Fostering learners' involvement in the assessment process during the COVID-19 pandemic: Perspectives of university language and communication teachers across the globe

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Abstract

With the transition to online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for identifying effective methods of assessment has become paramount. The methods of traditional summative in-person, paper-and-pencil exams could not be adapted to the online environment. In case of unsupervised (non-proctored) exams it was impossible to ensure students' academic honesty. Some universities have offered remotely supervised (proctored) examinations, which has been a rare exception. The pandemic prompted teachers to innovate their assessment practice and apply formative assessment methods as an alternative to traditional summative assessment. They have started using tasks such as e-portfolios, online learning journals, blogs, online presentations, creative writing, and open-book exams, which present golden opportunities to involve students in the assessment process. This study aims to explore assessment-related experiences of language and communication teachers at higher education institutions (HEIs) during the pandemic. Our mixed-method research combines an international survey administered to university language and communication teachers (N=301) with in-depth interviews with a selection of participants (n=18) of the same background. The results provide valuable insights into the perceptions that university language and communication teachers have of effective assessment methods and pedagogical approaches engaging learners in assessment. The implications of the study advocate a growing trend toward a wider use of learner-centered assessment.

Practitioner Notes

1. Communication and language higher education was challenged during COVID-19.
2. Portfolios and project tasks were considered by language educators to be the most effective remote teaching strategy.
3. Closed tests, translation activities, and role-playing were considered by language educators to be the least effective remote teaching strategy.
4. There is a need to change communication pedagogy when moving to online, rather than replicating on-campus activity.
5. Student-centricity should drive the migration to online content to support communication and language knowledge and skill acquisition.

Keywords

learner-centered assessment, online assessment, formative assessment, remote teaching, COVID-19

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Introduction

The transition to emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Hodges et al., 2020) in tertiary education at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic followed different scenarios and procedures across the globe (de Boer, 2021; CIHE, 2020; Crawford et al., 2020; Hong & Moloney, 2020; Jankowski, 2020; Ma et al., 2021; Marinoni et al., 2020; QAA, 2020; QQI, 2020; QS, 2020). According to international and national reports (CIHE, 2020; Hong & Moloney, 2020; Jankowski, 2020; Marinoni et al., 2020; QAA, 2020; QQI, 2020), some higher education institutions (HEIs) transferred in-person end-of-semester exams to the digital space using either the learning management systems (LMSs) or other online examination tools. Other universities introduced new emergency regulations and temporarily allowed various forms of assessment to replace summative examinations. Modifying the ratio of formative and summative assessment was equally common, so that formative assessment methods gained more weight in the final grade. Some institutions re-scheduled examinations or made concessions for students to retake exams. For seminars and practicums, it was also frequent to replace tests with other types of assignments to assess students' work (de Boer, 2021; Guangul et al., 2020; Jankowski, 2020). The aim of these emergency measures was to ensure reliable, credible, and effective assessment for students in the remote setting.

Although most online assessment methods tend to adapt traditional summative assessment to the online space (Guàrdia et al., 2017), a combination of summative and formative assessment methods can be observed during ERT (Guangul et al., 2020). In the remote context, ERT prompted HE institutions to introduce flexible regulations which grant considerable academic and pedagogical freedom for the teachers to select the most effective approach to accomplish the course's learning outcomes (Jankowski, 2020; JISC, 2020). When teaching and learning online, a definite shift is needed from memorization-based examinations to assessment tasks that require higher order thinking and unleash creative potential (Jankowski, 2020). Knight and Drysdale (2020) suggest that the key to the future's HE lies in the innovation of assessment practice. The rapid pedagogical and didactic solutions introduced due to ERT may recognize blended education as the new normal, where synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning complement each other (Marinoni et al., 2020). The blended educational model requires blended assessment approach using various methods and tools mixing traditional and innovative assessment practices (Ross et al., 2020; Willison, 2020).

The temporary adjustments the coronavirus epidemic has brought to assessment have undoubtedly posed challenges for institutions, educators, and students alike (Cooper & Tschobotko, 2020; Guangul et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2021; Sharadgah & Sa'di, 2020). These challenges resemble issues of online examinations in pre-pandemic contexts (Alruwais et al., 2018; Kearns, 2012; Romeu Fontanillas et al., 2016). Among the most common challenges of online assessment during ERT, lack of digital infrastructure (Guangul et al., 2020; Ramlo, 2021; Marinoni et al., 2020), gaps in teachers' technological and pedagogical competence (Marinoni et al., 2020; Ramlo, 2021; Sharadgah & Sa'di, 2020), academic dishonesty (Arity & Vesty, 2020; de Boer, 2021; Guangul et al., 2020; Sharadgah & Sa'di, 2020), lack of students' engagement (Guangul et al., 2020) and teachers' increased workload (Jankowski, 2020; Ramlo, 2021; Sharadgah & Sa'di, 2020) were reported. These issues have questioned the applicability of traditional forms of summative assessment in the remote setting and call for a shift from traditional assessment methodology towards formative assessment in the future digital educational environment (Baleni, 2015; Crisp et al., 2016; Dermo, 2011; Gikandi et al., 2011; Guàrdia et al., 2017; Kamsker et al., 2020).

