroom. The training concept was based on the assumption that one's self-care and well-being are prerequisites for one to be able to care about others (in this context the students).*

*The teachers tested various methods at two levels of classroom communication. They engaged in informal communication and introduced well-being techniques to create a relaxing class atmosphere and to facilitate the learning process. They also involved students in participative activities to help them take hold of their learning. Teacher and student feedback has been positive and points to the encouraging effect of this approach in the online environment and beyond it. It shows that the modern translation classroom, be it physical or virtual, requires giving students an active voice and a sense of control over their learning. It also shows that moving away from adhering to technical material to enrich the curriculum with topics and methods that address well-being and mental health is beneficial.*

**Key words:** *emergency education, psychosocial support, well-being, teaching methods*

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Corresponding author: Vladimir Cvetkoski, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Faculty of Philology, Department of Translation and Interpreting, Skopje, North Macedonia

E-mail: [cvetkoski@ff.ukim.edu.mk](mailto:cvetkoski@ff.ukim.edu.mk)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruptions in everyday life throughout the world. Soon after the outbreak of the disease, which first occurred in China in December 2019, public health authorities all over the world introduced restrictions to limit people's movements and stop the transmission of the virus. Restrictions on social contact, such as lockdowns and bans on public gatherings, and prevention measures, such as quarantine, self-isolation and social distancing, have affected all areas of human life. They have led to the closure of all schools and universities as well, interrupting the learning of more than 1.6 billion children worldwide (UNESCO 2021). As it was difficult to predict how long the emergency would last and in order to provide students with a sense of normalcy, authorities all over the world decided to transfer schooling online, so schools and universities moved to emergency remote teaching via online platforms (Sundarasan et al. 2020: 2), (Ihnatova et al. 2022) and (Ononiwu 2021). At the same time, Holmes et al. (2020: 548) present scientific data showing that many of the preventive measures themselves (quarantine and social and physical distancing, which lead to social isolation and loneliness) are risk factors for mental health issues and are strongly associated with anxiety, depression, alcohol and substance misuse, domestic and child abuse, self-harm and suicide attempts and psychosocial risks such as social disconnection, lack of meaning, cyberbullying, bereavement, loss. On this account, it is evident that measures to prevent the spread of the disease should be accompanied by measures to build resilience and coping strategies that help counteract the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's mental health and well-being. The more so because besides being acute in the short term, the psychological and social impacts of emergencies can also undermine the long-term mental health and psychosocial well-being of the affected population, which may, in turn, threaten peace, human rights and development (IASC 2007: 1).

The purpose of this paper is to discuss possible approaches to developing coping strategies and improving the well-being of university teachers and students. It presents the findings of a pilot project on psychosocial support for language and translation teachers and students. First, we present the concept of emergency education, followed by the biopsychosocial model of mental health to locate the role of education in crisis situations. Second, we discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education in general and on the psychological well-being of teachers and students. Then, we present the project and the methodology, followed by the main findings and recommendations. Finally, we discuss the results and suggest possible future steps.

## 2. BASIC DEFINITIONS

The terms *mental health*, *psychosocial well-being*, *psychological well-being* and *well-being* are closely linked and overlap (IASC 2007: 1). In this paper they are used interchangeably to refer to the state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being, "in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (WHO 2018). The term *psychosocial support* is used for any "non-therapeutic intervention" (Segen's Medical Dictionary 2011) and "support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being or prevent or treat mental disorders" (UNHCR 2022: 2).

