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THE USE OF THE MOODLE PLATFORM IN EMERGENCY REMOTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING AND BEYOND

Abstract. *The present article analyses the advantages and disadvantages of the use of Moodle in foreign language teaching and learning from the perspective of teachers and students, during the pandemic and after it. It is based on the present author's experience in teaching French on Moodle in the summer semester of 2020 and her students' evaluation of the course, as well as foreign language teachers' opinions on Moodle as a teaching and assessment tool. As the results show, Moodle is generally perceived by both teachers and students as useful and relatively convenient in foreign language teaching and learning, though it cannot replace synchronous classes (face to face or, for example, on MS Teams) and it is best to use it as a supplementary tool.*

Keywords: *Moodle, ICT, remote learning, learner autonomy, language learning with technology*

1. Introduction

The present article aims to present some advantages and disadvantages of using the Moodle platform in foreign language learning and teaching from the experience of both the present author and other teachers, as well as students. Since its introduction on a larger scale in the context of emergency remote teaching during the pandemic, it has remained in use to this day, albeit its application has shifted to some extent from one of the main online teaching tools to a largely supplementary one. However, as will be attempted to show, Moodle has some unquestionable advantages which render it a highly useful tool, not only in emergency remote teaching situations. There is some evidence that, apart from such obvious features as the possibility of accessing Moodle from home at any time, it can provide additional opportunities for language practice and the development of learner autonomy¹.

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown obliged teachers and students to stay at home and to switch from face-to-face to remote teaching and learning.

¹ Gulbinskienė, D., Masoodi, M., Šliogerienė, J. (2017). Moodle as Virtual Learning Environment in Developing Language Skills, Fostering Metacognitive Awareness and Promoting Learner Autonomy, *Pedagogika/Pedagogy* 127 (3): 176-185. <https://doi.org/10.15823/p.2017.47>

As noted by Hodges et al.², academic teachers had to ‘improvise quick solutions in less-than-ideal circumstances.’ Undoubtedly, one of such quick solutions was the use of Moodle, which, despite a number of advantages, also has certain disadvantages and limitations, that is why different subjects can be taught on Moodle more or less well. Moreover, Moodle being an online platform, its use required faculty members to develop the necessary technical skills, which caused them additional difficulty. While some teachers, including the present author, had already gained some experience in using Moodle before the pandemic, others had to learn it from scratch and universities organised online courses to help teachers master the new tool quickly enough to use it in their work.

The study is based on, first, the present author’s experience in teaching French on Moodle and her students’ perception of the course, as well as on two surveys^{3,4} still being conducted among foreign language teachers, one on the advantages and disadvantages of Moodle in foreign language teaching and the other on the possibilities and limitations of using Moodle as an assessment tool. The studies take into consideration, on the one hand, the skills that can be taught and assessed on Moodle and, on the other hand, the possibilities of developing learner autonomy, given the mostly asynchronous character of learning on this platform, as perceived by teachers and students.

2. Language learning with technology: challenges and opportunities

2.1. Language learning with technology before, during and after the pandemic

By and large, language learning with technology is becoming increasingly popular and it cannot be denied that it has a number of advantages, such as its interactive character, the possibility of combining different types of materials and activities (e.g. texts for reading comprehension, online videos, grammar and vocabulary quizzes, etc.) and often, as in the case of Moodle quizzes, immediate feedback. In fact, nowadays technology pervades our lives in a variety of ways, so its application in language teaching seems natural; for example, the Internet offers learners access to authentic materials, including press articles, e-books, videos, etc., as well as websites dedicated specifically to foreign language learning. As noted

² Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., Bond, A. (2020). The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning. <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning> Accessed: May 1, 2023.

³ Włosowicz, T.M. (in preparation a). Teachers’ opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of using the Moodle platform in foreign language teaching.

⁴ Włosowicz, T.M. (In preparation b). Moodle as an assessment tool in foreign language teaching and learning.

by Jones⁵, ‘technologies do not just affect how we learn language, but also how we use it in our everyday lives.’ According to Jones, technologies influence learners’ opportunities for meaning making and thus for language practice, the ways of recording, preserving and transmitting both input and learners’ language production, opportunities for social interaction and, finally, the development of learner autonomy⁶. Indeed, research has already provided considerable evidence of the potential of technology, especially the Internet, for fostering language learner autonomy^{7,8} in both formal and informal settings⁹.

As was remarked in the introduction, during the pandemic in particular, computer technology, especially online tools, started to play an unprecedented role. Hodges et al. speak about emergency remote teaching (ERT), which they define as ‘a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances¹⁰.’ As such solutions are temporary and the institution is going to return to face-to-face or blended learning as soon as the crisis ends, the objective is to create quickly a learning environment that will be reliably available throughout the crisis¹¹. As Hodges et al.¹² admit, the quality of ERT courses is likely to be lower than that of planned online ones, since developing a quality course can take months. As for the evaluation of emergency remote teaching, a media comparison study, such as comparing an online course with a face-to-face one, should be avoided. Instead, courses should be evaluated in terms of their success. However, success can be measured from different points of view: for the faculty, those may be students’ learning outcomes, for the students themselves their interest motivation and engagement, whereas for faculty members the perception of success may be affected by attitudes towards online instruction¹³. Nevertheless, despite the temporary character of ERT, Fuchs¹⁴ concludes that

⁵ Jones, R.H. (2018). Learning Through Technology. In: Burns, A., Richards, J.C. (eds.) *The Cambridge Guide to Learning English as a Second Language* (pp. 319-326). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 320.

