

Article

A Qualitative Analysis of Students' Reflections on the Current Use of Digital Media in Foreign Language Classes

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Abstract: Teaching and learning have radically changed in the COVID-19 era and highlighted many novel aspects of online teaching and learning. Based on a qualitative content analysis of central European university students' responses, the aim of this study is to discuss their reflections on the use of digital media in foreign language classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The key method of this qualitative study includes focus group interviews. The results reveal both advantages and disadvantages of online foreign language teaching and their impact on students' second language (L2) acquisition. The positive aspects involve satisfaction with being able to study a foreign language from the comfort from their homes, avoidance of commuting to school, ample opportunities to review the learning material, or improvement of listening skills. On the contrary, the negative aspects included a striking lack of social contact in the form of face-to-face classes, absence of collaboration between the teacher and students and between the students themselves in order to share and build on their knowledge and experience, health issues associated with a frequent exposure to technologies, or a lack of possibility to develop speaking skills. In conclusion, the authors of this study provide several implications for teaching practice, technology experts, and other stakeholders, which must be considered very seriously, as they represent the opinion of the users of online learning.

Keywords: second language acquisition; L2 acquisition; online learning; higher education; language education; applied linguistics



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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered and challenged the whole educational system we had been using for decades. During the first wave of the pandemic, more than 90% of the world's student population was affected, and they all had to get used to new ways of acquiring information, communication with their tutors and peers, and also the new methodology used in the educational process [1]. Teachers had to move from their traditional mode of instruction to the online mode, as well as to finding effective solutions to the issues connected to this type of teaching [2,3]. The teaching was run via a large variety of e-learning courses, which some universities had used earlier for teaching part-time students or as supportive or additional courses in blended learning (a combination of traditional, face-to-face teaching and online learning) mode [4,5], including foreign language classes. During this first wave (i.e., spring 2020) teachers faced different technological (i.e., access to infrastructures, such as technological devices and the Internet connection), pedagogical (i.e., teachers' lack of skills in using technology, the need for training and guidelines for teachers and students, and social challenges; the need for teaching materials in the form of interactive multimedia; a lack of student feedback and evaluation system), and social (i.e., a lack of suitable home learning environment to study and parents' support and social distancing in the sense of meeting schoolmates and teachers face-to-face) challenges [6–11].

However, during the second wave of the pandemic (i.e., from autumn 2020 to spring 2021), some of the issues mentioned above were resolved, especially the technological and pedagogical ones. The Internet connectivity was improved, the teachers and students equipped with PCs, and various forms of support from state and educational authorities were provided to the educators. For example, teachers in the European Union countries were more aware of and confident of using different online tools and platforms to ensure the quality of education, thanks to specific technical training they received from their institutions at all educational levels. In Europe, this has been also enhanced by the Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027), which is a renewed European Union (EU) policy initiative to support the sustainable and effective adaptation of the education and training systems of EU Member States to the digital age [12]. It has two main goals: to foster the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem and to enhance digital skills and competencies for digital transformation. These goals are in line with the need to implement digital competencies into all forms and all levels of education in the EU.

Furthermore, as Maican and Cocoradă [11] point out in their study, only a few students experienced problems in using technology. Peñarrubia-Lozano et al. [13] expand that students particularly appreciated the easy access to information, as well as the immediacy fostered by digital devices. In addition, their students were motivated and welcomed personalized learning experience via online teaching and learning. Hayat et al. [5] also highlight the fact that students appreciated taking control of their own learning processes, which resulted in better achievement results. This was attained by the possibility that the students could review the online lessons which were recorded and saved and thus revise new knowledge and skills. Particularly, the last aspect of foreign language learning, which is students' motivation to learn a foreign language, influences the whole learning process and its outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are several factors that affect students' motivation, such as their personality (e.g., learner confidence or character), attitude (positive or negative towards learning a foreign language), learning style (the style that suits the learner), educational context (e.g., learning environment or the role of the teacher), as well as social context (e.g., peer interaction) [14,15]. All these motivational factors then result in overall learner satisfaction with foreign language learning [16]. Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are considered to be primary motivational factors for learning satisfaction [16].