A growing body of research exists into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HE (i.e., CIHE, 2020; Koris et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2021; Marinoni et al., 2020; QAA, 2020; QQI, 2020; QS, 2020)

and various aspects of ERT (i.e., de Boer, 2021; Cooper & Tschobotko, 2020; Crawford et al., 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Kamsker et al., 2020; Paradowski & Jelińska, 2021; Ramlo, 2021). Although several studies have been dedicated to the opportunities and challenges of assessment during the pandemic (Arity & Vesty, 2020; Guangul et al., 2020; Hong & Moloney, 2021; Jankowski, 2020; JISC, 2020; Knight & Drysdale, 2020; Sharadgah & Sa'di, 2020), learner-centered assessment as a viable approach in remote teaching contexts needs further investigation. Resorting to a learner-centered approach during ERT, Hong and Moloney (2020) observe that a high number of teachers have provided continuous monitoring of student work, assistance in case of difficulties and formative feedback to improve learners' performance. Teaching during the pandemic prompted the widespread use of formative assessment in the online educational environment and beyond. Therefore, it is particularly interesting to analyze whether teachers could transform their assessment pedagogies to cater for the learners' needs in the ERT. This study seeks to fill this gap in the literature and investigate language and communication teachers' assessment-related experience during the pandemic. A further aim of this study is to highlight the importance of a learner-centered approach in assessment and argue for its mainstream application beyond the pandemic.

Learner-centered Assessment in Tertiary-level Language and Communication Courses

Language and communication teaching in tertiary-level education allow opportunity for adopting creative and innovative teaching pedagogies. These include competency-based teaching (Pérez Cañado, 2013), team teaching and learning approach (Tajino et al., 2015), project-based language teaching (Beckett & Slater, 2020), content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach (Juan-Garau & Salazar-Noguera, 2015), virtual exchange and international collaboration projects (Helm & Beaven, 2020; O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016). These developments presume an alternative approach to assessing students' work and performance. In the context of language and communication teaching, formative assessment has gained relative popularity worldwide in the past decades (Bachman, 1990; Brown, 2005; Gikandi et al., 2011; Rea-Dickins & Gardner, 2000). While summative formal assessment uses traditional paper-and-pencil tests or their online versions and students obtain scores without any further feedback, formative assessment or 'assessment for learning' goes beyond judgement and places students' learning and development at the center of assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Broadfoot et al., 1999; Brown, 2005; Stiggins, 1994; Zhang et al., 2020). Although traditional assessment methods are still widely used, many language and communication teachers apply formative assessment methods as an alternative to traditional summative assessment. They use tasks such as e-portfolios, online learning journals, blogs, online presentations, creative writing, and open-book exams, which present a golden opportunity to involve students in the assessment process. Learner-centeredness is a key characteristic of formative assessment, which places the learner in the center of teaching and the entire assessment cycle in the center of the learning process (Brown, 2005; Cano & Ion, 2017; Hidri, 2020; Stiggins, 1994).

Just like any innovation in teaching methodology, the use of learner-centered assessment in university language education has been adopted at three different, yet highly interconnected levels. At the individual level, language and communication teachers, inspired by best-practice or examples, start to experiment with new assessment methods and tasks. At the institutional level, universities encourage the use of alternative assessment methods by offering training courses and support for teaching staff. The third is the policy level, which can refer to regional, national, or international educational policy and is associated with top-down initiatives that drive innovation in HE. The Council of Europe, for example, introduced a new approach to language education in the 1970s, and has been committed to learner autonomy and self-assessment ever since (Council of Europe, 1992, 2001, 2009, 2011). The European Language Portfolio (ELP),

developed alongside the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), illustrates a policy-driven initiative to promote innovative assessment in language and communication courses in European HEIs. Self-assessment plays a key role in ELP, which implicates the user-learner's identity and agency (Little & Erickson, 2015).

The three levels intertwine in large-scale international projects conducted by a consortium of HE institutions. These projects aim at developing innovative open educational resources based on genuine local needs via the international cooperation of the educators/researchers at the participating institutions. A wealth of strategic partnership projects and virtual collaboration projects funded by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union (Erasmus+ EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, n.d.) or other organizations worldwide, for example Collaborative Online International Learning Center at the State University of New York (SUNY COIL, n.d.) or the Stevens Initiative (Stevens Initiative, n.d.), has been realized in the field of languages and communication. These international collaboration projects give room for pedagogical and methodological experiments, assessment innovation and target teachers' academic development by:

- Building on an innovative teaching approach and pedagogical beliefs, concepts, principles (e.g., autonomous learning, coaching methods) (Asztalos & Szénich, 2020; Laine et al., 2020);
- Involving more complex tasks and activities that promote students' collaboration and skills development (e.g., telecollaboration, interdisciplinary cooperation) (Burns & Stint, 2020; Loch & Pál, 2020; Koris & Vuylsteke, 2020; O'Dowd et al., 2020; Palmer et al., 2020);
- Applying new assessment methods and practices to move away from summative assessment to various modes of formative assessment (e.g., self-assessment, peer-assessment) and different tasks evoking formative assessment (e.g., learning journals, blogs, portfolios, open-book assignments) (Morgado et al., 2019; Vesala-Varttala & Hankimaa, 2020);
- Introducing a large variety of web applications and online tools for teaching, learning and transnational collaboration (Fuchs et al., in press; Helm & Beaven, 2020).