### 3. THE CONCEPT OF EMERGENCY EDUCATION

Emergency education is an approach to the education of children during times of crisis caused by man-made (e.g. wars and conflicts) or natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes, floods, pandemics). In this context, the term “emergency” does not refer only to the immediate period of crisis, but it also covers the post-crisis reconstruction and rehabilitation period (Sinclair 2002: 22). The theme of education in emergencies came to the fore when the governments, and organisations represented at the World Education Forum in Dakar 2000 pledged to “meet the needs of education systems affected by conflict, natural calamities and instability and conduct educational programmes in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace and tolerance, and that help to prevent violence and conflict” (World Education Forum 2000: 8). Emergency education is “a set of linked project activities that enable structured learning to continue in times of acute crisis or long-term instability” (Nicolai 2003: 11), or “education that protects the well-being, fosters learning opportunities, and nurtures the overall development (social, emotional, cognitive, physical) of children affected by conflicts and disasters” (Save the Children Alliance Education Group 2001 in Sinclair 2002: 23). In essence, the aim of emergency education efforts is to ensure children’s rights to education and to protection are exercised during conflicts and disasters so that they are better prepared for the future and able to contribute to the rebuilding of society after the end of the crisis. In emergency situations, education plays a short-term goal of meeting children’s basic needs and a long term goal of helping them reduce their vulnerability to disaster and build new lives (ibid: 6) by developing children’s survival skills, individual and social development skills and academic skills (ibid.:113). Whereas in emergencies education itself is a key psychosocial intervention by bringing a sense of normality, dignity and hope (IASC 2007: 148), Halstead & Affouneh (2006: 203-4) claim that a common feature of all emergency education programs is that they give low priority to personal, emotional and spiritual education, although this is the biggest need of all for children in crisis. They claim that to be able to develop resources to rise above the crisis and rebuild hope for a better future, children need inner strength, personal qualities of character and a rich sense of themselves and their own identity. We tend to agree with this claim and we would also extend it to teachers working in emergency education. According to IASC, teachers play a significant role in supporting the mental health and psychosocial well-being of students while struggling with their own emergency-related mental health and psychosocial problems (IASC 2007: 148). Emergency education should, therefore, support the emotional needs of teachers too. It is with these considerations in mind that we have approached the project we report on in this paper. The underlying motive was to complement education during the COVID-19 emergency with psychosocial support to empower students and teachers to cope with the stress of the pandemic and online teaching and learning so that they come out of the emergency better equipped to deal with daily life and possible future emergencies. We test this approach in the language and translation classroom.

### 4. THE BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL MODEL OF MENTAL HEALTH

According to Engel and Romano’s biopsychosocial model of health (1977 in URM), health, including mental health, is not the absence of disease but rather a complex interaction of biological, psychological and social factors. To understand mental health, it is not sufficient to investigate biological factors only (genetic predisposition or pathophysiological changes), but also psychological and social components of human existence (Engel 1977: 132). The

biopsychosocial approach is integrative and multidisciplinary and requires active engagement and self-awareness (URMC). This model is useful for our study as it incorporates aspects of human development that are relevant in education, such as psychological (social skills, coping skills and self-esteem) and social aspects (school and peers) (see Figure 1 in Physiopedia).

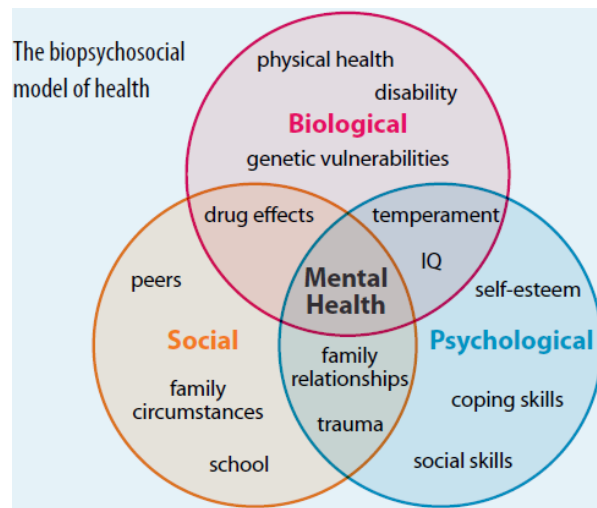


Figure 1 The biopsychosocial model of health

##### 5. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MENTAL HEALTH

Since the start of the pandemic, a number of research studies have demonstrated that COVID-19 and the accompanying changes and restrictions in daily life have had an enormous negative impact on people's psychological well-being. Teachers' and students' well-being has been affected by changes in society due to lockdowns and social distancing, as well as by the new circumstances of online teaching.