⁶ Jones, R.J. (2018). Ibidem, p. 320. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009024761.044>

⁷ Pawlak, M., Kruk, M. (2012). The development of learner autonomy through Internet resources and its impact on English language attainment. *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 47(2-3): 69-91. <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10121-012-0005-9>

⁸ Sockett, G., Toffoli, D. (2012). Beyond learner autonomy: a dynamic systems view of the informal learning of English In virtual online communities. *ReCALL* 24(2): 138-151. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344012000031>

⁹ Trinder, R. (2017). Informal and deliberate learning with new technologies. *ELT Journal* 71(4): 401-412. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccw117>

¹⁰ Hodges, C. et al. (2020). The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning. <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning> Accessed: May 1, 2023.

¹¹ Hodges, C. et al. (2020). Ibidem.

¹² Hodges, C. et al. (2020). Ibidem.

¹³ Hodges, C. et al. (2020). Ibidem.

the impact of the pandemic on teaching and learning constitutes both a valuable lesson and an opportunity to develop online education in the future.

A similar view is represented by Jelińska and Paradowski¹⁵, who, following Kim¹⁶, Gannon¹⁷ and Toquero¹⁸, admit that, after the pandemic, classes will become more blended, ICT will be increasingly employed in teaching and, consequently, teacher training will have to take these factors into consideration. On the basis of an international survey, they analysed the role of teachers' professional adaptation to emergency remote teaching in their perception of their students' ability to cope with emergency remote learning. They observed a number of factors influencing that perception, such as the teachers' perception of their own remote teaching effectiveness, conducting synchronous or asynchronous classes and, predictably enough, their prior experience with remote teaching¹⁹. By contrast, the teachers' age, experience with teaching the subject as such and their appraisal of the impact of the situation on themselves and the students did not influence their perception of students' coping with ERT²⁰. As Jelińska and Paradowski conclude²¹, awareness of the relevant factors should be used by both teachers and program directors in the development of training and intervention programs, especially stressing their role as facilitators, motivating and remotely guiding and mentoring their students^{22,23}.

¹⁴ Fuchs, K. (2022). The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and e-Learning. *Frontiers in Education* 2022(7), Article 921332: 1-3, p. 2. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.921332>

¹⁵ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021a) Teachers' Perception of Student Coping With Emergency Remote Instruction During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Relative Impact of Educator Demographics and Professional Adaptation and Adjustment. *Frontiers in Psychology* 2021(12) Article 648443: 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.648443>

¹⁶ Kim, J. (2020). Teaching and learning after COVID-19: three post-pandemic predictions. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/blogs/learning-innovation/teaching-and-learning-after-covid-19>. Accessed: December 29, 2020.

¹⁷ Gannon, K. (2019). 4 Lessons from moving a face-to-face course online. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/4-lessons-from-moving-a-face-to-face-course-online/> Accessed: December 29, 2020.

¹⁸ Toquero, C. M. (2020). Challenges and opportunities for higher education amid the COVID-19 pandemic: the Philippine context. *Pedagogical Research* 5:7947. <https://doi.org/10.29333/pr/7947>

¹⁹ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021a) Ibidem, p. 6-7.

²⁰ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021a) Ibidem, p. 7.

²¹ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021a) Ibidem, p. 10.

²² Paradowski, M. B. (2015). Holes in SOLEs: re-examining the role of EdTech and 'minimally invasive education' in foreign language learning and teaching. *English Lingua Journal* 1, 37–60, as cited In Jelińska and Paradowski (2021a), p. 10.

²³ Luthra, P., and Mackenzie, S. (2020). 4 ways COVID-19 could change how we educate future generations. *World Economic Forum*. Available online at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/4-ways-covid-19-education-future-generations/>, accessed: December 29, 2020, as cited in Jelińska and Paradowski (2021a), p. 10.

Jelińska and Paradowski²⁴ also researched teachers' engagement in emergency remote instruction and their ways of coping with it. They divided the respondents into two clusters: those who were more engaged and coped with remote teaching better and those who were less engaged and coped worse²⁵. Even though most of the respondents lacked experience in remote teaching, the teachers in the more engaged and better coping group tended to teach synchronous rather than asynchronous classes²⁶. The respondents' performance was also affected by their previous convictions and confidence about distance teaching, which led Jelińska and Paradowski to conclude²⁷ that preparing teachers for remote instruction required both technological instruction and institutional support. Indeed, given the growing interest in online learning, which started even before the pandemic, long-term adjustments should be made and teachers should be prepared to conduct both face-to-face and online classes²⁸.

However, remote instruction poses additional requirements not only for teachers, but also for students. A study by Stella Hurd²⁹ on the role of the distance language learner revealed that the most important factors in this type of instruction were long-term motivation, tutor feedback and the students' responsibility for their learning. Apart from motivation, the personality traits indicated by the respondents included persistence, enthusiasm and reflection³⁰. Indeed, especially in distance education, it is difficult yet simultaneously necessary to maintain motivation. Yet, the teacher's role could not be neglected either. According to the respondents, the most important roles for the teacher were to provide feedback, monitor and assess the students' progress and, consequently, to identify their problems³¹. As for the students' roles, the participants indicated, among others, hard and systematic work, using French as often as possible (it was a French language course), doing assignments carefully and on time, acting on tutor feedback and taking responsibility for their own learning³². As Hurd remarks³³, 'even at the start of their course many students had a

²⁴ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021b). Teachers' engagement in and coping with emergency remote instruction during COVID-19-induced school closures: A multinational contextual perspective. *Online Learning Journal*, 25(1), 303-328. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v25i1.2492>

²⁵ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021b). Ibidem, p. 311.

²⁶ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021b). Ibidem, p. 311.

²⁷ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021b). Ibidem, p. 318.

²⁸ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021b). Ibidem, p. 319.

