Undergraduate Translation Students' Perceptions of Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Aim. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented challenges at all levels of education. Higher education institutions across the globe had to move traditional campus-based learning online as it was the only available option to continue academic activities. Students' perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 crisis have been investigated in many fields of study, however, little known research has been conducted in the field of Translation studies. To fill in the gap, small-scale research was carried out at a University in Lithuania. It aimed to examine undergraduate translation students' perceptions of learning online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods. To carry out the research, qualitative methodology was used. The data was drawn from 23 translation students' essays and analysed using inductive content analysis.

Results. The study resulted in the identification and description of two major categories and five subcategories that revealed the students' experience of online learning during the pandemic and their perceptions of its positive and negative impacts.

Conclusion. The results demonstrate that all study participants perceived online learning both as a positive and negative experience with the number of the student-reported negative impacts being slightly bigger than that of the positive ones. The findings of this research are important; yet they do not allow for wide scale generalisations as the study was conducted on a small sample.

Originality. The present study contributes to the research in the field by providing new insights into the impacts of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic as seen from the students' perspective.

Keywords: students' perceptions, online learning, impacts of online learning, COVID-19 pandemic, Translation Studies, higher education

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a wide range of impacts (including social, economic, political, environmental, etc.) on societies across the globe. Education institutions worldwide, higher education institutions (HEIs) among them, had to cope with the unprecedented challenges to ensure the continuity of the process of teaching and learning under the

conditions of sudden and long-term lockdowns. HEIs were forced to close in March 2020 and to move traditional campus-based learning online as it was the only available option to continue academic activities. According to the findings of the survey conducted by UNESCO in 57 countries in 2021, the pandemic disrupted education of 220 million students across the globe (*UNESCO's COVID-19 Education Response*, 2021). The survey revealed that the closure of university campuses was a challenge that affected all participating countries and had negative effects both on the global and national levels. On the global level, the major negative effects included the disruption of universities' research activities and of international student mobility (even though virtual mobility was used to substitute physical mobility). On the national level, the transfer to online teaching and learning posed health-related challenges both to the staff and students and negatively impacted student enrolment. According to the UNESCO report, in many of the 57 countries who participated in the survey, both students and staff were facing the challenges of health and adaptation to the new reality. As far as student enrolment was concerned, the scope of the negative impact varied across the countries depending on the region and their income level, with high-income countries being more successful than medium- and low--income ones (UNESCO, 2021).

Today, HEIs have a valuable two-year long experience of online teaching and learning. It is crucial to analyse this experience from the institutional, student and teacher perspectives so that the challenges and benefits can be assessed, and lessons learnt. The latter is particularly important since the best practices of online learning can be used in the future for the development of university curricula, for the integration of new methods of teaching and for the application of web-based education technologies for learning in higher education (HE) contexts.

The relevant literature shows that multiple aspects of online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic have been researched across different fields of study, including medicine, teacher education, geography studies, science, engineering and business management studies, agriculture studies, hospitality and tourism studies, teaching languages, to mention just a few (Baczek et al., 2021; Carrilo & Flores, 2020; Cutri et al., 2020; Day et al., 2021; Flores & Gago, 2020; Kidd & Murray, 2020; Sokal et al., 2020; Pal & Patra, 2021; Muthuprasad et al., 2021; Lei & So, 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2020, among others). Institutional, faculty and student readiness for the transition to online teaching and learning as well as the challenges and opportunities resulting from it have been investigated (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023; Cutri et al., 2020; El Refae et al., 2021; Hodges et al., 2020; Saha et al., 2022, among others). Faculty and students' experience, their perceptions of and satisfaction with online teaching and learning, students' satisfaction with their learning outcomes, students' acceptance of technology-based learning have been explored (Almahasees & Qassem, 2021; Ismaili, 2021; Lei & So, 2021; Nikou & Maslow, 2023; Pal & Patra, 2021; Stewart & Lowenthal,

2021; Tam, 2022, among others), as well as students' and teachers' mental health and stress caused by online teaching and learning have been studied (MacIntyre et al., 2020).