Aims and Research Questions

The aim of this study is twofold: 1) to explore university language teachers' assessment-related challenges and their perceptions of the methods of assessment that worked well during ERT, and 2) to reveal alternative assessment practices that seek to involve the students in the assessment process. The current investigation builds on our previous studies conducted among language teachers in the European HE context (Pál & Koris, 2021a; Pál & Koris, 2021b). These studies provided preliminary insights into the appropriateness of tasks used for online assessment and the application of alternative assessment methods during the pandemic and projections for the post-COVID era. This paper seeks to extend the scope of our research to a wider international context of the COVID-19 pandemic and answer the following research questions:

1) Which tasks do university language and communication teachers find effective to assess students' performance in remotely held courses during COVID-19?

2) What challenges do university language and communication teachers face in applying these assessment tasks during COVID-19?

3) What solutions do university language and communication teachers across the globe introduce to overcome challenges and foster learner-centered assessment?

Method

Our mixed-method study comprises an online survey administered among university teachers of language and communication subjects and in-depth personal interviews with selected participants. The two strands of the research run in parallel with the aim of combining the findings from the two data sets at the final stage of the research (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The 'convergent design' of this study allowed us to arrive at a more comprehensive interpretation via the synthesized results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 122).

The survey instrument was piloted in a smaller-scale study in September – November 2020 and following some revisions, data collection occurred between February and April 2021. The online survey was designed to register perceptions of the effectiveness of 29 tasks and activities used for assessment by university language teachers both in the classroom and online. Respondents rated the effectiveness of the tasks they use in face-to-face and remote classes on a 6-point Likert scale. The rationale behind using a 6-point rating scale as opposed to a 7-point Likert scale was to eliminate central tendency bias (Taherdoost, 2019). Data from the online survey were exported to SPSS 25.0 for Windows and analyzed using frequencies and descriptive statistics. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the 29 items were computed for both face-to-face ($\alpha = 0.940$) and remote teaching ($\alpha = 0.944$). Both scales were found to be highly reliable (Cohen et al., 2018).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted online with the selected participants in two batches: twelve interviews were completed in October 2020 and six in March/April 2021. The study was conducted in compliance with the internal ethics protocol of both authors' universities following Hungarian practice for academic scholarship. Prior to data collection, the participants were given an information sheet which informed them of the aims and procedures of the study and their written consent was obtained. The interviewees participated in the research on a voluntary basis, and they could withdraw from the study at any time. The interview guide approach was opted for using a set of questions and guiding prompts to drive the discussion and maintain the focus of the interviews (Cohen et al., 2018; Galletta, 2013). The interview questions and prompts can be found in Appendix A. The interviews were recorded with the interviewees' written consent. The recordings were then transcribed, revised, and scanned for recurring themes and patterns following the constant comparative method (Creswell, 2013).

Survey Participants

The online survey was circulated among first, second and foreign language and communication teachers of more than 250 partner universities worldwide and 310 responses from university educators were collected. After data clean-up and the exclusion of disqualified and incomplete responses, 301 answers were subject to data analysis. The respondents were teaching language and communication courses at 132 HEIs in 37 countries across 5 continents during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Most of the teachers were highly experienced with more than 15 years of teaching background in tertiary education. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1

Demographics of Survey Participants (N=301)

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Region (number of countries)		
Europe (24)	213	70.76
Asia (7)	21	6.97
North America (3)	39	12.9
South America (2)	26	8.6
Australia (1)	1	0.3
Not specified	1	0.3
Gender		
Male	66	21.9
Female	218	72.4
Not specified	17	5.6
Age		
Between 20-29	18	6.0
Between 30-39	55	18.3
Between 40-49	101	33.6
Between 50-59	89	29.6
Above 60	38	12.6
Teaching experience		
0-5 years	26	8.6
6-10 years	39	13.0
11-15 years	41	13.6
16-20 years	52	17.3
20+ years	143	47.5
Online teaching experience		
0-1 years	146	48.5
1-3 years	99	32.9
3+ years	56	18.5

Interview Participants

The interviews were conducted with teachers of language and communication, who were teaching in HEIs when ERT was introduced globally due the restrictive measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. The interviewees were selected using a purposive sampling procedure along the following three main priorities: 1) representing a large variety of countries across the globe, 2) having extensive teaching experience in terms of the number of years taught at HEIs, and 3) active participation in international collaboration projects practicing online and alternative teaching approaches.