²⁹ Hurd, S. (2006). Towards a Better Understanding of the Dynamic Role of the Distance Language Learner: Learner perceptions of personality, motivation, roles, and approaches. *Distance Education* 27(3): 303-329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587910600940406>

³⁰ Hurd, S. (2006). Ibidem, p. 308-309.

³¹ Hurd, S. (2006). Ibidem, p. 312.

³² Hurd, S. (2006). Ibidem, p. 313-314.

³³ Hurd, S. (2006). Ibidem, p. 313.

good degree of awareness of learner roles in distance language learning.’ She concludes that her study provided useful insights into the possibilities of improving distance education, including support to students in the affective domain³⁴.

At this point, it is worth clarifying the distinction between remote teaching and learning, online education and distance education. While in some contexts these terms can refer to the same courses and can be used interchangeably, they differ to some extent. As was noted before, the instruction type adopted during the pandemic was called emergency remote teaching and, indeed, remote teaching generally takes place in emergency situations when face-to-face classes become impossible. As explained by Teach Thought Staff, ‘[r]emote learning is the practice of moving a formerly in-person learning process online – usually temporarily’³⁵. By contrast, according to Berg and Simonson,

distance learning, also called distance education, e-learning, and online learning, [is a] form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student--student communication³⁶.

It is therefore not necessarily applied in emergency situations, but may be, for example, more convenient for a particular group, may serve to reduce the cost of a course, etc. In fact, while nowadays distance education is practically synonymous with online education, in the past it could involve correspondence courses, where students would receive materials and send in their work by post³⁷. However, both in distance education and remote teaching, there is a separation in space between the teacher and the students, and nowadays both types of teaching take place online. As a result, some researchers use these terms interchangeably, for instance, in their research questions, Jelińska and Paradowski³⁸ say they aim to investigate the participants’ coping with ‘the transition to emergency remote instruction³⁹,’ what the patterns of their ‘*engagement* in distance teaching vis-à-vis contextual variables are⁴⁰,’ and what ‘the *contextual* patters of teachers’ coping with online instruction⁴¹,’ are. As their study refers specifically to the pandemic, they actually investigated teachers’ coping with

³⁴ Hurd, S. (2006). Ibidem, p. 320.

³⁵ Teach Thought Staff (2021). The Definition of Remote Learning, <https://www.teachthought.com/learning/what-is-remote-learning/> Accessed: June 14, 2023.

³⁶ Berg, G.A., Simonson, M. (2023). Distance learning. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/distance-learning> Accessed: June 14, 2023.

³⁷ Berg, G.A., Simonson, M. (2023). Ibidem.

³⁸ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021b). Ibidem, p. 305-306.

³⁹ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021b). Ibidem, p. 305.

⁴⁰ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021b). Ibidem, p. 306, their emphasis.

⁴¹ Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021b). Ibidem, p. 306, their emphasis.

emergency remote teaching, not with a planned online course. On the other hand, they mention the teachers' experience with remote teaching⁴², which does not necessarily imply an earlier pandemic or another emergency, but rather previous experience with conducting online courses.

In the present study, for the sake of precision, the terms 'remote teaching' and 'remote learning' are going to be applied to the pandemic and the emergency remote teaching connected with it, whereas 'distance learning' and 'online learning' will be used in a more general sense, implying that the courses in question take place via the Internet and involve physical separation between the teacher and the students. Thus, classes held online before or after the pandemic for other reasons (for example, to supplement the course with extra activities) will be referred to as 'distance learning (or teaching),' 'distance education' or 'online learning (or teaching),' where the latter is the default type of distance education, as such courses no longer take place by post.

In summary, online teaching constitutes a useful complement or, in case of emergency, an alternative to face-to-face teaching, provided that more attention is paid to both teacher and student training, so that teachers as well as students can cope with the technological requirements, remain engaged and motivated, and, last but not least, that teachers know how to provide the appropriate feedback and affective support. Still, as the present article focuses on Moodle in particular, it is necessary to examine the advantages and disadvantages of Moodle in foreign language teaching and learning, and the possibilities of its meeting the requirements of distance education.

2.2. Moodle as a language teaching and learning tool

The Moodle platform was originally developed by Martin Dougiamas, who experimented with an alternative method of online teaching and started testing his early prototypes in 1999. The first Moodle site ever was created by Peter Taylor in 2001 and Moodle 1.0 was released in 2002. Over the years, Moodle was constantly developed and in March 2020 the number of its registered users 'passed 190 million on over 145,000 sites.'⁴³ The current version is Moodle 4.2, which has a number of new features, such as quick content creation, better section options, including useful permalinks, bulk editing, new BigBlueButton settings, assignment messaging, viewing feedback directly in the grader report, etc.⁴⁴

⁴² Jelińska, M., Paradowski, M.B. (2021b). Ibidem, p. 311.

⁴³ <https://docs.moodle.org/402/en/History> Accessed: May 2, 2023.

⁴⁴ https://docs.moodle.org/402/en/New_features Accessed: May 2, 2023.

As emphasised by Bošković, Gajić and Tomić⁴⁵, Moodle offers a number of benefits, such as the possibility of learning English in an interesting way and the ease of using this system. It shares several advantages with online communication in general, namely flexibility and the possibility of accessing it at any time and place, the lack of time zone limits, additional time for students to prepare their answers, anonymity, which makes them more willing to participate in discussions, and cost-effectiveness⁴⁶. However, students actually have accounts on Moodle, so they are not completely anonymous, but it is possible that communication via Moodle feels more anonymous than face-to-face communication. According to Bošković et al.⁴⁷, the main advantages of using Moodle in foreign language learning include access to multimedia tools and applications, which allow students to practise the four language skills, i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking, as well as exercises and progress tests in grammar, vocabulary, listening and writing, which let them see the results immediately. This claim is supported by the results of their survey, where, as the greatest advantages of Moodle, students listed the use of multimedia tools, access to the platform from anywhere and at any time, its good organisation and transparency, self-evaluation tests, ‘easily available material for exams preparation⁴⁸,’ as well as the ease of searching for particular materials. The only disadvantage mentioned by the students was the impossibility to use English actively in interaction with the teachers.