Other research by Sugino [17], despite its small scale, identified three major factors related to the students' motivation in their synchronous online learning, i.e., mutuality resulting from interaction, the impact of COVID-19 on their life and learning, and individual circumstances. Their interaction stimulated their enjoyment very much and encouraged them in their active engagement in the classes. Therefore, their motivation was enhanced by their participation, cooperation, and active engagement. Again, those students that expressed their dissatisfaction with these aspects or their lack will naturally need much higher support so as not to lose their motivation to withstand the difficult situation and not to give up.

A similar idea is expressed by Martinez-Roget et al. [18] who claim that the subjective perception of the skills acquired in the class is the main motivator for higher education students. Perceived future usefulness plays a crucial role in motivation development, and thus leads to improved performance, which will naturally improve the study results. Additionally, the central role of the tutor must not be neglected, as they found out, which could be a significant problem during online classes as many of the students did not even see the tutor and could only exchange chat messages or listen to their voice. This could again decrease the motivation level of the students and their results will thus not reach their full potential.

Overall, research on online foreign language teaching and learning [19–22] also reveals other general shortcomings, such as a lack of social contact, which might be improved by implementing meaningful collaborative activities. In addition, more attention should be paid to the development of productive language skills, such as writing and speaking [23].

Based on a qualitative content analysis of central European university students' responses, the aim of this study is to discuss their reflections on the use of digital media in foreign language classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors consider the qualitative research reliable, relevant, and of high importance, since it can elicit specific issues relevant for the improvements of online foreign language teaching and learning.

2. Methodology

The research was conducted in May 2021, i.e., the end of the 13-week semester that was all fully taught online, at the University of Hradec Kralove, the Czech Republic, and at the same time at Wroclaw University of Economics and Business, Poland. The respondents were aged between 20 and 25 years, both male and female students of financial management and information science bachelor study programs. They were selected randomly from the current full-time students and also randomly divided into five groups with seven participants in each group for both countries (making it $n = 35$ for Czech students and $n = 35$ for Polish students). The data were collected by a focus group methodology inviting the participants to be on-site and organizing a small discussion session with them. Each of the sessions lasted 60 min. The focus group was conducted in May 2021 as it allowed researchers to meet with the research subjects in person after the period of the spring lockdown due to COVID-19 issues.

The participants of the study were asked three open-ended questions, which were as follows:

1. What do you like about online foreign language classes?
2. What don't you like about online foreign language classes?
3. Think of one thing that is important to you that you would like to change in online foreign language classes.

All these questions were presented to the participants in a written form that was available to them during the whole session on a piece of paper, and they had a pencil to write notes if needed. That allowed them to have time to think about the questions in detail and write notes before the time for their answers. Each question was asked by the researcher, then there was some time (usually two to three minutes) for the expression of each participant about their opinion followed by a twenty-minute discussion of all participants in the focus group where anyone could take part and express an opinion. All participants expressed freely their opinions if they wanted to participate in the discussion. The researchers did not interfere in the discussion or moderate it in any way, but only asked the questions. The respondents were not pushed to talk but they could express themselves whenever they wanted during the discussion part. The focus groups were conducted in the Czech or Polish language as all the participants were either Czech or Polish citizens and their L1 was Czech or Polish, therefore, it was natural and easier for them to express what they wanted to say in their mother tongue rather than in English. All focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed and then translated into English to be later analyzed by the researchers.

All participants expressed their agreement with their participation in the focus group. All GDPR regulations were strictly followed, no images or video recordings were made during the focus groups. After the transcripts were finalized, all audio recordings were deleted from the computer that was used for the data collection. No personal information, no addresses, names or any other personal information about the participants was collected. The only data we collected are presented in this manuscript without any personal identification. This research was approved by the Ethics Committee no. 2/2021 of the University of Hradec Kralove.

Description of Foreign Language Classes

All respondents who participated in the focus groups talked about their English language classes despite also studying another foreign language, such as German or Spanish in the case of Polish students. Their level of English ranged from B1 to B2 according

to the standardized Common European Framework Reference for languages. The English language courses are obligatory and last for four semesters in the course of two academic years, starting from their second year of study. The aim of the English foreign language courses at both institutions is to increase the level of language competence in the sense of improving all basic language skills, i.e., reading, listening, speaking and writing, and expanding vocabulary in selected subject areas (specifically business and IT) since they are expected to acquire the common grammar structures during their secondary school studies. In order to improve their foreign language proficiency, continuous assessments are implemented in evaluation of their language development. In addition, at the end of each semester, they write a credit test, and at the end of both academic years, they usually make an oral presentation on the topic from their subject area, i.e., business or IT, to evaluate their overall progress.