Participants (n=18) – referred to in pseudonyms in brackets – are affiliated with 18 HEIs worldwide, located in sixteen countries, namely Argentina (Hannah), Belgium (Pierre), Colombia (Lucia), Czech Republic (Margita), Finland (Jade, Tina), France (Lisette), Germany (Adele), Hungary (Claudia), Italy (Gina), Japan (Sonia), Malaysia (Raihana), Poland (Kristine), Portugal (Magda, Maricela), Slovakia (Ivette), United Kingdom (Eva), and the United States (Dafne). Besides

teaching, 8 participants assume a leadership role as the head of university departments or language centers. Fifteen interviewees have been involved previously in large-scale international projects. Nine teachers have been involved in international virtual exchange (VE) projects, while six participants have taken part in the development, piloting, and implementation of intellectual outputs in different projects funded by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union (EU). The EU projects mentioned by the interviewees are listed in Appendix B.

The interviewees' courses focus on developing students' language and communication skills in the context of different teaching programs related to the following academic fields: business, marketing, management, tourism, communication, health sciences, natural sciences, special needs education, teacher education, technology, and engineering. All interviewees have extensive teaching experience: five participants have 10–20 years of teaching practice, 10 interviewees have been teaching for more than 20 years, while three of the teachers have been in this profession for more than 30 years. Participants had an average of 1-3 years of online teaching experience prior to ERT. The number of students they were teaching and assessing during ERT was between 50–100 on average.

Findings from the Quantitative Data Analysis

The purpose of the quantitative inquiry is to determine the tasks and assignments university language and communication teachers perceive to be effective for assessing students' work in face-to-face and remote teaching. A further aim of the survey is to reveal any statistical differences between the two teaching contexts. For our survey, we used the list of 29 tasks typically used in the language and communication classroom for assessing students' learning (INCOLLAB, 2021). The list of tasks ranged from simple (e.g., true/false, multiple-choice, reading comprehension) to more complex tasks (e.g., presentation, case study, project task, learning journal, open-book assignment), each suitable for either summative or formative assessment methods. The respondents were asked to mark the effectiveness of each task on a 6-point Likert scale based on their teaching practice before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of each task are listed in Appendix C.

Descriptive statistical analyses indicate that in regular face-to-face teaching, respondents rated 'presentation' (M=5.1, SD=0.98), 'dialogue' (M=5.10, SD=1.14), 'topic discussion' (M=4.99, SD=1.17), 'project task' (M=4.94, SD=1.22), 'oral summary' (M=4.93, SD=1.19) and 'role-play' (M=4.82, SD=1.33) as highly effective. These results show that teachers of the current sample effectively use oral tasks in the classroom to evaluate students' performance. Only four scored below 4 and fell into the ineffective task category, which means that teachers used to perceive before ERT the following four tasks to be unfit for assessment: 'learning journal' (M=3.95, SD=1.61), 'translation' (M=3.90, SD=1.63), 'true and false' (M=3.81, SD=1.61), 'blog' (M=3.68, SD=1.54).

In the case of remote teaching, however, teachers found 'project task' (M=4.55, SD=1.44), 'portfolio' (M=4.54, SD=1.49), 'presentation' (M=4.49, SD=1.32), 'written summary' (M=4.38, SD=1.52), 'video creation' (M=4.37, SD=1.52), 'open-book exam' (M=4.36, SD=1.47) and 'oral summary' (M=4.34, SD=1.45) highly effective ways of assessing students' work. Among the least effective ones, 'cloze test' (M=3.58, SD=1.56), 'translation' (M=3.56, SD=1.62), 'true and false' (M=3.45, SD=1.67), 'role-play' (M=3.37, SD=1.56) and 'closed-book exam' (M=2.75, SD=1.63) were listed. Compared to the classroom setting, more tasks (12 of the 29 tasks) were rated as inefficient means of assessment.

Statistical analyses also revealed those task types that indicated a difference between the mean average values received in the case of face-to-face teaching and the ones in the remote context. First, tasks with the largest increase in their perceived effectiveness are identified and summarized in Table 2. Respondents considered more complex tasks to be more effective for assessment in remote context, which build on students' creativity, collaboration and self-reflection on their own learning and development. These activities include the completion of a 'blog', 'video', 'telecollaborative task', 'open book exam', and 'learning journal'.