The pandemic came with the loss of social interaction (Cardenas et al. 2020: 2187) and mobility, fear or direct experiences of infection, information-related anxiety (either from lack or excess information or misinformation), loss of relatives or friends, monotonous lifestyle (Sundarassen et al. 2020:2) with no extra-curricular activities (including lack of physical activity), lack of personal space at home, longer screen time (Wang 2021: 946), uncertainty about the future (especially for final year students), or, for some, even domestic violence or abuse (Cardenas et al. 2020: 2187).

Online classes came with issues like lack of internet access, technical equipment and digital skills (Naidoo & Cartwright 2020: 4), work overload (Olawale et al. 2021:185), difficulties of adapting the face-to-face curriculum, assessment and evaluation to the online classroom, blurred boundaries between work/study and family and deterioration of work-life balance (ILO 2020: 18).

All these challenges have affected teachers and students physically, behaviourally, socially, emotionally and cognitively. Both teachers and students have demonstrated shifted

eating and sleeping patterns, social withdrawal, cyberbullying, alcohol misuse and addiction, absenteeism, anxiety, stress, depression, suicidal ideation or attempt, rigid thinking patterns, memory issues, lack of concentration, lack of motivation, lower job/class engagement and performance (Chaturvedi et al. 2021: 6, El-Monshed et al. 2021: 2, Sundarasan et al. 2020: 3, Rajkumar 2020: 3, ILO 2020: 6-7, Oncevska-Ager & Ivanovska-Naskova 2020).

Research in various countries on different continents has also shown that students have experienced serious deterioration in all mental health indicators with clinically relevant symptoms of PTSD (30.8% in Chi et al. 2020, 49.4% in Ristevska-Dimitrovska 2020), depression (23.3% in Chi et al. 2020, 74.5% in El-Monshed et al. 2021, 34.19% in Odriozola-González et al. 2020, 42.5% in Ristevska-Dimitrovska 2020), anxiety (15.5% in Chi et al. 2020, 24.9% in Cao et al. 2020, 29.8% in Sundarasan et al. 2020, 47.1% in El-Monshed et al. 2021, 21.34% in Odriozola-González et al. 2020, 28.2% in Ristevska-Dimitrovska 2020), stress (40.5% in El-Monshed et al. 2021, 28.14% in Odriozola-González et al. 2020) and even suicidal ideation (19.6% in Ristevska-Dimitrovska 2020).

These findings suggest that psychosocial assistance and support is necessary for students in the current crisis. As teachers are in the frontlines of emergency education, it seems they can be the ones to provide such support. However, to be able to do so, they should be given psychosocial support too (Muldong et al. 2021, Odriozola-González et al. 2020, Aperribai et al. 2020: 2). Teacher effectiveness in creating a safe and supportive interaction with students depends on their own social and emotional skills and well-being. Therefore, providing support for teachers' own psychosocial well-being is an essential component of supporting students (IASC 2007). In this paper we present the approach we took as a possible solution to providing psychosocial support to both teachers and students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, hereby follows a description of the project aims and activities, research questions and methodology.

## 6. THE PROJECT

Due to the nature of their profession, teachers are constantly in direct communication with their students. They are expected to guide them and to offer advice and help whenever possible, but sometimes they do not feel able to respond to such challenges. In order to provide support for their students and be able to assist, they have to have psychological stability and take care of their personal well-being first.

This was the motivation behind the project. It was designed to explore the possibilities for coping with the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic. Its aim was to identify critical assistance points based on empirical data with a view to enhancing educational practices and personal working conditions through greater participation of all relevant parties, better communication and the development of teams and support networks. Teachers were the primary target group of the project, and students were the secondary target group. Activities were organised accordingly during the period March and June 2021.

### 6.1. Teacher-centred component

The teacher component included a series of nine online workshops with a group of fifteen teachers from the Blazhe Koneski Faculty of Philology in Skopje, under the guidance of a clinical psychologist. The work was based on three important aspects: 1) personal life management and improvement of the quality of life in times of pandemic; 2)

student-teacher relationship enhancement through direct contact, motivation, encouragement, setting personal examples and exchanging experiences, and 3) enhancing the overall learning environment for the students in times of pandemic through equality and greater involvement in problem solving strategies with a view to empowering students to be able to adapt to the changes in life and to use the challenges for personal development and well-being.