3. Results

The commented results as follows are not divided geographically (i.e., the Czech Republic vs. Poland), but they were put together as there was no clear-cut discrepancy that would be related geographically, and therefore, there is no reason to differentiate between these two countries. A content analysis of the students' responses to the three open-ended questions used in the focus groups revealed certain similarities among the respondents' statements and they could be clustered into the related topics stated below (I–IV). Therefore, an attempt was made to categorize the responses, and four clusters could be created as follows:

- I. Comfort of participants;
- II. Organizational and technical issues;
- III. Overall quality of education;
- IV. Language competences.

The first question (Q1) was as follows: What do you like about online language classes? It generated these reactions and ideas that can be divided into the aforementioned four categories (I–IV). Q1, Q2 and Q3 will mean the research questions (1–3), and the Roman numerals (I–IV) will refer to the cluster of core ideas (see above). Thus, Q1-I will mean research question 1, cluster I.

Q1-I results highlight the following advantages about the comfort of the participants. Regarding the comfort of participants, the most common idea expressed by them was the fact that they saved a lot of time, as they did not need to commute to school. They often used expressions like *"I don't waste time, time-saving for me, flexibility."* Moreover, they very often expressed a practical feature connected to the convenience that there was no need to get up very early and dress up because they were at home, usually learning from their bed. Therefore, learning became more informal. As students pointed out: *"I don't have to put on my makeup and dress as usual. When I have the camera off, I am not shy. You can stay in your bed. I can turn off the microphone and have a snack without making others feel uncomfortable."* They appreciated the comfort of their home very much and the convenience of staying there is of the utmost benefit for them.

They also appreciated it as they could multitask, such as eat or listen to music at the time of the class. In addition, they emphasized the opportunity the digital media offer to them, which is the flexibility of studying from anywhere. As one of them puts it: *"Online classes are ideal for out-of-town students. We can be anywhere we want to join the lesson."* This multitasking is frequently supported by their opinion and in some reactions, it was stated that this can lead to lower levels of concentration, as it caused the loss of focus.

In addition, the respondents appreciated working from home since they felt less stressed, being able to enjoy the comfort of one's own room, not missing classes due to the traffic jams and being able to review the recorded knowledge in the online environment, e.g.,:

"Sitting comfortably in your room during classes. No noise in the classroom, no being late. I can watch the recording several times. I stay at home."

Overall, they considered the pandemic as a time of change, in a positive sense: *“An opportunity to try something new that I wouldn’t even know about if the pandemic didn’t exist.”* Again, these opinions were quite frequent, as this situation created an atmosphere of novelty and excitement.

As far as the results of Q1-II questions are concerned, the participants expressed their positive attitudes towards using their PC, and the reason for this is the technical convenience of having a computer to check vocabulary, spelling, reduced stress because there was no-one around, and no need to carry books because everything is available online. Some of their other responses about organizing the online materials and contacting teachers were as follows:

“The teacher can write new words in chat, and I can just copy them into a Word file. I started organizing my notes on my laptop better. My day has become more flexible since I started online classes; I’m learning about different ways to learn languages. I like that we can contact the teacher through email and messaging, it’s easier and sometimes online tests have better form than normal tests. You can contact a lecturer/professor very quickly, and you don’t have to move from room to room in a hurry, just a few buttons are enough.”

In addition, the possibility to watch the recorded lessons seemed very important because all the material to be studied is readily available. Students also felt more confident by learning from home, e.g.: *“When I make a mistake, no one sees me and I’m not under much stress. Online classes are convenient and relaxed. Less stress when speaking.”* It can be assumed that for those students who are more introverted, this new situation of being without personal contact with the tutor or their peers will, naturally, be viewed positively, and on the other hand, the extroverted students expressed their frustration of the same, i.e., not being able to be in touch with their peers and the teacher.

Q1-III results explored students’ positive attitude to the overall quality of education. Surprisingly, some of the participants expressed their excitement connected with online classes, such as that they are more ecological, compelling, less stressful, or interactive, but on the other hand, some voices were very strongly against this way of teaching (e.g.: *“Personally, I don’t see anything I like about online classes.”*). Again, for shy, introverted people, it brought many benefits, expressed by the participants, who could take part much more often without being worried about being ridiculed or stressed by other students or the teacher. As the respondents put it:

“There are lots of videos and electronic materials, teachers interact with students more than in the classroom. As an introvert, I feel more confident speaking in front of a screen. I like that when I speak I don’t have to look at other people’s faces or get distracted, I can just look at the screen or anywhere else and really focus on what I want to say, and eventually, I’ll hear in my headphones my teacher correcting me or adding something, non-aggressively, politely, while others are muted and perhaps not paying as much attention to me and my mispronunciation. Moreover, we can all exchange our views within seconds, even all at once, by writing comments under the teacher’s post.”