Table 2

Comparison of Mean Average Values – Tasks with an Increase in the Perceived Effectiveness from Face-to-face to Remote Teaching

Assessment task with increase in effectiveness		Face-to-face teaching		Remote teaching	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
n3/o3	Blog	3.6809	1.54928	4.1927	1.53130
n28/o28	Video	4.0343	1.52283	4.3775	1.52796
n10/o10	Telecollaborative task	4.0517	1.61377	4.2691	1.52140
n6/o6	Open book exam	4.2261	1.40530	4.3680	1.47990
n23/o23	Learning journal	3.9568	1.61264	4.0184	1.66842

Tasks with a decrease in effectiveness compared to face-to-face teaching are shown in Table 3. Based on the responses, tasks that require face-to-face communication of students in the classroom and are difficult to perform in an online setting (e.g., 'role-play', 'listening comprehension'), received lower effectiveness rates in the remote teaching context. The largest decrease can be observed in the case of 'closed book exam' with a -1.9938 drop in the mean average value.

Table 3

Comparison of Mean Average Values – Tasks with a Decrease in the Perceived Effectiveness from Face-to-face to Remote Teaching

Assessment task with decrease in effectiveness		Face-to-face teaching		Remote teaching	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
n5/o5	Closed book exam	4.7510	1.35300	2.7572	1.63469
n24/o24	Role-play	4.8263	1.33631	3.3780	1.56146
n25/o25	Simulation	4.6319	1.46475	3.6333	1.62350
n8/o8	Dialogue	5.1080	1.14787	4.1647	1.55316
n11/o11	Listening comprehension	4.7718	1.27875	3.8894	1.63968
n26/o26	Topic discussion	4.9960	1.17260	4.2651	1.48447

Findings of the Qualitative Data Analysis

The findings of the interviews are presented below under three main themes that were identified as a result of the qualitative data analysis.

Transition to Online Teaching: A Process of Trial and Error

The interviewees had different personal perceptions of the ERT. Both positive and negative feelings toward online teaching were observed among the participants, and if some interviewees emphasized its positive aspects (Dafne, Pierre, Ivette), others stressed the loss of "interpersonal dimension" (Maricela) that characterizes face-to-face teaching in a normal classroom (Maricela, Magda, Adele). Despite the uncertainties related to the pandemic and faced by the interviewees, the qualitative study shed light on the participants' self-confidence in teaching online and assessing students' performance in the remote setting. The high level of self-confidence can be attributed to their previous experience in online collaboration projects. Two international projects had already ended and four were still running at the outburst of the pandemic. The qualitative data show a correlation between participants' previous project experience and their ability to cope with online instruction. However, it was beyond the scope of the research to explore how the participant could apply the learning outcomes of previous projects. The interviewees (Pierre, Ivette, Gina) mentioned that they felt at ease with the transition to remote teaching. As Ivette remembered, "I think that I could not really notice any differences between teaching online and offline".

There was only one interviewee who had been teaching fully online before ERT. One year before the pandemic the management of Lucia's university decided that they would offer all their courses online to increase the institution's international competitiveness. As Lucia recalled their transition to online teaching, "our school director would say before all this virus, if a meteor falls on the building (of the university), we can now continue working as normal". Universities teaching already online before the introduction of ERT had an added advantage over those without prior expertise in online instruction and thus were struggling with the sudden change. In Lucia's case, she faced similar challenges a year earlier and their experience confirms that methodological innovation is a result of trial and error. When digital education was introduced at their university, they initially applied proctored online exams, but they soon moved to formative assessment. As she remembered, "One day I just said I'm going to stop being a policeman because I got tired of the complaints from teachers saying, 'this guy cheated, that guy cheated'. Let's not fight against it (…) let's look at other ways of doing things".

Formative assessment relies on the transition to student-centered teaching methodology. As interviewees (Pierre, Gina, Dafne, Kirstine, Hannah) highlighted, formative feedback is considered an integral part of the students' learning process, but some university course curricula still tend to overweight or rely exclusively on summative assessment. In the case of remote teaching and learning, student-centered teaching approach receives more emphasis and implies that students should take even more responsibility for their own learning (Maricela, Kirstine). Projects and experience of our interviewees confirm that this approach is motivating for students in online and offline contexts alike. Therefore, this should be taken as a lesson learnt from the pandemic and the global ERT experience. Raihana used the expression of trial and error. She explained that her university had provided training for faculty and staff, but it was up to the teachers to decide which teaching and assessment methods they found effective and which platforms they saw fit to accommodate their courses. The interviews revealed that teachers either having prior project experience focusing on student-centered pedagogical approach or having experimented with new alternative ways of teaching and assessment, could adapt more easily to the challenges of online

teaching. Integrating virtual exchange projects in the curriculum was an enriching experience for the interviewees who had been experimenting with it prior to the introduction of ERT. Depending on the level of integration of the VE projects into the course curriculum (compulsory/elective, credit/non-credit course), the interviewees may include the learning outcomes of telecollaboration into the assessment criteria of the course.