Relying on the biopsychosocial model of mental health, the basic characteristics and developmental potential of crises, as well as on the concepts of attachment and authenticity as crucial preconditions for progress, the teachers focused on the importance of self-care as the most useful tool for enhancing students' well-being and assisting the learning process. During this teacher-oriented phase, they explored possibilities for safe self-study, self-recognition and self-care with a view to boosting their self-confidence, sense of compassion, tolerance and resilience, which are necessary to understand personal strengths and weaknesses and to express one's personal authenticity and autonomy. Being authentic and autonomous empowers people to easily find solutions to problems and adapt to difficult situations effectively with better chances for survival. This has been achieved through concrete strategies and tools which enable them to get to know themselves better. For example, they learned about and practised the healing power of deep breathing. This is a very effective relaxation technique that can be used in situations of stress and anxiety as a self-help technique which restores mental and physical balance whenever one needs it. Teachers were encouraged to dedicate time to this technique on a daily basis. The next technique was role play designed to help prioritise and find solutions to problems in stressful situations relying on key coping principles such as attachment, authenticity, participation, originality, creativity, safety, flexibility, employed in situations of prolonged crises. It was intended to demonstrate the need of being able to react and prioritise differently in stressful situations and recognise the importance of flexibility, which lead to creative and original solutions. Another tool that was used was the development of a personalised self-care model which is supposed to entail a personal self-awareness routine as a vehicle for establishing a relationship with oneself and accepting one's strengths and weaknesses as a precondition for bonding with other people. This model is intended to promote self-development and enthusiasm for daily routines. An individual approach to this technique is required in order to focus on rituals that best serve one's needs and personality. These might vary, like for example: visualisation, meditation, yoga or other forms of physical activity, drinking coffee or tea at a particular time of the day, taking up hobbies, learning new skills and having varied interests, or anything else that is effective and helps create a better relationship with oneself. Another technique was creating a safe place. This technique involves imagining a situation in which you feel safe, happy and relaxed, drawing that situation on a piece of paper and finding your place in the drawing. It is then necessary to visualise the safe place and to try to feel the emotions behind the scene and to evoke any colours, feeling, sounds or presence of other people as well. This is a useful relaxation technique which can be used when under stress or when experiencing a negative emotional charge. The techniques were accompanied by frequent discussions about teachers' feelings and emotions at a particular time, as well as attempts to recall how they felt in the past compared to the present. These discussions were used in order to help teachers better understand how they felt and why, especially if they experienced negative emotions, frustrations or any kind of unhappy disposition. Frequently, techniques were combined for optimal results, for example, the visualisation technique was done after a session of deep breathing exercise. The teachers regularly discussed the benefits of the techniques in small groups, brainstormed ideas and exchanged opinions on the

importance of self-care as a tool for helping others. They also repeatedly accentuated the usefulness of the workshops, which helped them better understand themselves and adopt new approaches to problems and challenges.

Through this continuous process of self-recognition and self-care, the teachers empowered themselves to enhance their relationships with the students and establish even more solid bonds based on humanity and empathy. This has put a completely new and different perspective on the teacher-student relationship.

## **6.2. Student-centred component**

In the student component of the project, taking a student-oriented approach, the teachers explored possibilities for improving the teaching methodologies by using benefits of self-care techniques and by promoting direct communication with the students, stronger engagement and independence during classes and improving the psychosocial aspect of the educational process. The aim was to boost students' self-confidence and to show them that they can be active participants in solving problems during turbulent times.

Firstly, the teachers introduced the project to the students and informed them about their intention to modify the teaching methodology by giving them opportunities to become more active participants in the educational process. Furthermore, they devised different teaching models containing good practices relying on their experience with the self-care techniques. They tested the models with different categories of students adopting an individual approach when choosing the activities to be done depending on different teaching objectives for various courses (language, literature, translation and interpreting and teaching methodology). The students belonged to different years of study and attended different courses (language, literature, translation and interpreting and teaching methodology).