Q1-IV, concerning the positive views on language competencies, brought the following results. Some of the participants showed their surprise that online classes can be delivered of the same or very similar level to onsite face-to-face classes they knew from the earlier time. For example:

“When it comes to language classes, they are well taught and just as well delivered as in the classroom.”

Furthermore, students were satisfied with the way of teaching and learning, which seemed for them to be interesting and beneficial. According to the respondents, teachers were well prepared and knew how to run the online classes. As one of them reported: *“I really like the teacher’s involvement in the lessons and the communication between classmates.”* This subjective positive evaluation of the online classes is quite balanced with the negative opinions about the quality of the way the lessons are delivered.

Listening competencies can be improved, as the headphones enable better understanding and the recording can be played several times based on the need of the student, unlike during the regular class: *"Since my hearing is pretty bad, I really like the fact that I can wear headphones and adjust the volume so I can hear everything well."* Students really welcomed a personalized style of learning, i.e., that they had an opportunity to learn according to their own pace.

The second question (Q2) was as follows: What DON'T you like about online language classes?

Q2-I results about the students' discomfort raised the following issues. The biggest drawbacks of using technology for education are clearly visible from the respondents' answers. The increased screen time causes a major disadvantage, as they already spent too much time in front of the screen for entertainment and searching for various information. Another negative aspect mentioned very often was limited social contact with peers, but also with the tutor of the class. Some participants mentioned possible negative health, such as worsening eyesight or increased headaches and backaches by sitting in front of the screen for a long time. Generally, this section was widely discussed, and it clearly shows that this negative aspect of discomfort is crucial for the majority of the participants. The responses below illustrate these findings:

"We definitely spend too much time looking at a screen, which can affect our health."

"Online lessons are bad for my eyesight. Besides, I don't have opportunities for meeting new people."

"We spend too much time in front of the computer; sometimes there are internet connection problems and other technical issues, it is harder to understand some topics in online classes than when we have the opportunity to discuss something face to face."

"I don't like the nervousness and the camera."

"I lose concentration faster."

"There is not as much interaction between other students and the teacher."

"It's harder to work in groups."

"No face-to-face interaction, a greater mental barrier to speak up, you can be easily distracted and feel less motivated."

"Traditional classes motivated me to work harder and my work was more efficient."

As far as the technical issues are concerned, they were quite common, such as slower or unstable internet connection, the need to update software, and the decreased quality of voice transfer disabling proper understanding of the spoken language. Moreover, students did not like to have their camera on: *"I don't like switching on the camera and the fact that there are often problems with the Internet."* They also could feel that the interaction between the teacher and students thus took longer: *"The microphone takes a while to turn on, the internet connection is sometimes unstable"*.

The negative results about the overall quality of education were mainly connected with fewer interactions between the teacher and students and between the students themselves, i.e., there was often a perceived lack of collaborative learning. As one of the respondents puts it: *"In school, we would talk in pairs or groups, but it's impossible online, so the teacher has to ask one person and the others to sit quietly and listen to him or her."* In fact, the interaction, which is crucial for language education, was reported to be missing in many responses and thus making the classes not very efficient regarding L2 and its acquisition. For some of the participants, the lessons were not interesting enough due to not enough stimulation from the tutor, and not enough communication. For example: *"I don't like to learn just from a book. We have no more time for other activities such as quizzes or games related to the topic."*

"Communication seems colder and more unemotional than if we were all sitting in a classroom. Also, it's very easy to get distracted, as with any online classes."

“The lack of contact with the rest of the class “live” means that online lessons are not quite as exciting and motivating as they would be in a classroom environment. In addition, closed in the rooms, we pay a little less attention to listening and, in my opinion, we have a greater problem with concentration than if we were directly in the classroom in front of the lecturer.”