Apart from its technological qualities and the possibility of providing different materials and interactive activities, Moodle has been shown to possess a number of other advantages for enhancing the learning process. Given the immediate feedback provided by them, special attention has been paid to the educational role of Moodle quizzes. A report by Weimer et al.⁴⁹ presents various facets and applications of quizzes. For example, quizzes increase students’ engagement; if completed before a class and graded automatically, they allow students to identify areas of difficulty and provide opportunities for practice⁵⁰. Moreover, rather than punishing students for not preparing for a class, a quiz can motivate

⁴⁵ Bošković, V., Gajić, T., Tomić, I. (2014). Moodle in English language teaching. *Sinteza* 2014: 480-483.

⁴⁶ Bošković, V., Gajić, T., Tomić, I. (2014). *Ibidem*, p. 481.

⁴⁷ Bošković, V., Gajić, T., Tomić, I. (2014). *Ibidem*, p. 481.

⁴⁸ Bošković, V., Gajić, T., Tomić, I. (2014). *Ibidem*, p. 482.

⁴⁹ Weimer, M., Stan, P.L., Dreon, O., Talbert, R., Starks, J., Lin, T.-C. (2019). *Ideas for Rethinking Your Quiz Tactics. Special Report: Course Design*. Madison, Wisconsin: Magna Publications. Available at: <https://www.facultyfocus.com/free-reports/designing-better-quizzes-ideas-for-rethinking-your-quiz-practices/> Accessed: May 1, 2023.

⁵⁰ Weimer, M. (2019). Five Types of Quizzes that Deepen Engagement with Course Content. In: Weimer et al. *Ideas for Rethinking Your Quiz Tactics. Special Report: Course Design*. Madison, Wisconsin: Magna Publications, pp. 3-4.

them to prepare and then to participate in class discussions, as in the case of the accounting quiz designed by Braun and Sellers⁵¹ and discussed by Weimer⁵².

As for the development of specific language skills, Huynh-Cam et al.⁵³ studied the use of Moodle-based assessment in teaching listening and reading comprehension in English during the pandemic and the associated lockdown. As they conclude, ‘students can use MOODLE to self-assess their English competence and improve listening and reading skills⁵⁴.’ The students’ self-assessment and learning progress can be monitored by the teachers, even outside the classroom, and, last but not least, this monitoring can help higher education institutions to manage the teaching and learning processes and improve students’ performance⁵⁵.

Indeed, not only does the possibility of self-assessment, using automatically grading quizzes, provide immediate feedback and allow students to identify the language skills and structures that pose them difficulty, but it has also been found to promote metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy and, as a result, motivation as well⁵⁶. Metacognitive awareness helps students to reflect on their learning, monitor and organise it consciously. Oxford⁵⁷ describes it as ‘the construction manager whose job is to focus, plan, obtain resources, organize, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the construction of knowledge.’ On the other hand, following Holec⁵⁸, Gulbinskienė et al.⁵⁹ define learner autonomy as

the ability to take charge of one’s learning and hold the responsibility for the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning including determining the objectives, defining the contents and progress, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedure of acquisition and evaluating what has been acquired.

⁵¹ Braun, K.W., Sellers, R.D. (2012). Using a “daily motivational quiz” to increase student preparation, attendance, and participation. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 27 (1): 7-279. <https://doi.org/10.2308/iace-10219>

⁵² Weimer, M. (2019). A Quiz Design that Motivates Learning. In: Weimer et al. *Ideas for Rethinking Your Quiz Tactics. Special Report: Course Design*. Madison, Wisconsin: Magna Publications, pp. 9-10.

⁵³ Huynh-Cam, T.-T., Agrawal, S., Chen, L.-S., Fan, T.-L. (2021). Using Moodle-based e-assessment in English listening and reading courses: A Vietnamese case study. *Journal of Institutional Research South-East Asia* 19(2): 66-92.

⁵⁴ Huynh-Cam, T.-T., Agrawal, S., Chen, L.-S., Fan, T.-L. (2021). Ibidem, p. 87.

⁵⁵ Huynh-Cam, T.-T., Agrawal, S., Chen, L.-S., Fan, T.-L. (2021). Ibidem, p. 87

⁵⁶ Gulbinskienė, D., Masoodi, M., Šliogerienė, J. (2017). Moodle as Virtual Learning Environment in Developing Language Skills, Fostering Metacognitive Awareness and Promoting Learner Autonomy, *Pedagogika/Pedagogy* 127 (3): 176-185. <https://doi.org/10.15823/p.2017.47>

⁵⁷ Oxford, R.L. (2011). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, p. 44, as quoted in Gulbinskienė et al. (2017). Ibidem, p. 178.

⁵⁸ Holec, H. (2008). Foreword. In: Lamb, T.E., Reinders, H. (eds.) *Learner and teacher autonomy: Concepts, realities and responses* (pp. 3-4). Amsterdam: John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/aals.1.02hol>

⁵⁹ Gulbinskienė et al. (2017). Ibidem, p. 177-178.

In their study, Gulbinskienė et al. gave students a questionnaire regarding their evaluation of language learning on Moodle. As the results showed, most of the respondents agreed that Moodle helped them to learn autonomously with precise instructions from the teacher, to learn how to learn, and to evaluate their own learning; moreover, the choice of activities promoted their autonomy⁶⁰. At the same time, Moodle increased their confidence and motivation to read, write and communicate in English. Finally, in the students' opinion, Moodle made learning English easier and more interesting, which was especially visible in the case of vocabulary, and their attitudes towards English improved⁶¹. As Gulbinskienė et al. conclude, Moodle can indeed increase learners' motivation and metacognitive awareness: as they become aware of what they are learning and why it is important to them, they can take responsibility for their learning and become more autonomous. However, while Moodle can be used as a supplementary virtual learning environment, it cannot replace face-to-face teaching completely⁶².