The literature pertaining to students' experience and their perceptions of online learning in HE contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic shows a gap in the field of Translation studies. To the best of our knowledge, there has been a single study reporting on the results of research into university teachers' perceptions of teaching translation courses (Almahasees & Qassem, 2021). However, translation students' experience and / or their views of online learning during the pandemic have not been investigated yet. To address this gap, a study was conducted at a University in Lithuania. It aimed to examine undergraduate translation students' perceptions of online learning by addressing two research questions: what is the students' experience of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? and what are the students' perceptions of the impacts of online learning? To this end, a qualitative approach was chosen. The research was conducted at the end of the academic year 2020/2021, which, in Lithuania, was the point in time when the study participants had studied online for almost 1,5 academic years.

The present article reports on the results of the research starting from the literature overview followed by the research methodology. The research limitation is then described, research results as well as the discussion are presented, and conclusions drawn.

Literature Overview

Online learning, which is defined as the educational usage of technological devices, tools and the Internet (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023), is not novel. Its use in HE has been increasing since the beginning of the 21st century, which was due to a rapid growth of technological innovation and wide access to the Internet. However, it was the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 that made it the only alternative to face-to-face learning across the globe (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023).

The potential of online learning and university teachers' and students' experience of online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic have been explored in different fields of study. These include medicine (Baczek et al., 2021), teacher education (Carrilo & Flores, 2020; Cutri et al., 2020; Flores & Gago, 2020; Kidd & Murray, 2020; Sokal et al., 2020), geography studies (Day et al., 2021), science, engineering and business management studies (Pal & Patra, 2021), agriculture studies (Muthuprasad et al., 2021), hospitality and tourism studies (Lei & So, 2021), teaching languages (MacIntyre et al., 2020), to mention just a few.

The literature shows that online teaching and learning have been analysed from different perspectives. To begin with, institutional, faculty and

student readiness for the transition to online teaching and learning as well as the challenges and opportunities resulting from the transition have been investigated (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023; Cutri et al., 2020; El Refae et al., 2021; Hodges et al., 2020, to mention just a few). For example, Olasile Adedoyin and Emrah Soykan (2023) studied the methods that universities used for the transfer of traditional learning online and the challenges and opportunities resulting from it. It was reported that institutional readiness varied considerably across the countries, depending on such factors as the level of institutional digitalisation, their prior experience of providing distance learning programmes, and faculty readiness to teach online. Due to sudden lockdowns, universities with low levels of digitalisation and little or no experience of online teaching did not have enough time to prepare for the transition. Therefore, they were forced to provide the so-called "emergency remote teaching" rather than well-planned and carefully designed "online teaching" (Hodges et al., 2020; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2021). On the other hand, according to Adedoyin and Soykan (2023), online learning provided several opportunities (flexibility, interactivity, self-pacing) and resulted in the general recognition that online learning is acceptable in HE contexts.

Faculty readiness for teaching online has been explored by researchers in different parts of the globe (Almahasees & Qassem, 2021; El Refae et al., 2021; Saha et al., 2022, to mention just a few). For instance, Sourav Saha et al. (2022) carried out research in some public and private universities in Bangladesh. They focused on their faculty readiness and preferences regarding online teaching (e-teaching) used during the COVID-19 pandemic and after the pandemic. The research results showed that about 50% from 438 study university teachers had to teach online without any prior training, suggesting that the level of the faculty readiness was not high. Despite this, it was established that, overall, their perceptions of online teaching were positive and that it was viewed as effective (except for evaluation), efficient and suitable for sharing teaching materials. Also, more than 3/4 of the teachers expressed their preference for online teaching during the pandemic, and most preferred both face-to-face and hybrid teaching after the pandemic. According to the authors, the teachers' preferences were influenced by a wide range of factors, including age, teaching experience, the type of the course, received training, among others. On the other hand, the findings demonstrated that online teaching was challenging. The teachers found it difficult to conduct practical classes, monitor students and provide sufficient feedback, followed by poor Internet connection, poor student-teacher interaction and low student engagement.

In another example, faculty readiness to teach online, their perceptions of such teaching, as well as the challenges that it caused were researched in Jordan by Zakaryia Almahasees and Mutahar Qassem (2021). The study involved 49 university teachers of translation courses delivered to undergraduate and postgraduate students. The results demonstrated that the teachers viewed online teaching as being less effective than traditional

teaching due to several challenges, such as difficulty to adapt to the new learning environment, the lack of communication between teachers and students and decreased student motivation. The authors suggested that blended learning environment integrating online learning and traditional teaching of translation courses could create the best environment for online learning.