In the section on negative aspects of online learning on the acquisition of language competencies, the respondents reported the following issues. The possibilities of improving some language competencies were very limited. Speaking is almost impossible, the pronunciation cannot be corrected properly, grammar exercises are boring for the students, and the general ability to improve spoken language is very low. One reply for all: *“I don’t like that I feel insecure or embarrassed and most of the time I don’t speak unless the teacher calls me out. Although I put effort into learning languages because I enjoy it, face-to-face contact forces me to interact, and when I feel at home in my safe space, I find it hard to step outside my comfort zone. Besides, it is definitely harder for the teacher to correct students’ mistakes because online classes are less interactive.”*

The third question (Q3) was as follows: Think of one thing that is important to you that you would like to change in online language classes.

As far as the students’ comfort about online teaching and learning in L2 acquisition is concerned, the respondents generally did not propose any suggestions, or they just reiterated what they already said. Some of them expressed their wish to return to standard classes soon. Again, the lack of social contact was one of the aspects they repeated very often and would like to change, despite the fact they realized that it was not possible due to the objective situation caused by the epidemic. Some of the answers were as follows:

“I have no idea what to change. I’m satisfied, but of course, I prefer face-to-face meetings in the classroom.”

“I can’t actually think of anything I’d like to change, as everything seems to be working fine.”

“I’d like classes to be more relaxed, I feel much more shy when classes are so formal, and to stop requiring cameras to be on because it’s stressful.”

The technical issues were again the crucial topic to be improved, from the internet stability to the tutors’ better microphone. In addition, a break in too long sessions would be great for some of the participants. Students suggested having classes one hour long. More specifically: *“I think that when it comes to studying online, many tasks take more time: opening the right file or downloading it if needed, time to turn the camera/microphone on and off, etc. Not everyone realizes this, so it would be good if we had more time: it would be less stressful for us.”*

In the category of the *Overall quality of education*, the students miss the interaction with other students, social contact and communication, which are the aspects necessary for any language education and the participants of the study were fully aware of them. In addition, students would appreciate more varied teaching methods. As they reported:

“I would add more “fun” activities such as games, quizzes, etc. It would be great to have a few minutes during classes to discuss the current situation (what is happening in our country or around the world). Or More group-work activities. More speaking and activating students.”

In online foreign language classes, students reported the following issues on the acquisition of language competencies. Basically, all of the participants expressed their wish to improve speaking, discussions both with the tutor or their peers. On the other hand, grammar exercises and reading were not considered to be so important and useful. Almost all participants realized that language acquisition was always connected to speaking and they expressed this in their comments very often, such as *More speaking. More speaking about business and daily routines. I would like to discuss more with my classmates. More speaking and self-expression, but less grammar.*

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of this qualitative study reveal both advantages and disadvantages of online foreign language teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and their impact on students' motivation to learn a foreign language. Although the students felt satisfied with some of the aspects of an educational environment, such as being able to study from the comfort of their home and avoid commuting every day to school, they also experienced negative aspects of the educational environment, i.e., learning most of the time in front of the computer, which had a detrimental effect on learner motivation. This is in line with other research studies, resulting in the same conclusion [5,11]. Furthermore, they often had to face technical problems, such as the slow Internet connection, delayed interactions, or the decreased quality of voice transfer.

On the other hand, students appreciated the recordings of the seminars, as well as the possibility to review the materials, which obviously had a positive impact on their learning performance and achievement results and thus on their motivation to study a foreign language. They could see the perceived usefulness of this online learning environment [5].

One of striking aspects was also a lack of social contact in the form of face-to-face interactions. For example, in a study by Jansem [19], students admit that learning by themselves is discouraging and stressful. Therefore, the results indicate that students in the post-COVID era want to come back to the traditional way of teaching and learning. This has been also confirmed by Maican and Cocoradă [11] who in their study report that more than 50% of their participants rejected online learning.

Furthermore, there was an absence of collaboration between the teacher and students and between the students themselves. Similar findings were true for Jansem [19] or Peñarrubia-Lozano et al. [13]. In addition, collaboration through which students could share and build on their knowledge and experience in the online mode was absent despite the affordability of the online environment, which is typical of other research studies, e.g., [20]. As Huang et al. [20] state: *"By participating in real-life related tasks involving cooperation among peers, students will benefit from this quality contributing to personal development and teamwork in future careers."* However, this error in the learning design might be overcome by implementing a relevant online collaboration tool as it was conducted by Eteng and Oladimeji [21] and the potential of online collaboration activities discussed in depth in another research study by Faja [22], who claim that a well-thought structure of these online collaborative activities might contribute to perceived learning and overall satisfaction with the course.