3. The studies

3.1. Research questions and methods

In order to investigate the benefits and challenges of using Moodle in foreign language teaching in the Polish context in particular, though not only, and to verify the findings of other researchers, several studies have been designed and conducted. This article is based on three studies by the present author, two of which are still in progress, so only their preliminary results will be presented. The research questions are as follows: First, what challenges did the switch to emergency remote teaching pose to the French language teacher and students? What were the advantages and disadvantages of the remote course online? Second, what are teachers' opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of Moodle in foreign language teaching and learning? Third, how has the use of Moodle changed since the pandemic? Fourth, how can different language skills be evaluated on Moodle?

The main method employed here is the online survey. The questionnaires for both students and teachers were created using Google Forms. In addition, the present author's evaluation of the French course from the teacher's point of view involves online classroom observation, including the students' activity on Moodle and later, also during the synchronous classes on MS Teams.

⁶⁰ Gulbinskienė et al. (2017). *Ibidem*, p. 179.

⁶¹ Gulbinskienė et al. (2017). *Ibidem*, p. 180-181.

⁶² Gulbinskienė et al. (2017). *Ibidem*, p. 182-183.

3.2. The French language course on Moodle

3.2.1. The teacher's perspective

At the time of the outbreak of the pandemic, the present author was teaching French to international students at WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland. As the students were mostly beginners and came from a variety of countries, including Poland, Peru, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Mexico, Kosovo, Venezuela, Laos, Ukraine, etc. the language of instruction was English. (In fact, at the beginning of the course, the groups had not been divided according to the students' proficiency levels, which ranged from absolute beginners to B2, but according to whether French was the first or the second foreign language in their degree course. By the time of switching to ERT, they had been learning French for one year and two months, so the beginners had approximately reached the A1 level.) In the face-to-face teaching mode, the materials were varied and included five textbooks, two general ones^{63,64} and three focusing specifically on vocabulary⁶⁵, grammar⁶⁶ and communication⁶⁷, some authentic materials, such as YouTube videos, and a database of quizzes on Moodle prepared by an external company before the course.

The lockdown required a quick adjustment to emergency remote teaching, so the face-to-face French classes were replaced by Moodle. As the syllabus had not changed, the author had to scan pages from the textbooks and upload them on Moodle (certainly, with precise indication of the sources), adding links to YouTube videos for listening comprehension practice and quizzes from the ready-made database. However, as the textbooks contained explanations and instructions in French, these had to be translated into English for the students to understand. The texts also required translation if the vocabulary was unfamiliar to the students and writing a glossary was not enough; in fact, as the vocabulary was used in context and a dictionary equivalent was not always the most appropriate one, the whole sentence had to be translated into English, possibly with an additional note. Similarly, the quizzes had been created with instructions in Polish, so the author had to edit them, replacing the instructions with English translations or adding an explanation in English. If a video had no English subtitles available, it had to be translated and/or explained in English too.

⁶³ Berthet, A., Daill, E., Hugot, C., Kizirian, V.M., Waendendries, M.,. (2012). *Alter Ego +. A1*. Paris: Hachette.

⁶⁴ Capelle, G., Menand, R. (2009). *Le Nouveau Taxi!* Paris : Hachette.

⁶⁵ Miquel, C. (2017). *Vocabulaire Progressif du Français. Débutant*. Paris : CLE International.

⁶⁶ Grégoire, M. (2010). *Grammaire Progressive du Français. Débutant*. Paris : CLE International.

⁶⁷ Miquel, C. (2013). *Communication Progressive en Français. Débutant*. Paris : CLE International.

All of this was very time-consuming, so the author had little time for monitoring the students' progress, especially because the whole course was asynchronous at that time and contact with the students was limited to email, Moodle chat and, in some cases, home assignments uploaded as files into folders on Moodle and feedback on them. While the ready-made quizzes, translated into English by the teacher if necessary, served for practice and self-evaluation purposes, quizzes created by the present author were progress or end-of-term tests. Therefore, while summative assessment, 'focusing on attainment'⁶⁸ was done by means of online tests, formative assessment could only be based on the students' home assignments and the results of Moodle quizzes, which might have felt like online games rather than real learning. Moreover, as the pandemic affected everybody's lifestyles and routines (for example, students working in companies had to work from home too), regular study began to require even more motivation and self-discipline. As a result, some of the students would log into Moodle regularly, while others would do it only towards the end of the semester in order to prepare for and pass the end-of-term exam.

The situation changed in October 2020, when a synchronous course on MS Teams was introduced and Moodle came to be used as a supplementary tool for uploading materials, links and quizzes, as well as creating folders for home assignments. The test at the end of the winter semester took place on Moodle in the form of a quiz prepared by the teacher, but the final exam in June 2021 was conducted on Inspira Assess, another assessment tool introduced at WSB University. However, the change to synchronous classes was not positive for everybody, as some of the foreign students had gone to their home countries and were not able to return to Poland because of the pandemic, nor to participate in the classes due to the time lag, so they had to rely on the materials and activities available on Moodle anyway.

If the remote French course were to be evaluated objectively, there was certainly room for improvement, but, given the emergency character of the lockdown, it seemed to be the best solution in that particular situation. A possible improvement might have been the creation of online practice quizzes based on the textbooks, rather than scanning exercises, translating them into English and creating folders for home assignments. Moreover, while the synchronous classes on MS Teams with Moodle as a supplementary tool resembled a normal foreign language course more, not everybody could participate in them, but there was no time for individual classes either, as the time lag, for example, between Poland and Peru is 7 hours.