Faculty and students' satisfaction with institutional readiness, their perceptions of opportunities and challenges of online (distance) learning were studied by Ghaleb El Refae et al. (2021). The research was conducted at a university in the United Arab Emirates with the participation of 445 students and 139 faculty members. The results showed that even though the university did not have prior experience of online (distance) learning, in general, both faculty and students were satisfied with the institutional readiness. It was also established that the perceived major opportunities of online (distance) learning included improving skills, promoting quality education and fostering lifelong learning. On the other hand, faculty and students were concerned about the challenges that online (distance) learning posed, which were deeper digital divide, disrupted student-teacher communication, increased level of plagiarism and higher educational expenses.

Another stream of investigations has been focused on faculty and students' experience and their perceptions of as well as satisfaction with their online teaching and learning (Ismaili, 2021; Lei & So, 2021; Mishra et al., 2020; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2021; Tam, 2022, among others). To illustrate, Sut Lei and Siu So (2021) conducted research with the participation of 491 university students and 117 teachers from over 15 universities in China. The authors explored the participants' experiences of online learning and teaching and compared the factors influencing their satisfaction with online teaching and learning. Yassine Ismaili (2021) analysed Hungarian university students' experience of using two virtual platforms (ZOOM and TEAMS) for online (distance) learning, their satisfaction with learning and their general views of education during the pandemic. It was found that even though before the pandemic the university's experience of using these web-based learning platforms was low (they were used exclusively by students with special needs), most study participants were satisfied with their use during the pandemic. Moreover, they expressed willingness to use them during the post-pandemic period. On the other hand, the findings showed that the students' experience and expectations of online (distance) learning ranged from satisfaction to dissatisfaction, that they faced some health problems and experienced mixed feelings of loneliness, uncertainty and anxiety with regards to learning, examinations and graduation.

Students' experience of online examinations during the pandemic was analysed by Angela Tam (2022) at a university in Hong Kong. The author conducted a small-scale study in which nine students' views of online take--home examinations were explored. The findings revealed that the online

format of examinations and the time limit given to submit one's work were the major factors that influenced their learning and behaviour. On the one hand, online examinations caused some students' anxiety and stress as the new format of online examinations included more types of questions and was more difficult. On the other hand, the new format promoted highly motivated students' approach to deep learning as it enhanced their participation, reflection, higher order thinking and motivation.

International exchange students' experience of online learning was studied by William Stewart and Patrick Lowenthal (2021) in South Korea. Fifteen students from 7 countries had to take and finish their coursework online (which the authors called the Emergency remote teaching course) at a university in Seoul at the height of the pandemic. It was established that lack of socialisation caused by the extreme social distancing resulted in students' isolation and loneliness, which caused stress, anxiety and mental health issues. According to the authors, to cope with such problems in the future, HEIs should provide virtual mental health support services, whereas faculty should undergo special training to facilitate teacher-student and student-student communication.

The faculty and students' stress and mental health problems caused by online teaching and learning were investigated by Mahtab Jafari et al. (2021) and Peter MacIntyre et al. (2020). Jafari et al. (2021) conducted research at two university campuses in the USA. It focused on undergraduate students' mental health, the methods they used to cope with stress and their perceptions regarding the institutional support. The findings demonstrated that 87% from 593 students acknowledged that the pandemic had a negative impact on their mental health, on the one hand. On the other hand, the results showed that keeping physically fit, maintaining one's social contacts and having access to mental health services helped the students cope with their health problems. It was also reported that they expressed willingness to be involved in the institutional processes of making decisions regarding university responses to students' health problems.

The pandemic-induced stressors that language teachers faced during the transition from traditional to online teaching and the strategies they used to cope with the stressors were analysed by MacIntyre et al. (2020). The teachers (n = 634) were from different countries from across the globe (including Europe, North America, Asia, South America, and the Middle East), from different types of institutions (private, public and mixed) and from different levels of education, post-secondary level (n = 242) included. The findings demonstrated that about 75% of the research participants had less than one week to prepare for the transition to online teaching, which resulted in increased workload and caused the highest level of stress. The latter was exacerbated by other stressors, such as concerns about their family health and their own health, the merger of work and home environments, to mention just a few. It was concluded that the strategies of acceptance, planning, reacting to the situation and getting involved in distracting

activities supported the teachers while coping with the multidimensional stressors.