The teaching models tested rely on two basic segments: 1) informal activities and 2) formal activities that were conducted online via Zoom, MS Team, Google Meet and similar platforms for distance learning. The informal activities offered possibilities to spend time during the class to discuss everyday topics and current affairs. These included visualisation techniques, in which students were asked to imagine a problem they faced at that moment and to try to put it in a positive perspective by offering a creative solution. Another example were discussions on leisure activities, pastimes or hobbies that students had adopted during the pandemic and sharing information about any common interests and activities. Students also watched inspirational videos about well-being in general, including topics like gratitude, kindness or happiness, which motivated them to reconsider their attitudes and priorities and to learn new well-being techniques that might be useful when faced with difficulties or lack of motivation. Discussions also dealt with feelings in general and the possible motivation behind those feelings, sharing ways of coping with the challenges of the pandemic. Students also practiced deep breathing techniques and were informed about their benefits and discussed possibilities of developing a personalised self-care model. The informal activities were conducted anytime during the class, whenever the teacher noticed poor concentration, distraction or lack of enthusiasm in students. These activities helped the teacher to get to know the students better, understand how they felt and respond with empathy and care for the students.

The informal activities were combined with formal methods, which offered possibilities to cover different areas of the curriculum with a stronger students' engagement compared to traditional frontal teaching modes. The students actively participated in designing different

course aspects (objectives, methodology, assessment and evaluation). Switching from listeners to active participants in the educational process, students become more responsible and better prepared for professional challenges. This approach makes them equal partners in the teaching process.

Formal activities included presentations, preparation of classes and lectures, homework assignments, peer-reviewing and assessment tasks, project team work, discussions and debates, simulations and role plays, and even students' leading the class themselves. For example, during language classes, students were assigned the task of preparing presentations on a certain grammar topic by working in small groups. After having finished, the groups shared the presentations, reached conclusions, discussed problematic areas and possible solutions independently, while the teacher monitored the class and participated with comments or clarifications when necessary. The goal of the activity was to enable the students to understand the benefits of active involvement in the learning process. Interpreting students, for example, took part in role plays in which they simulated everyday interpreting situations (hospital, police station, school, court etc.). They worked with specially designed scenarios which they prepared themselves and assumed different roles. After the task was done, they discussed each other's performance, pointing out good practices and errors and sharing opinions. The teacher moderated the class with comments and advice. The aim of the activity was to share knowledge and to boost students' self-confidence. Translation students worked on creating their own assessment criteria based on pre-existing assessment models and their own practical experience. Working in small groups on translation projects, they were given the task of reviewing other colleagues' translations according to previously established assessment criteria using Google Docs options for reviewing. In the end, the translations and the comments were compared and the errors were discussed, which was very instructional for the students. Within the teaching methodology classes, the students were given the role of a teacher and were asked to prepare the class, plan activities and assign tasks to other colleagues and actually hold the class. On another occasion, they watched a previously recorded online class taught in a secondary school, and then without the aid of the teacher, discussed the strengths and the weaknesses of the teaching methods used in the video and independently drew conclusions. During literature classes, students had the possibility to discuss the concept of suicide, for example, which was a key issue in the novel they worked on, to share their view and to relate it to other literary texts or to everyday life.

## 7. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Based on the assumptions and the model presented above, we have formulated the following sets of research questions regarding this intervention:

1. Can the intervention benefit teachers' personal and professional well-being? If so, to what extent?
2. Which well-being techniques do teachers find to be the most useful ones?
3. Which teaching activities do teachers find to be the most useful ones?

On the students' end, we formulated the following research questions:

4. How do students find the teachers' attempts at introducing/practicing participative teaching methodologies? What are their preferences?



With a view to providing answers to these questions, two questionnaires were compiled: one for the teachers and one for the students. The teacher questionnaire comprised 22 questions (multiple choice, open ended and linear scale questions). It was designed to explore the teachers' attitudes on their project experience and the potential personal and professional benefits from it.