⁶⁸ Rea-Dickins, P. (2006). Currents and eddies in the discourse of assessment: a learning-focused interpretation. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 16(2): 163-168, p. 164. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2006.00112.x>

An additional challenge was technical problems, such as a poor Internet connection, a faulty microphone, which prevented the student from speaking and made him or her type the answers, software errors, etc. Therefore, while the online classes worked generally well as emergency remote teaching, they also had some limitations.

3.2.2. The students' perspective

The questionnaire for the students was completed by only 11 of the 30 course participants, but, as by the time of the study they had already graduated, it was more difficult to reach them. Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous. Nine of the participants were female and two were male. Their native languages were Polish (3 respondents), Spanish (2), Azerbaijani (2), Georgian (1), Turkmen (1), Albanian (1) and Lao (1). Apart from English and French, they had also studied other languages, such as German, Russian, Spanish as a foreign language, Italian, Turkish, Arabic and Korean. They had chosen to study French because they were interested in the French language and culture (100%), they needed it for their studies (27.3%), they wanted to go to France or another French-speaking country and communicate in French while travelling (18.2%), one student (9.1%) had already learnt some French and wanted to continue learning it, one (9.1%) wanted to move to France after her studies, one (9.1%) had some French-speaking friends and wanted to communicate with them in French and one (9.1%) wanted to read French books in the original.

As for the remote course, Moodle was quite easy for them to use, as the mean level of difficulty was 2.64 on a 5-point Likert scale, though their responses varied considerably ($SD=1.21$). Nine (81.8%) had to learn to use Moodle at the beginning of the pandemic, one had learnt it at university in Poland and one had already been using Moodle at university to some extent before the pandemic. It was thus a challenge for the majority of them to master a new virtual learning environment. Even so, they were fairly confident about using Moodle ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.13$), mainly because their IT skills were generally good (45.5%), they only needed a few basic functions of Moodle (36.4%), they had already gained considerable experience with Moodle (27.3%) and Moodle was intuitive and easy to use (27.3%). By contrast, what made them unconfident about using Moodle was technical problems (36.4%), the lack of previous experience with Moodle (27.3%), insufficient training (18.2%), while one student commented she did not feel that Moodle was sufficient to teach anything, only the test format could teach something, but not the PDF files. The latter statement seems quite surprising, as new knowledge has to be presented before being tested. However, it is

possible that what she regarded as teaching was the immediate feedback on the quizzes, whereas reading texts in French, even with the possibility of consulting the English translation, might not have given her the feeling that she had really mastered the material.

However, the students proved to have been moderately satisfied with the remote French course, both on Moodle alone and on MS Teams and Moodle. Their mean overall level of satisfaction with the course on Moodle before the introduction of classes on MS Teams had been 3.18 on a 5-point Likert scale ($SD=0.87$, so they were quite unanimous about it), and with the course combining Moodle and MS Teams 3.64 ($SD=0.81$), so the addition of synchronous classes had slightly improved their experience. As the advantages of the course on Moodle, the students indicated the fact that the texts had been translated into English so they could understand them well (54.5%), it could be accessed at any time, including in the evening, at weekends, etc. (45.5%), the course had combined different skills (reading, listening, vocabulary, grammar and to some extent writing) (36.4%), it had been possible to receive feedback on the quizzes and the home assignments (36.4%), the content had been similar to what had been done in the previous semesters, the main difference being the use of Moodle (27.3%), the materials had been available until the end of the semester (27.3%) and, finally, if recordings had been available on Moodle, it had been possible to replay them as many times as one wanted (18.2%). Predictably enough, the main disadvantages of the course on Moodle were the fact that communication had been limited to email and feedback on some tasks (63.6%), the impossibility to practise speaking (36.4%), the difficulty of planning their learning as there were no fixed hours of classes (18.2%) and the fact that it had not felt like real learning (18.2%). One person chose the answer that it had been more difficult to prepare for the end-of-term exam than in the case of face-to-face classes.

On the other hand, the advantages of the course involving both MS Teams and Moodle were the following: access to the materials on Moodle even when the students were absent (63.6%), the possibility of joining the online classes from home rather than going to university (45.5%), the fact that the classes on MS Teams had resembled normal classes, whereas the materials had been available on Moodle (36.4%), and, in case of doubt, the possibility of asking the teacher questions during the classes on MS Teams (18.2%). Yet, only one person marked the answer that the course had been like a normal one, except that it had taken place online with the materials being uploaded on Moodle (9.1%). By far the main disadvantage of the course combining MS Teams and Moodle was the occurrence of technical problems (90.9%), followed by the fact that it had been more difficult to concentrate on the classes while participating from home (36.4%), and the lack of an English translation

of the texts uploaded on Moodle (the texts were translated and explained by the teacher during the classes, so written translations were no longer uploaded), the impossibility of participating in the classes because of the time lag, as well as the impossibility to participate because of one's job and, consequently, the need to rely on Moodle, each mentioned by one student (9.1%).