As little-known research has been conducted in the field of Translation studies, the present research aims to address this gap and expand the literature in this field by investigating undergraduate students' perceptions of online learning during the pandemic (March 2020-June 2021) at a university in Lithuania.

Methodology

The theoretical background of this study is based on the theory of perception. Its central idea is that perception is a process through which knowledge of the objective world is acquired (Maund, 2003). It is relevant for the present research to analyse such knowledge as it can reveal university students' experience and perceptions of online learning, which allows for the identification of its best practices and challenges. Understanding of these can be used in the future for the development of university curricula, for further integration of new methods of teaching and the application of web-based education technologies for learning in HE contexts.

Research Context and Participants

In Lithuania, all HEIs were forced to close their campuses on 16 March 2020. Before the pandemic, the University where the present research was conducted had had experience of distance teaching, and its faculty and students had been using the virtual learning environment Moodle (but it was not mandatory). During the pandemic, all academic activities were transferred to the video-conferencing platforms Zoom or Teams, which was a new experience to all, including faculty, staff and students.

The present research was conducted with the participation of 23 undergraduate Translation students (20 females and 3 males) whose age ranged from 20 to 21. Before the lockdown, the study participants had gained some experience of using the main functionalities of the virtual learning platform Moodle, but none of them had had any prior experience of learning via the video-conferencing platforms.

The data for this study was drawn from the students' essays "My experience of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic" in June 2021, during the spring online examination session of the academic year 2020/2021. At that time, the students' experience of online learning was almost 1,5 academic years.

To analyse the data, the qualitative method of inductive content analysis was used. According to Satu Elo and Helvi Kyngäs (2007), this method can be used when researchers investigate the phenomena that have not been investigated yet or when prior research is not exhaustive. The data was

analysed in 3 stages following the procedure described by the authors. The preparation stage (units of analysis were established) was followed by the stage of open coding, grouping and abstraction (categories and subcategories were identified). The procedure was finished by providing examples illustrating each subcategory.

The limitation of this research is the size of the sample, which does not allow for wider generalisations. Despite this, the findings are important as they expand the existing knowledge in the field of Translation studies by deepening our understanding of translation students' experience and perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results

The results of the inductive content analysis of the students' perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed two major categories of impacts that included five subcategories: positive impacts of online learning and negative impacts of online learning (Table 1). As some students (S) presented more than one response, the number of responses is bigger than the number of the students.

Table 1
Student-perceived Impacts of Online Learning

Category	Subcategories
1. Positive impacts	1.1. More time available (n = 14)
	1.2. Opportunities / advantages (n = 9)
2. Negative impacts	2.1. Mental health issues (n = 8)
	2.2. Health (physical and/or mental) issues and impacts on one's studies (n = 15)
	2.3. Technical problems (n =5)

Source. Own research.

Category 1: Positive Impacts of Online Learning
The first category covers two subcategories that emerged when the students were describing the most important changes regarding their studies resulting from online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (23 responses).

The first subcategory, *having more time*, was the major student-perceived positive impact of online learning. More time became available since students did not have to commute to the university and / or did not waste any time in traffic jams (examples a-m). It was established that extra free time was used for studying and supported student well-being. For example, some students stressed that they could focus more on the main and / or extra-curricular subjects, did more tasks, prepared for classes better than

before the pandemic, studied individually (examples c-f) and / or spent more time with the people they love (examples e, m). Others valued the possibility to sleep longer and / or enjoyed their hobbies or explored new things (examples f-l):

(a) "I have more free time as I don't have to commute to the university". (S1, 14, 15)

(b) "<…> online learning gives me a lot of extra time that I would otherwise have been spent on commuting <…>". (S 11)

(c) "Online learning <…> gives me more time for learning. <…> I can dedicate much more time to read additional literature. Moreover, <…> I have an opportunity to deepen my knowledge in other subjects that are not in my study programme. This is because <…> I no longer have to spend more than two hours to go to university and get back home <…>". (S 17)

(d) "We <…> have much more time to dedicate to studying. <…> we don't need to waste our time on getting to and from the university". (S 23)

(e) "One of the main positive aspects of online learning is the possibility to save time. <…> I can do other tasks instead of the usual commuting, <…> I can prepare more successfully for the given tasks and lastly <…> I can spend more time with the beloved ones". (S 12)