As far as the language competencies acquired in the online environment are concerned, students in this qualitative study felt that they could improve their listening skills, however, they missed the possibility of developing speaking skills, which are crucial for the development of communicative competencies [23], and which contribute to learner satisfaction and thus to learner motivation to study a foreign language [18].

Overall, the findings of this qualitative research show that the students who voiced their skepticism about the usefulness of the online classes are naturally less satisfied with them compared to the students who could see some usefulness in those classes despite the complicated situation in which their language education was happening.

The researchers did not want to influence the opinion of the participants of the focus group in any way and also to eliminate any bias that could easily arise. Therefore, a more general approach was chosen, and the general answers it generated were taken into consideration very seriously. Moreover, the focus groups also generated very specific evaluation of the participants that was analyzed in the study as well. This brings a unique balance that is very important from the methodological point of view. The fact that the participants did not propose many suggestions can be understood as a neutral approach, i.e., neither very satisfied nor dissatisfied. As it was a focus group, the researchers did not want to imply the participants' answers, which was the reason why the questions were rather general and the participants were allowed a lot of time to think about them and to discuss them. These answers could very well indicate various levels of subjective well-being rather than only

focus on objective and assessable L2 learning outcomes as can be seen in the majority of questionnaires. These are the reasons why a classic questionnaire study was not conducted as numerous research has already been done using this methodology, but rather a focus group was conducted where there is much more space for subjective and individualized answers in a larger (social) context, unlike in a very specific (individualized) questionnaire. Therefore, one of the major contributions of this study lies in the methodology applied. Letting the participants almost freely express their subjective satisfaction or dissatisfaction brings a new perspective to the numerous research already available. This holistic approach goes in line with the positive psychology approach and also with the mindful realization of various aspects and factors that form the environment we live in.

The findings of this study have generated several implications for teaching practice, technology experts, and other stakeholders that must be considered very seriously as they represent the opinion of the users of online learning. First, it is very important to maintain healthy communication with the participants of the online courses despite the disadvantages of the distance between the participants. They all belong to Gen Z, i.e., the generation of social media, and therefore their communication patterns are very much influenced by that. They appreciate a quick reaction from the tutor when they need to know something and cannot accept a long waiting time. However, in this respect, the technology developers also could help improve delayed interaction feedback caused by the Internet transfer. Second, the sufficient challenging materials provided by the tutors must be ensured so that no one gets bored, and on the other hand, those participants who lag behind must be guided more often by the tutor. Again, many participants of the research complained that the study material was not sufficient, i.e., not very demanding and challenging, and the others expressed their dissatisfaction as they were not able to understand sufficiently. In the face-to-face class, an experienced tutor is able to personalize their instructions and guidance, but in the online environment it is largely neglected, as it is very complicated but feasible. Nevertheless, as the research shows, there are online collaborative tools, which can be successfully implemented in online foreign language learning, and thus design meaningful peer interactive activities. In addition, the tutor should meet their foreign language learning needs to enhance the overall language proficiency, with a special focus on the development of speaking skills. Thirdly, it is crucial to reduce the screen time of the students however it is possible. They voiced their strong dissatisfaction with enormously increased screen time. Naturally, the majority of this screen time is caused by their entertainment and social media, but adding a huge amount of time to their regular screen time makes it unbearable and unacceptable, and thus, very demotivating for them and not willing to devote more time to their education. In this respect, the school management must also take relevant measures to ensure the quality of education and students' motivation to pursue their studies.

The limitations of this study can be seen in its regional nature, i.e., the research was conducted in two midsized European countries; however, it can be postulated that the findings would be very similar as the respondents were just ordinary university students, thus, regular representatives of Gen Z. It can be claimed that the results are relevant and must be considered very seriously as they provide us with detailed information about the subjective evaluation of everyday users of online learning. The research was qualitative as it can reveal motivational factors more easily than standard quantitative research that could be used when enquiring about study results and other objective outcomes of the learning process. Naturally, further research must be conducted into the motivational aspects, as they are crucial for learner's satisfaction and outcomes. The larger geographical scope could provide us with more exact data that could be more precise and then responsibly utilized by curricula developers and the educational authorities responsible for smooth implementation of online learning into higher education institutions.

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