Furthermore, the students' opinions on Moodle in general and on the remote French courses, both on Moodle alone and on Moodle and MS Teams, were analysed. Again, a 5-point Likert scale was used. The students generally agree ($M=4.18$, $SD=1.08$) that Moodle can complement a foreign language course with online quizzes and other materials, but it cannot replace regular classes, either face-to-face or on MS Teams. They also agree that learning on Moodle requires a lot of self-discipline, as you have to find the time to study on your own ($M=4.27$, $SD=1.1$) and, but for the pandemic, they would have preferred normal face-to-face classes ($M=4.18$, $SD=1.33$). Moreover, to a slightly lesser extent, they agree that, despite the difficulties, the French course on Moodle was an interesting experience anyway ($M=3.64$, $SD=0.92$). However, they are not very sure whether they would have preferred the course on MS Teams to be introduced in the first semester of the pandemic, so that Moodle would have only been used for uploading materials ($M=3.81$, $SD=0.98$); given the low standard deviation, they are quite unanimous, so it is possible that, at the beginning of the pandemic, Moodle was a good solution after all. Finally, the development of learner autonomy by using Moodle cannot be taken for granted, as the mean response to the statement that the French course on Moodle had helped them to develop self-discipline and autonomy as learners was 3.81 ($SD=1.08$). As these results suggest, despite the quick implementation of emergency remote teaching, the students generally appreciated the online French course and its main disadvantages were related to its technical limitations and the whole situation.

3.3. The two studies in progress: other teachers' perspectives

3.3.1. The advantages and disadvantages of Moodle in foreign language teaching: preliminary results

In order to obtain other teachers' opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of Moodle in foreign language teaching as well, the present author has created an online questionnaire using Google Forms, which has so far been completed by 39 participants, but responses are still being collected. According to the respondents, the main advantages of Moodle are its accessibility, so that students can use it in their free time (87.2%), the automatic calculation of quiz scores (53.8%), the possibility of creating extra activities for

students who want extra practice (48.7%), considerable independence for students (41%), the possibility of creating different activities for practising different language skills (38.5%), and the fact that Moodle feels more modern than traditional activities, such as tasks from a textbook (33.3%). By contrast, its main disadvantages include the impossibility to use it if there are problems with the Internet connection (64.1%), more time-consuming preparation of materials than in the case of face-to-face classes (53.8%), the need to think of all possible answers while preparing a quiz (38.5%), and the fact that Moodle is used without the teacher's control requires responsibility on the student's part (38.5%).

In response to the question whether they had changed their ways of using Moodle since the pandemic, 11 participants (28.2%) replied they had not, while the same number answered they only used Moodle for uploading additional materials and creating activities for students who were interested. 10 participants (25.6%) use Moodle for home assignments, for example, by creating folders for uploading essays. 9 (23.1%) no longer teach on Moodle, but they still upload materials there, for example, for students who were absent in class. 7 participants (17.9%) do not use Moodle any more, and another 7 use Moodle to upload additional materials and create extra activities for students who are lagging behind.

As for the skills which can and cannot be taught on Moodle, the respondents' opinions vary considerably. The largest number (41%) think it can be very good for teaching vocabulary, followed by reading comprehension (33.3%), cultural competence (33.3%), grammar (30.8%), listening comprehension (28.2%) and writing (17.9%). As for the skills which can be taught well (though not very well) on Moodle, the participants indicated: vocabulary (33.3%), grammar, reading comprehension and listening comprehension (30.8% each) and cultural competence (17.9%). On the other hand, according to 33.3% of the respondents, writing can only moderately be taught on Moodle, probably because the possibilities of oral explanation and feedback are limited and the teacher would need to put all corrections in writing, which would be very time-consuming. According to the teachers, speaking can be taught on Moodle very poorly (20.5%), poorly (17.9%) or not at all (12.8%), while 12.8% have no opinion. However, there are respondents who think that speaking can be taught on Moodle moderately (15.4%), well (10.3%) or even very well (10.3%). It is possible that the latter use BigBlueButton or combine Moodle with other tools; as one teacher has explained, combining Moodle with other tools, such as Vocaroo or Flipgrid, makes it possible to teach speaking.

In fact, while it might be argued that BigBlueButton allows the use of Moodle for synchronous classes, it is not an inherent part of Moodle but has to be installed from another

source⁶⁹, which is not done by all higher education institutions. A case in point might be the present author's French course described above: WSB University did not install BigBlueButton on Moodle but, after a semester of asynchronous classes on Moodle, combined them with synchronous ones on MS Teams. (Certainly, synchronous classes also took place at WSB University in the first semester of the pandemic, such as lectures and seminars on Clickmeeting, but the focus of the present study is Moodle, its advantages and disadvantages, so the use of Clickmeeting is beyond the scope of the article.)

It can thus be concluded that, although Moodle is no longer as indispensable as it was during the pandemic and some teachers do not use it any more, it can still be useful, especially if it is combined with other resources and tools.

3.3.2. The use of Moodle in foreign language assessment: preliminary results

As was mentioned in Section 2.2. above, Moodle can be used by students for self-assessment and by teachers for monitoring the learning process⁷⁰. However, Hyunh-Cam et al. analysed it only with respect to listening and reading skills, which, as shown in Section 3.3.1, can be taught on Moodle relatively well, so it can be assumed that they lend themselves to Moodle-based assessment. Therefore, the present author created a more comprehensive questionnaire, covering the possibilities of assessing different language skills. The survey is still being conducted and has so far been completed by 33 participants.

As the preliminary results show, they have taught practically all philological and language-related subjects on Moodle, ranging from reading comprehension (57.6% of the participants), through practical grammar and vocabulary (54.5% each), listening comprehension (45.5%) language for specific purposes (LSP) (30.3%), etc. to such academic subjects as language teaching methodology (21.2%), translation (18.2%), descriptive grammar and literature (6.1% each). As in the case of teaching, the subjects that can best be evaluated on Moodle are vocabulary (according to 48.5% of the respondents), reading comprehension (45.5%), listening comprehension (42.4%), grammar (42.4%), translation skills (36.4%) and LSP (33.3%). On the other hand, the skills that can be evaluated the least well include speaking/conversation skills (rather poorly, according to 27.3% of the participants, and not at all, according to 18.2%, but simultaneously 3 respondents (9.1%) marked the answer 'perfectly', so combining Moodle with other tools apparently makes testing speaking

⁶⁹ <http://bigbluebutton.org/> Accessed: August 2, 2023.