The student questionnaire aimed at gathering the students' opinions about the different forms of engagement (formal and informal) in classes. It was intended not only to explore their attitudes towards the teaching approaches adopted during the project, but also to demonstrate to them that their opinions matter. The questionnaire consisted of nine multiple choice and open-ended questions. The questions were intended to explore students' attitudes on the possibility to participate more actively in classes than usual and their preferences related to the teaching methodology ranging from frontal approaches (which include a more traditional methodology without necessarily engaging the students actively in class activities) to more interactive approaches (which make the students active participants in the learning process). Furthermore, they investigated students' views on possible advantages and disadvantages of active engagement during the classes and whether the classes should include activities and techniques for reducing stress and improving the overall well-being on a regular basis.

## 8. RESULTS

### 8.1. Teacher-centred component

Twelve out of 15 participating teachers completed the questionnaire (response rate of 80%). The respondents were predominantly female (84.6%), aged between 30 and 60 years (with the majority falling within the 40 to 50 age group (46.2%), and the minority falling within the 50 and 60 age group (15.4%).

When it comes to workshop attendance, the results reveal that the workshops were well attended. Total of 38.5% of respondents participated in all workshops, whereas 46.2% of them attended most workshops; only few of them (15.4%) did not participate regularly in the workshops.

Regarding the influence of the self-care techniques on their overall well-being, 81.4% of respondents marked it as positive (on a scale of 1 to 5, they gave a mark of 4 (58.3%) or 5 (23.1%)). According to their answers, these techniques helped them improve concentration and focus, better understand their emotions in times of crises, enabled them to cope with the challenges and difficulties that arise from long isolation and working from home; they restored mental and physical balance and promoted self-respect and equality among the academic staff since they showed common weaknesses, fear and frustrations arising from the pandemic, and offered an opportunity to find solutions together as a team. More importantly, they raised awareness about the importance of overall well-being in times of prolonged crises. According to the results, the most useful self-care techniques were deep breathing exercises, safe place visualisation, yoga, everyday rituals and routines, team work, journaling. Teachers revealed that they were happy to understand that self-care promotes care about the others as well, and that it is very important to be flexible and to learn how to prioritise and dedicate time to oneself in times of crises. The self-care techniques proved to be useful, which is evidenced by the fact that a huge number of respondents continue to use some of them in everyday life. Thus, 46.2 % said that they use

them regularly on a daily basis, and an equal percentage said they do it occasionally. They mostly use deep breathing exercises, safe place visualisation techniques, as well as techniques for reframing causes of stress, yoga, meditation, journaling and everyday rituals and routines. Only 7.7% of respondents do not use them at all in everyday life.

With regard to how much the experiences from the project influenced the students' active participation in classes, most teachers were indifferent as 69.2% of them gave a mark of 3 (on a scale of 1 to 5). Only 1/3 of respondents (30.8%) consider that the project had a positive influence on students' being more actively involved in the classes (23.1% marked it with 4, whereas 7.7% marked it with 5). According to respondents, the online classes are more interesting and there is less room for boredom or monotony, they increase student's motivation and they achieve better results, which leads to higher self-esteem and self-confidence. Furthermore, they promote a more straightforward relationship between teachers and students, making them equal partners in the learning process. Some teachers revealed that, since they had been intuitively using some of these techniques even before the pandemic, the experiences from the project only confirmed the importance of putting the teaching material in a wider context and relating it to real life situations and strengthened their motivation to work even more enthusiastically than before.

As regards the most beneficial aspects of the activities done with the students, the results show that the opinions are in favour of informal activities since the majority of respondents think that either both types of activities (informal and formal) are equally useful (46.2%), or that the informal activities are more beneficial (38.5%). Only 15.4% of respondents think that formal activities are more practical and serve a better purpose. The respondents who are in favour of informal activities argue that they relax the atmosphere during the classes and contribute to a more direct relationship between teachers and students. They also encourage the students to be more enthusiastic, to give feedback and to take an active role in the learning process. Those who prefer formal activities explain that they use them more often than informal activities because they think they are more suitable for introducing new concepts and ideas. They base their opinions on the impressions they have got when comparing the results of the students' work after having done informal and formal activities, the latter proving to be more indicative of students' progress. However, the important thing to note is that those respondents who are in favour of both types of activities actually conclude that they are inseparable and provide complementary benefits when combined, since mental balance leads to professional success and vice versa. The majority of respondents say that they continue using some of the informal activities during classes: 30.8% do that on a regular basis and an equal percentage of respondents reported that they do it occasionally. Among the most frequent activities they use are deep breathing exercises, visualisation, listening to relaxing music, discussions and relating the teaching material to everyday situations. There 38.5% of respondents did not continue using any of the informal activities during classes, mostly because they did not have classes at the time, but plan to use them in the future. Some say it is because the students were shy and did not respond well to the informal activities. When it comes to whether they continued using formal activities during classes, the results show that 30.8% do it regularly and 38.5% of them do it occasionally. Most often, these activities include presentations, preparation of classes and lectures by the students, homework assignments, peer-reviewing and assessment tasks, project team work, discussions and debates. On the other hand, 30.8% responded that they did not continue using any of the formal activities during classes; mostly because they did not have classes at the time, but pointed out that they would use them in the future.