Challenges of the Online Transition and Solutions in the Implementation of the Student-centered Approach

The interviews highlighted that academic dishonesty poses a major challenge to educators in online teaching and assessment. The interviewees voiced concern about honesty in online examinations and felt that they should introduce new reliable means of assessing student learning. Formative assessment methods were given priority over summative assessment in response to this challenge. Additionally, most interviewees (Magda, Adele, Gina, Pierre, Jade, Hannah, Lisette, Dafne) underlined that the need to prioritize formative assessment had not only been a response to eliminate the cheat factor in the remote teaching setting, but it had also been in line with their pedagogical conviction based on their extensive teaching experience. Gina found summative exams based on memorizing "terribly unfair" as "it does not necessarily reflect that person's capabilities." The end of term examinations measure a given situation at a given point in time where students' performance whether to pass or fail the test may vary (Magda). Pierre, Magda and Ivette emphasized the stressful element of final tests and end of term examinations. Moreover, Ivette believed that "students can be more motivated when I can put aside all the stressful elements from learning."

The interviewees regarded institutional support as a key to success in case of the fulfillment of the following two factors: 1) the institution provides academic freedom to teachers in choosing their teaching and assessment methods, and 2) the course is recognized with the credits equivalent to students' workload. Negative examples have also been reported (Kirstine, Claudia). The lack of fulfillment of the first factor could be observed when final tests required by the university management were already seen as ineffective before the introduction of ERT (the course had to focus rather on the exam preparation than on skills development), and these tests proved to be useless in the online environment. Kirstine only had the possibility of altering the proportion of formative and summative assessment but could not modify the course completion criteria to eliminate the requirements of taking online tests. Concerning the lack of the second factor, Claudia explained that her course on professional communication and academic skills was worth 0 credit. Although she was using alternative forms of assessment – she gave formative feedback to the students and was using advising as a tool to support learners –, the students considered the absence of credits as a clear message from the institution that the subject was unimportant. However, most interviewees stated that institutional support guaranteed the recognition of students' work and allowed for innovation in their assessment practice.

Involving Learners in the Assessment Process

The interviewees used different tools to encourage students to take ownership of their own learning. Lisette and Tina convincingly explained the effectiveness of learning journals for formative assessment, whereas Pierre, Maricela and Margita highlighted the benefits of e-portfolios. Respondents emphasized the effectiveness of using peer-evaluation and student collaboration in Maricela argued, peer-evaluation "makes all the difference because it sets students up not to see evaluation as something scary, which they have been taught to see."

Besides student-student collaboration, the idea of student-teacher cooperation is equally addressed in continuous assessment and formative methods. This aspect assumes even greater significance during ERT since the situation calls for prompt solutions to ensure effective teaching, learning and assessment that supports students' development. Interviewees (Magda, Lisette, Gina, Raihana, Ivette) reported a general tendency that there was an increased expectation of scaffolding students' learning process. The need for scaffolding or handholding is present simultaneously with the need to empower students to realize the full potential of their learning autonomy.

According to the interviewees (Maricela, Margita, Lucia), the most serious obstacle to alternative assessment lies in the widespread application of traditional teaching methods. The traditional pedagogical mindset is deeply entrenched in the HE environment and teaching culture. Participants (Pierre, Gina) urged a paradigm shift in the teaching and assessment practice and advocated the adaptation of a 'coaching attitude'. One of the listed projects promotes coaching-oriented teaching in LSP, but other interviewees (Pierre, Gina) also highlighted the significance of coaching-oriented teaching. As Pierre explained,

> "I need to trust you as you need to trust me, and it is the trust which is shared by the two parties. So, we also capitalize on that kind of relationship. I am less a teacher and more a coach. I believe today in the way I teach, it's more like coaching people to do their best instead of being a teacher and telling people they do mistakes."

Discussion

RQ1: Which assessment tasks do university teachers find effective in remote teaching during COVID-19?

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis revealed that respondents considered complex tasks to be more effective for assessment in remote teaching. These complex tasks build on students' creativity, collaboration and self-reflection on their own learning and skills development. The survey results show that respondents laid greater emphasis on tasks such as 'blogs', 'videos', 'telecollaborative tasks', 'open book exams' and learning journals' in ERT. These findings are in line with previous literature arguing for e-portfolios, open-book exams, take-home assignments, and presentations to be potential alternatives to proctored remote exams (Guangul et al., 2020). All these assignments promote student-student and student-teacher collaboration, and the execution of these tasks are part of the students' learning process and leave room for discussion and reflection (Hong & Moloney, 2020).

Interviewees had been experimenting with some of these tasks before the transition to ERT, either through participation in international projects or due to other circumstances that guided them toward assessment innovation. Contrary to previous research into the effective use of online summative examinations (Alruwais et al., 2018; James, 2016; Nicol, 2007), our findings accentuate the increased importance of formative assessment methods in ERT, irrespective of the subject or discipline. In line with previous research findings (Hong & Moloney, 2020; Jankowski, 2020; JISC, 2020; QQI, 2020), most interview participants expressed their pedagogical conviction that traditional assessment tasks based on memorization were considered out-of-date in university language and communication courses. They argued for the need to innovate assessment which the transition to remote teaching brought into spotlight.

RQ2: What challenges do university teachers face in applying these assessment tasks during COVID-19?