⁷⁰ Hyunh-Cam, T.-T., Agrawal, S., Chen, L.-S., Fan, T.-L. (2021). *Ibidem*.

possible) and pronunciation, where 24.2% chose the answer 'rather poorly' and 18.2% 'not at all' (but again 9.1% marked 'perfectly').

When asked about the ways of evaluating different skills, as many as 48.5% of the respondents do not teach or evaluate speaking skills and 15.2% think it is impossible to evaluate speaking skills on Moodle. However, 27.3% create folders for their students to upload recordings of their speech and, similarly, one person (3.03%) asks students to prepare Vocaroo recordings, one uses Vocaroo or Flipgrid but also meets students synchronously, one assesses role-plays recorded by students, and one assesses speaking skills during synchronous classes but not on Moodle. Therefore, though Moodle is not really designed for the evaluation of speaking, it is possible to upload and evaluate recordings of speech. Arguably, BigBlueButton might also allow the evaluation of speaking on Moodle, but, as was mentioned above, it is not always installed.

As for other skills, such as grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension and listening comprehension, they are generally tested using the typical functionalities of Moodle, for example, by creating quizzes, uploading tasks scanned from textbooks and creating folders in which students upload files with their answers, or discussing grammar and vocabulary on the forum. Another possible way of assessing students' grammar or vocabulary is the evaluation of the grammatical or lexical correctness of their essays or other tasks.

In summary, though some skills are easier to evaluate on Moodle than others, ways of evaluating them can be found. Indeed, as Moodle is not often used alone but rather complements synchronous (both face-to-face and online) classes, the best method of evaluation can be chosen for every language skill.

4. Conclusions

To answer the research questions, first, the main challenges for the teacher in the remote French course included the creation of materials, as they had to be accessible at any time and comprehensible to the students, so a lot of time had to be devoted to the translation of texts and instructions from French (or, in the case of the ready-made quizzes, from Polish) into English, and monitoring the students' progress. Undoubtedly, the possibility of accessing Moodle at any time was an advantage, but it allowed some students to wait until the end of the semester, rather than logging in regularly. Another advantage was the availability of materials and activities, as the present author did her best to meet the aims set out in the syllabus, but, unfortunately, not everything could be done. In particular, the course on Moodle had to focus

on vocabulary, grammar, reading and listening comprehension, but speaking practice was virtually impossible, which was certainly a disadvantage.

As challenges for the students, one can mention the need for self-discipline and good time management, as well as limited contact with the teacher. Learning to use Moodle was also challenging to some extent, but it actually proved easier than it might have been supposed. Yet, possible technical problems in general constituted a disadvantage of the emergency remote course, both on Moodle alone and on Moodle and MS Teams.

The students' responses confirm Gulbinskienė et al.'s⁷¹ conclusion that Moodle can complement face-to face (or, more generally, synchronous) teaching, but it is not sufficient on its own, at least in foreign language teaching. They are also in line with Bošković et al.'s⁷² finding that the main disadvantage of Moodle is the lack of direct interaction between the teacher and the students. However, despite its challenges, the remote French course also constituted an interesting experience for both the teacher and the students.

Second, the teachers' opinions largely confirm the results of earlier research as well as the present author's and her students' experience. Quite predictably, Moodle is constantly accessible, it allows the creation of different activities, also additional ones for students who are more interested in the subject, as well as the automatic calculation of quiz scores, and last but not least, it feels more modern than traditional textbooks. By contrast, its disadvantages include technical problems, time-consuming preparation of activities and the difficulty of testing certain skills, such as speaking and pronunciation, as well as the fact that limited contact between the teacher and the students imposes more responsibility on the students.

Third, the use of Moodle has certainly changed since the pandemic, but it has by no means ceased to be used. Even though some teachers do not use Moodle any more, others upload materials, create extra activities or folders for home assignments.

Fourth, given the basically asynchronous character of Moodle (except when other software, such as BigBlueButton⁷³ is integrated with it), the possibilities of assessing speaking skills are limited, unless students' speeches or dialogues are recorded and uploaded on it. Theoretically, it might be argued that such a functionality should be introduced and, for example, BigBlueButton should become an inherent part of Moodle, but, apparently, as Moodle can be used in combination with other software (MS Teams, Vocaroo, Google Classroom, etc.), this is not considered a priority and only institutions that want to use

⁷¹ Gulbinskienė et al. (2017). Ibidem.

⁷² Bošković et al. (2014). Ibidem.

⁷³ https://moodle.org/plugins/mod_bigbluebuttonbn Accessed: May 3, 2023.

BigBlueButton install it. However, other skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, reading or listening comprehension can undoubtedly be assessed, using quizzes, more traditional tasks in which files with answers are uploaded into folders, or less directly, such as assessing the grammatical correctness of an essay. Even so, it must be remembered that teachers do not have to use Moodle alone, but they can combine it with other tools or use it in addition to synchronous classes, thus choosing the best way of evaluating each skill.

Finally, the study offers some interesting implications for the future. As online tools are going to complement traditional teaching methods and materials, it is worth considering their possible applications in order to facilitate teaching and learning and make them more attractive. Indeed, since Moodle is accessible at any time from anywhere, allows the integration of various resources (quizzes, videos, etc.) and quizzes allow immediate feedback, it might be a good idea to train and encourage foreign language teachers to use it in their work. In fact, an additional benefit of Moodle is that, apart from developing purely linguistic skills, it can help students to take responsibility for their learning, manage their time and thus develop autonomy as learners.