When asked to compare the usefulness of the traditional/frontal teaching and interactive teaching with greater students' involvement in classroom activities, the respondents' answers are in favour of interactive teaching. More precisely, 61.5% of respondents think that the interactive approach is more useful for purposeful learning, 23.1% think that both approaches are equally useful, whereas 15.4% reported that they are not sure about the answer. Generally, they think that when students are actively involved in the learning process, then learning becomes "more personal and lasting and they feel they have done their share of the task". It encourages them to articulate their attitudes and share opinions and knowledge and raises their self-confidence and feeling of achievement. They also emphasise the importance of traditional/frontal teaching approaches, and point out that different teaching and learning goals require different approaches. The frontal approach ensures the teacher's input and control over the educational process, while interactive approaches offer possibilities for a "dynamic learning environment in which knowledge can be constantly upgraded, promote critical and creative thinking and improve communication skills". They conclude that these two methods should be combined since both have advantages for the students.

According to a large majority of respondents (92.3%), their participation in the workshops had a positive influence on their overall personal and professional well-being and they would recommend the workshops to other colleagues. They also provided additional comments saying that such projects are more than welcome since they "raise awareness about the importance of mental health of all participants in the educational process in general". For some of them, the project provided a "transformational experience on a personal and professional level which helped them to share knowledge and to meet wonderful colleagues".

## **8.2. Student-centred component**

The results of the questionnaire on students' opinions about the different forms of activities (formal and informal) implemented during classes reveal significant findings. One hundred and twenty-one students answered the questionnaire. A great majority of the students (93%) liked being more actively engaged in the class activities than usual; very few of them did not like this possibility, 30.5% would like to be active participants in the classroom on a regular basis, whereas 57.5% of the students prefer this type of work, but only from time to time/periodically.

With regard to the teaching methodology preferences, the results reveal that the students are in favour of the interactive approach, since the majority of them think that either both approaches (interactive and traditional) are equally useful (41.4%), or that the interactive approach is a better option (52.3%). They think that, generally speaking, interactive modes of teaching make the classes more interesting and prevent monotony and boredom, which might be typical of online classrooms. Additionally, they think that the interactive approach facilitates the learning process since it combines students' enthusiasm and teachers' experience and expertise. However, they emphasise that the appropriate teaching methods are selected depending on the subject matter of the course, proving that both approaches can be useful if strategically combined to meet the students' educational needs.

Speaking of the advantages of the interactive teaching approaches, students think that it improves concentration and motivation, creates a feeling of ease, accomplishment and collegiality and enhances self-confidence. Furthermore, it reflects the teacher's creativity

and sensitivity to students' needs. They consider the interactive approach to be an attempt to bring online classes as close to in-person classes as possible. They also think that this encourages critical thinking and offers the opportunity to share different opinions on relevant topics. Having in mind that interactive classes are specifically designed for distance learning, number of students underline that they are able to relax and deal with stage fright when among colleagues whom they had never met in person. Some students argue that the interactive classes are a better option because they reduce anxiety, which might be related to the familiarity of the settings in which these classes take place.