(f) "<…> I don't have to get up very early and hurry to take busses to avoid morning traffic jams. <…> I have more time to prepare home assignments; there is more time not only for studying individually, but also for new hobbies. And finally, the comfort of the personal room in which studying online takes place allows us to take care of any personal needs faster <…>". (S 9)

(g) "Firstly, I have a chance to study at home <…>. I can make some tea and breakfast and have no fear that I will be late for the seminars <…>. Secondly, I have some extra time to sleep. While I had to prepare for university, I had to wake up 2 hours earlier <…>". (S 18)

(h) "<…> it is easier to attend classes when studying online. The reason for this is the fact that I can simply participate in class activities in my own bedroom, whereas before the pandemic I had to commute to reach the city where I study. But the most important thing for me is that I do not have to wake up early anymore". (S 7)

(i) "<…> Because of this pandemic, I have much more free time for my hobbies, which I have a lot. I can also sleep a bit longer. This is because <…> I don't have to get up earlier to make it on time to seminars and do not have to spend [from] 30 minutes to an hour going back home". (S 4)

(j) "My experience with online learning during the pandemic has been mostly negative. However, the positives of online learning, like the ability to get longer sleep and tailored schedules does make my experience a little better." (S 13)

(k) "<…> Furthermore, studying online gives us more flexibility and we can work and schedule our hobbies around the lectures more easily.

The reason for this is that we don't have to go to university and waste a lot of time just on the road." (S 20)

(l) "<…> Since we don't have to commute, some students have used this time for their hobbies <…>; they have freedom to explore new things and find something that they really enjoy, something that helps them to relax. <…>". (S 10)

(m) "The most important positive aspect of the online learning for me is the amount of time saved. For instance, I save a lot of time before classes, in between and after them. Since I do not have to commute to university and from it or find something to occupy myself during the breaks between them, I use that time for many useful activities. I have more time in the mornings to go on longer walks with my dogs, and now I can take them for a short walk in the afternoon, and they do not have to wait for the evening to go outside again. In addition, I have more time to do my house chores: I can do them in between classes and finished them by the time classes are over. Above all, I have more time with my family. Since I finish all the chores during the day and I take my dogs for a long walk, after classes I have enough time to prepare dinner with my family and spend some quality time with them before I have to study and prepare for the next day's classes". (S 22)

Example m is interesting in that it demonstrates how effectively one's extra time was planned. Mainly, the student not only studied, but also spent more time with their pets, did the house chores and had quality time with their family.

The second subcategory of the positive student-perceived impacts covers *opportunities / advantages* of online learning. These include saving some money (examples n-o), using more online learning resources and fostering one's ability to use web-based technologies for learning (example p), significantly improving one's academic skills (examples q), promoting creativity (example r), providing an opportunity to study from any place in the world (example s-t), developing communication skills while interacting with students from different countries (example u):

(n) "The biggest advantage of studying from home is that a big amount of money and time is saved. Firstly, due to online studying there is no need to spend money on transport <…>". (S 9)

(o) "[Also] many students have saved some money because they don't buy bus tickets or pay for petrol". (S 23)

(p) "<…> Learning online gives us a lot of opportunities, e.g., <…> having more access to a variety of learning resources. Also, many learning platforms emerged that facilitate learning. Zoom, MS Teams, Kahoot and many more help us not only to learn for our studies, but also learn more about new technologies that will help us in the future". (S 2)

(q) "As for me, I see more positive than negative aspects of online learning. <…> this is because I have improved my research skills significantly.

Firstly, since I study using my computer, I have become quicker in finding relevant information for the lectures <…>. Secondly, the way I summarise the information <…> has become more efficient. Lastly, I can better distinguish trustworthy pages <…> from pages with false information." (S 21)

(r) "Online learning gives [us] an opportunity to find new creative ways to make our study process more fun and interactive, since we can no longer meet in real life". (S 1)

(s) "<…> as there is no need to go to university, plenty of opportunities are open to students who want to travel and attend classes from anywhere in the world. Studying from home can be really draining, so traveling somewhere seems like a great way to get a degree and relax at the same time". (S 6)

(t) "<…> Students can participate in classes from anywhere in the world, provided they have a computer and Internet connection. <…>" (S 20)

(u) "<…> Another positive thing is the fact that it is easier to communicate with students from all over the world and share knowledge with them." (S 7)

The student-perceived multiple advantages of online learning are best illustrated by example v. The student stated that online learning not only allowed for more free time and mobility, but also for studying at one's own pace and at the most suitable time. Finally, online learning widened their access to various learning resources:

(v) "After the year of the pandemic, online learning has improved and now has multiple advantages. For example, it gives students more free time and mobility. Also, online learning allows students to study at their own pace and build their learning schedule. The reason for this is that universities quickly transformed their system to digital as a response to the pandemic. Besides, the resources are available from anywhere and at any time of the day." (S 19)

Category 2: Negative Impacts of Online Learning

This category emerged when the students were describing what they called the major disadvantages or threats of online learning (28 responses). It covers three subcategories: negative impact on *students' mental health*, on their *health (physical/mental) and / or on studying* and *technical problems*.

It was established that the students' *mental health* was negatively affected by the pandemic-induced uncertainty which gave rise to dark thoughts and led to questioning the meaning of life (example w), by social isolation and lack of communication with one's peers that caused depressive episodes (example x-y) and by the pandemic-induced stress and the new mode of learning that worsened the symptoms of the already existing stress-related illness (example z):

(w) "The most detrimental aspect of online learning is the decline of the quality of my mental health. <…> The pandemic and studying at home sometimes made me think of the future and feel uncertain about it. Other times I even started to question life, and my thoughts became quite dark because the pandemic made me realise how fragile human life really is. On top of this, constant worrying about the future and challenges that may come along, quite a few times made me think if it really is worth fighting it after all." (S 7)

(x) "I am an extrovert, so it is very difficult for me to have no contact with my friends for a long time. Of course, I had a chance to talk to them via virtual communication platforms like Discord, WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram, but it is incomparable to a real-life conversation where you have a chance to hug the person or hear their laughter, see their emotions in their eyes. It caused me a lot of depressive episodes that were hard to cope with without any emotional support. But, thanks to our healthcare system, I was able to get a psychological aid for free." (S 23)

(y) "Even though my overall well-being has improved, online learning still poses a threat to my mental health. <…> The reason for this is the lack of face-to-face socialising and interacting. <…> keeping some personal feelings or some things to myself sooner or later makes me feel depressed." (S 21)

(z) "Everyone has been feeling stressed - a lot of us may have developed [some] illnesses because of this. I, for example, have a stress-related psychosomatic illness, [which] became worse due to all the stress and uncertainty I have faced during both the pandemic and my online learning process." (S1)

It is worth noting that in four cases (examples aa-dd) it was difficult to establish if the students themselves experienced the negative impacts of online learning on their mental health and / or on their physical condition since the impacts were not described using the first person:

(aa) "Once in a while I <…> feel distant to my university friends <…>. Such emotions could even lead us to a serious illness or even to depression." (S 8)

(bb) "Now that students do not need to go to university there is less interaction with their friends or professors. <...> attending classes from home can make people less social, and this can affect their mental health." (S 6)

(cc) "<…> Sitting all day is not good for our physical health, which in turn translates into our mental health. Too much time spent sitting not properly, staring at the computer screen and not moving much in general can have a detrimental effect on our overall health <…> which consists of not only good physical shape, but also of a stable mental state." (S 11)

(dd) "Moreover, online learning also badly affects not only physical health, but mental status too. For example, a lot of time is spent at computers, therefore, one's eyes get tired and vision deteriorates. Second, students do not communicate as they did before the pandemic, so this problem affects students' mental health. The reason for these effects is that while learning online, students spend more time at home and constantly look at their computer or telephone screens." (S 16)

The second subcategory covers the students' responses demonstrating the negative impacts of online learning on their *health (both physical and mental)* (example ee) and on *their health and / or studies* (examples ff-ss). It was found that some students suffered from multiple health problems, such as headaches, eye tiredness and / or back pains and / or negative emotions that negatively affected their ability to concentrate and / or motivation to study (example ff-hh), whereas one student stated that the headaches and the strain on their eyes led to procrastination which, eventually, caused stress (example ii):

(ee) "Online learning has also been affecting me in a negative way both physically and mentally." (S 4)

(ff) "<…> it is very difficult to concentrate, because of my headache and eye tiredness <…>. Sitting almost in the same position for the whole day and watching at the computer screen is exhausting and causes eye tiredness and even a headache, due to which there is no motivation to study at all." (S 18)

(gg) "I now have to control myself not to sit too close to the screen and to sit straight, otherwise I have a headache and back pains, which makes me not willing to study at all. <…>." (S 17)