According to our survey results, this sample of university teachers also found that closed book exams did not adequately assess students' performance as academic dishonesty could not be eliminated. This may reflect teachers' pedagogical approach to assessment, i.e., their preference for employing alternative means of assessment when teaching online. Many teachers had also gained negative experiences with closed book exams during ERT due to the lack of secured and proctored examination environment at their institutions. Universities without providing the necessary infrastructure to accommodate secure and reliable proctored exams, could not offer it as an option during ERT. Investment and development of digital infrastructure would be indispensable for innovation in summative assessment practices at HEIs. Furthermore, providing training opportunities and institutional support on how to administer online proctored exams would be recommended. Interviewees considered institutional support as crucial and expected that their institutions grant them the academic freedom to make decisions in assessment methods among other questions. Overall, these findings are in accordance with conclusions drawn by prior studies (de Boer, 2021; Guangul et al., 2020; Ramlo, 2021; Sharadgah & Sa'di, 2020). However, our results go beyond national reports and confirm these findings on international level.

All participants draw from extensive background in the HE sectors, and the interviewees on top have fulfilled an active role in international projects focusing on the development of innovative teaching methodology. Their professional background might be the reason for the fact that they did not report any methodological and technical difficulties with ERT. In fact, they demonstrated a substantial degree of confidence in the constraint of adapting the curriculum to online teaching in an emergency. The teachers' increased confidence in transition to ERT casts a new light on the prominent role of internationalization and cross-institutional collaborations.

RQ3: What solutions do university teachers across the globe introduce to overcome challenges and foster learner-centered assessment?

The qualitative findings of this study revealed some solutions of formative assessment which promoted learner autonomy and increased students' self-confidence. The following learner-centered assessment practices were identified:

1. Promoting collaboration, with the use of peer assessment (student-student collaboration) and continuous assessment (teacher-student collaboration).
2. Claiming that students take ownership of their own learning, promoting self-reflection, self-assessment, and learner autonomy.
3. Advocating for the product and process element of grading students' performance. Assessment considers the product, task or deliverable to be submitted and the process of learning, i.e., students' competence development.
4. Showing flexibility in assessment by allowing students to choose between summative and formative assessment.
5. Using an e-portfolio which provides students the opportunity for continuous feedback and working towards a higher grade (there is a compulsory minimum).
6. Using virtual exchange and international collaboration projects to foster cooperation among international students, involving team tasks that rely on self- and peer-assessment.

Learner-centered assessment provides more visibility on students' actual learning through teacher-learner collaboration and continuous monitoring of their work. Therefore, it tends to be a more accountable means of assessment than summative methods. Learner-centered approach helps meet

the challenges associated with assessment in ERT. It reduces – if not eliminates – the cheat factor. Using complex tasks for assessment do not necessarily need to rely on sophisticated technical infrastructure. By fostering learner autonomy, this approach boosts learners' motivation and engagement and reduces learner's anxiety, which leads to higher retention of students. A further benefit of learner-centered attitude to assessment in ERT is that it promotes inclusion and accounts for learner differences in abilities, learning pace and schedules.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Implication for Future Research

Our mixed-method research focused on university teachers' perceptions of effective assessment approach in ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite all our efforts to reach institutions and faculty members, we could collect a limited number of survey answers within a short timeframe. As the present study had to rely on a relatively small (n=301) sample size, quantitative results cannot be generalized to larger populations or other contexts.

Quantitative and qualitative findings have provided meaningful insights to phrase the following recommendations. On the personal level, our survey results indicate that the ERT reinforced the use of complex tasks such as e-portfolios, blogs, learning journals and open-book exams. Educators' personal experience during the pandemic triggered an innovative pedagogical thinking and calls for a paradigm change in language and communication course curricula and assessment practice. Lessons learnt during ERT should place formative feedback in mainstream instruction. On the institutional level, institutional regulations on assessment should be aligned with new pedagogical approaches to ensure the synergy between personal, institutional and policy level. The adequate balance between formative and summative assessment should be enabled in the corresponding regulations. An implication of this study is HE institutions should consider learner-centered assessment essential and foster individual solutions which promote a more emphasized inclusion of learners in the assessment process. On the policy level, the modernization of teaching policy should build on the interconnectedness of personal, institutional and policy level. Fostering innovation of assessment may not be considered independently of teaching practice and curriculum. National and international educational policies need to set the direction as "the future of higher education hangs on innovating our assessment" (Knight & Drysdale, 2020).

In conclusion, findings revealed that learner-centered forms of assessment have come to the fore and may press for a paradigm shift in the assessment practice of HEIs. New innovative teaching practices, like the internationalization initiatives and cross-institutional international collaborations, pave the way for effective assessment methodology in the future. The inclusion of innovative ideas and teaching attitudes has a great potential to trigger change in assessment methods, which may have a long-term positive effect on tertiary education in the post-COVID era. Further investigations on teachers' experience of self- and peer-assessment in remote teaching contexts could add considerable insights into this agenda. In addition, students' perceptions and beliefs of learner-centered assessment may prove an important area for future research.