On the other hand, those students who do not support active participation in the class activities listed some disadvantages that the interactive approach might have. For example, they think that it is more stressful, puts them under pressure and creates a feeling of discomfort since the attention of the group is often directed to one particular student at a time. Frequently, students experience anxiety and fear when giving answers, and they are afraid of being mocked if they make a mistake. Some respondents point to technical issues, like poor internet connection, background or digital noise, which physically prevent them from actively taking part in the class activities.

With regard to the informal activities tested, a great majority of the students (93%) support the idea of introducing short stress reducing and well-being promoting activities in classes. Additionally, they suggest alternative methods and approaches, which, according to them, might contribute to better motivation and overall well-being in times of pandemic and in a distance learning environment. For example, they propose occasional discussions of current topics that are not related to the course material and engagement in physical exercises or deep breathing exercises during the breaks in between classes in order to stay fit. They also propose listening to music during classes, which might help them relax. Furthermore, they would like to be able to engage in team-work activities more often since they offer an opportunity for greater solidarity and spontaneous communication among fellow students. They also think that it would be beneficial to reduce the course duration in order to minimise the time spent in front of the screens, which creates fatigue and exhaustion. According to them, the teachers should show support and empathy at all times and refrain from judging or discouraging them even when their achievements are lower than expected.

## 9. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought enormous changes in daily life, including changes in education, teaching and learning. These abrupt changes required quick adaptation to the new circumstances and dealing not only with the immediate pandemic-related restrictions, but also with the psychological burden of living and working in an unprecedented evolving environment. This paper addressed possible solutions to tackling these challenges in higher education. More specifically, it presented the findings of a pilot project on psychosocial support to teachers and students in the setting of the online language and translation classroom. The intervention involved providing teachers with the tools necessary to care about themselves and promote their own well-being and thereby empowering them to assist students to face the new teaching and learning environment in better and more productive ways. The answers were sought by piloting the intervention and then by pooling participants' opinions and experiences thereof.

With regard to the teacher-focused component of the intervention, the analysis has shown the intervention benefits teachers' personal and professional well-being to a great extent. A large majority of teachers think that the self-care component has had a positive impact on their overall well-being and, based on their experience, they would recommend such activities to other colleagues. They identify deep breathing, visualisation of one's safe place and daily rituals as the most useful self-care and well-being techniques.

With regard to the student-centred component, both teachers and students prefer interactive teaching methodologies where students are actively involved in teaching and learning activities in class, thereby shaping their learning experience. Likewise, both teachers and students consider informal activities that relieve stress and create a more relaxing class atmosphere to be beneficial for learning. Overall, students like the teachers' introducing or practicing participative teaching methods for both formal (curriculum-related) and informal (curriculum-unrelated) content.

The far-reaching effects of COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated the importance of holistic student support for managing the short-term adjustments and the long-term implications of the pandemic (Naidoo and Cartwright 2020: 11). Our study, too, has shown that holistic approaches are highly beneficial to both teachers and students.

According to Bensalah et al. (2001: 8), emergency education programmes are a response to exceptional crisis conditions and as such require exceptional means of response, linked to a process of planning for future educational development. The experience of the COVID-19 emergency and its impact on teachers and students can be used as a basis to plan future interventions in the higher education curriculum. Educational policies should be reviewed to accommodate for drastic changes in teaching and learning, especially during and after COVID-19 (Mbunge et al. 2020), not only in providing the adequate IT infrastructure, and teaching and learning methodologies, but also opportunities for addressing teachers and students mental health needs. Our study has proved that this is necessary indeed.

In times of crisis "educators everywhere bear a moral imperative to provide opportunities for children to reclaim hope, reintegrate socially, learn well, reflect deeply, and act justly" (Hill 2005: 155). Schools should foster resiliency by developing resourcefulness, ability to attract and use adult support, curiosity and intellectual mastery, compassion, ability to conceptualise, conviction of one's right to survive, ability to remember and invoke images of good and sustaining figures, a goal to live for, the need and ability to help others and an affective repertory (ibid: 162-163). Teachers can help by both providing a safe context and by setting a positive example (Halstead & Affouneh 2006: 212). Our project has demonstrated that it is possible to do this in the language and translation classroom and that both teachers and students welcome it. We leave it to future studies to investigate it further in different contexts and to different degrees.

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