(hh) "I have numerous online classes every day, and my eyes get tired very quickly. Such tiredness can be explained by constant learning in front of a computer. Also, personally, I often face negative emotions, and I find it hard to concentrate." (S 8)

(ii) "An enormous disadvantage of online learning is that it causes negative effects on our health. Studying all day at home becomes exhausting and it puts much strain on my eyes. Secondly, sometimes, it leads to procrastination because studying online requires discipline, this later puts much stress <…>. And finally, my headaches are a big disadvantage; this is also due to prolonged sitting in front of the computer screen." (S 9)

A multiple negative effect of online learning on both the student's health and studies is illustrated by example jj, suggesting that the student did not cope with the challenges of the new mode of learning:

(jj) "It is hard to focus, and looking at the screen for several hours results in fatigue and strains my eyes. And some lecturers think that this is the time to give more assignments <…>, and if we combine everything mentioned above, we get a great way to destroy not only one's physi-

cal health, but also mental. And I feel so bad about my grades and not having time for myself because of the workload. All in all, my personal experience of online learning has been negative as it has affected my grades, physical and mental health." (S 13)

A group of students noted that it was their home environment that made a negative effect on their studies. It affected their ability to concentrate and motivation to study, which was caused by a big number of distractions and / or because it was perceived as a place suitable for rest rather than for studying (example kk-oo):

(kk) "It's difficult to concentrate at home as the environment is not academic." (S 1)

(ll) "Studying from home does not provide the same experience as learning in the classroom – it is harder to focus and avoid distractions. <…> Personally, at home I tend to get distracted way more than I would [while] sitting in the classroom. This is because home for me is a place for rest and relaxation and not for studying. At home there are many tempting distractions such as a phone, a TV or even a fridge, full of delicious food. It is also harder to focus on studying when there are many household chores waiting to be tackled.". (S 11)

(mm) "Being always at home makes you feel tired of classes, so you want to sleep, this happened to me because the atmosphere was not official, and I always felt like I am going to relax. When this happens, productivity is low, which can have a negative impact on the results." (S 18)

(nn) "<…> for many students and me, one of the biggest issues of online learning is the struggle with focusing on the screen for long periods of time. It is because we can be easily distracted by social media or other sites. If a lecture takes place and we just need to listen, we often handle other things. <…> Therefore, sometimes it's even hard to talk about attentiveness." (S 20)

(oo) "The most negative aspect for me is the lack of motivation. The main reason for this is the home environment. My consciousness still "thinks" that home is a place where I can rest and relax. Also, it is harder to resist the need of checking my phone every few minutes. Lastly, family members are a big distraction and annoyance." (S 21)

On the other hand, it was established that home environment was not the only factor which affected students' motivation. Other factors included the feeling that there was no point in studying since the pandemic put a stop to one's life (example pp), the view that online learning was not mandatory (example qq), that it allowed for the possibility to use some sources during tests and examinations (example rr) or that it led to procrastination, which resulted in lack of motivation to study (example ss):

(pp) "I have also felt less motivated to do my homework and actively participate in my seminars. The reason for this might be that because of the

pandemic I feel like my life has been put to a stop and it is pointless to try and be productive."(S 4)

(qq) "It is much harder for me to find motivation to study. <…> I often find myself not wanting to attend my classes. The reason for this could be the fact that I sometimes find myself thinking that online studying is not even obligatory. So, in summary, online learning has its positives and negatives, but I mostly find it to be detrimental." (S 7)

(rr) "Compared to face-to-face learning, online studying requires much more motivation to prepare for the tests or exams, because everyone knows that one has an opportunity to look at the sources." (S 16)

(ss) "One of the most noticeable negative aspects of online learning is a possible procrastination <…>. For example, for me sometimes it is really difficult to focus on completing something that must be done because I can easily get distracted and later on have no motivation to proceed with studying." (S 23)

The third subcategory of negative impacts includes *technical problems* that were perceived as stressful and causing fear of not being able to participate in online lectures and / or to fulfil one's assignments or fear of becoming a hackers' target (examples tt-xx). The major student-reported technical problems included bad Internet connection and / or sound quality (example tt-vv), bad Internet connection, inadequate quality of student-owned computer and software (example ww) and weak cyber-security protection of one's equipment (example xx):