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Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Questions and Prompts

I. Introductory conversation about teacher's profile and pedagogical views

- Professional background
- Qualification and teaching experience
- University program(s), discipline
- Pedagogical views on teaching and assessment

II. LSP courses, educational context and the role of LSP courses in the university program

- Which subjects (courses, modules) do you teach?
- Were your courses face-to-face before ERT?
- Have you ever taught online before ERT?
- What are the main learning outcomes of the course/module?
- What skills are developed and how is this skills development monitored?
- Are there online collaboration projects (e.g. telecollaboration) included in your course(s)?

III. Assessment practices, instructor's freedom and possibilities for innovation in assessment in pre-ERT teaching practice

- Based on what are your students graded? What makes up the grade and how is it weighted?
- How do you measure the development of students' language and communication skills?
- Do you measure the development of students' other ('21st century') skills? Do students get feed feedback on it?
- What possibilities do you have for differentiation?
- Have you changed your teaching and assessment methods in the past 5 years?
- At what extent is the course description/curriculum rigid or flexible concerning the assessment criteria? What are the teachers' possibilities in your institution to adapt them to a specific course?

IV. Impact of ERT on assessment practice

- When assessing students' work during ERT what was the major challenge for you?
- What did you need to change in your assessment practice? What solutions or approaches could you not use any more in the new context?
- What worked less and what worked better compared to the pre-ERT context? What assessment solutions did you consider keeping from pre-COVID19 times, but were not as effective- or worked better - as in face-to-face teaching?
- What was the major benefit of ERT in your teaching practice, if any? Why?
- What assessment solutions used during ERT would you keep in the future? Why?
- Based on the experience of ERT, how do you think assessment will change in the post-COVID19 era?

Appendix B

Project	Project Homepage
ICCAGE (2015-2017)	https://iccageproject.wixsite.com/presentation
EVALUATE (2017-2019)	https://sites.google.com/unileon.es/evaluate2019/
E+VE (2018-2020)	https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual_en
PROMINENCE (2018-2020)	https://www.prominenceproject.eu/index.php/prominence/goals/
D. T. Uni (2018-2020)	https://www.designuni.eu/about/
INCOLLAB (2019-2021)	https://incollabeu.wixsite.com/project
CORALL (2019-2022)	https://corallprojecteu.wixsite.com/presentation

Appendix B. Interviewees' Erasmus+ Projects Funded by the European Union (EU)

Appendix C

Assessment task	Face-to-face teaching[*]		Online teaching/ERT[**]	
	Mean	St. Deviation	Mean	St. Deviation
1. Argumentative essay	4.6653	1.21931	4.6653	1.21931
2. Narrative essay	4.4826	1.32400	4.4826	1.32400
3. Blog	3.6809	1.54928	3.6809	1.54928
4. Case study	4.6716	1.32350	4.6716	1.32350
5. Closed-book exam	4.7510	1.35300	4.7510	1.35300
6. Open-book exam	4.2261	1.40530	4.2261	1.40530
7. Cloze test	4.1793	1.42959	4.1793	1.42959
8. Dialogue	5.1080	1.14787	5.1080	1.14787
9. Guided writing	4.7321	1.18270	4.7321	1.18270
10. Telecollaboration	4.0517	1.61377	4.0517	1.61377
11. Listening comprehension	4.7718	1.27875	4.7718	1.27875
12. Matching, sequencing	4.2968	1.44265	4.2968	1.44265
13. Mediation	4.3293	1.33894	4.3293	1.33894
14. Multiple-choice	4.0040	1.50743	4.0040	1.50743
15. Oral summary	4.9399	1.19834	4.9399	1.19834
16. Written summary	4.7755	1.16058	4.7755	1.16058
17. Portfolio	4.5672	1.39525	4.5672	1.39525
18. Poster presentation	4.4898	1.51061	4.4898	1.51061
19. Pre/post-questionnaire	4.0455	1.55955	4.0455	1.55955
20. Presentation	5.1564	.98950	5.1564	.98950
21. Project task	4.9488	1.22367	4.9488	1.22367
22. Reading comprehension	4.7490	1.25795	4.7490	1.25795
23. Learning journal	3.9568	1.61264	3.9568	1.61264
24. Role-play	4.8263	1.33631	4.8263	1.33631
25. Simulation	4.6319	1.46475	4.6319	1.46475
26. Topic discussion	4.9960	1.17260	4.9960	1.17260
27. Translation	3.9010	1.63302	3.9010	1.63302
28. Video creation	4.0343	1.52283	4.0343	1.52283
29. True or false	3.8142	1.61685	3.8142	1.61685

[*]The answers in this column referring to face-to-face teaching (pre-COVID) were coded as n1-n29.
[**]The answers in this column referring to online teaching/ERT were coded as o1-o29.

Appendix C. Mean Average Values of the 29 Tasks Used for Assessment in Face-to-face and Remote Teaching