(tt) "Internet connection problems have become the everyday issue that bothers me a lot. <…> Personally, I tend to get nervous about such disturbances because they are hardly controlled. <…> Moreover, the problem is that the sound is not always of good quality." (S 8)

(uu) "I would like to share my personal experience with online leaning which, for the bigger part, has been negative. With online learning going online, I ran into a few big problems. Where I live, there is a bad Internet connection and I, even if I want to, cannot actively participate in the lectures <…>." (S 13)

(vv) "Besides, you start to fear that you will not hear or answer something, because of unstable Wi-Fi connection and a natural lag in TEAMS calls." (S 20)

(ww)   "The only negative aspect of online learning for me is the unreliability of technological tools. What I mean is my computer and the program used for online classes as well as the Internet connection. None of them is completely reliable and tend to malfunction at the most crucial moments. <…> But most importantly having a computer as old as I do, it is hard to know if I will be able to participate in the class or do my homework since it tends to shut down on his own free will, and I am never sure if I will be able to turn it back on. This is very stressful; instead of focusing on studying, I focus too much on worrying if some technical aspect of online learning will fail me." (S 22)

(xx) "Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic some universities have suffered from hacking. In my personal experience, unprotected Internet connection makes a great hacking target <…>, which was not a big problem until now. To sum up, online learning has shown some areas that might be used for mischievous purposes <…>." (S 13)

Discussion and Conclusions

The general conclusion of the present study is that the study participants' experience of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was both positive and negative. It was established that all students acknowledged that it had both positive and negative impacts with the number of student-reported negative impacts being slightly bigger than the number of the positive impacts.

The student-perceived positive impacts of online learning were beneficial for their general well-being and for their studies. More specifically, online learning allowed for sleeping longer, studying in the comfort zone of one's home, saving some money and spending more time with one's family. Also, online learning supported students' learning, allowed for extra-curricular activities and their hobbies. In this context, an important finding is that online learning significantly promoted some students' academic (research) skills and fostered their ability to use web-based educational technologies, which was perceived as being useful for their further studies. This is in line with the findings of El Refae et al. (2021) who reported that one of the major student-perceived opportunities of online learning was improving their study skills.

The results demonstrate that the major student-perceived negative impacts of online learning were the impacts on their mental and /or physical health. These results corroborate the findings of Jafari et al. (2021) and Mishra et al. (2020) that online learning caused students' mental health problems and socio-emotional imbalance. Therefore, to support both students' sound mental health and well-being, counselling services provided by HEIs should be available to those in need.

The findings that online learning had a negative impact both on students' health and / or on their studies are also in accord with the results of a number of researchers (Almahasees & Quassem, 2021; Ismaili, 2021; Jafari et al., 2021; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2021) who found that online learning, social isolation and social distancing, as well as the disrupted student-student and student-teacher communication negatively affected student motivation, caused stress, anxiety and health problems, mental health problems included.

It was also established that some students faced technical problems, which caused stress and did not allow them to fully participate in online learning. This supports the results reported by El Refae et al. (2021) that bad

Internet connection, inadequate level of technical equipment and outdated software can result in digital divide.

Finally, the results illustrate that that even though all students identified the benefits of online learning, five students concluded that this experience was more negative than positive, which was due to the challenges they faced ranging from negative to detrimental. On the other hand, even though all students faced some challenges, three students considered that their online learning experience was more positive than negative, suggesting that they perceived online learning as an opportunity and used it for their benefit:

- "All in all, online learning has its positive and negative aspects. But I see more positive than negative aspects. Even though it has affected my motivation and social life in a negative way, I have been able to expand my research skills and improve my well-being. Online learning is not as bad as it seems when one knows how to use the given opportunity to improve one's skills." (S 21)
- "I would say that it [online learning] was more beneficial for my physical and mental health than detrimental. All the time spent walking with my dogs has improved my physical health since I have been exercising significantly more than I did before. Furthermore, the time spent with my family has improved my mental health. Even the stress caused by technical difficulties can be managed with the help of my family <…>." (S 22)
- "To sum up, the challenges that we faced whilst studying online have affected us, but we have become stronger and more determined than ever before." (S 7)

The present research is one of the first of its kind conducted in the field of Translation studies. Since its sample was small, its results do not allow for wide generalisations. Yet, they contribute to the relevant literature in that they expand our understanding of the undergraduate translation students' perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic by revealing how they experienced this period of their university studies.

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