Miranda Lai · Oktay Eser · Ineke Crezee
Editors

Educating Community Interpreters and Translators in Unprecedented Times

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Editors
Miranda Lai
School of Global, Urban and Social Studies
RMIT University
Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Oktay Eser
Department of Translation and Interpreting
Amasya University
Amasya, Turkey

Ineke Crezee
Auckland University of Technology
Auckland, New Zealand

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Turkey: Community Interpreter Training During the COVID-19 Period in Turkey—Practices and Education

Aymil Dogan, Duygu Çurum Duman, and Özge Çetin

1 Introduction

The end of 2019 and beginning of 2020 marked a significant calamity which started in Wuhan, China. Toward the end of January 2020, the Ministry of Health in Turkey started to measure the temperatures of people entering crowded places. In the following days, the novel disease turned into a global health emergency, and a pandemic was declared

A. Dogan (✉)
Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey
e-mail: aymil@hacettepe.edu.tr; aymildogan@gmail.com

D. Ç. Duman
İ.D. Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey
e-mail: duygu.duman@bilkent.edu.tr

Ö. Çetin
Amasya University, Amasya, Turkey
e-mail: ozge.cetin@amasya.edu.tr

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by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2022), which brought the world to a halt in the weeks and months to come. Disruption to education had never been experienced on such a global scale before. The WHO Worldometer shows that the pandemic was confirmed in 228 countries across the world as of August 1, 2022 (Worldometer, 2022).[1] On March 6, 2020, the Turkish Higher Board of Education (YÖK) issued *Recommendations Concerning the Precautions Against the Spread of Coronavirus in Higher Education Institutions* (YÖK, 2020a), calling for attention to the importance of hygiene rules, advising people to delay traveling abroad if possible, and warning people not to discriminate against foreigners, especially those from the Far East. On March 11, 2020, Turkey detected its first COVID-19 case in a person returning from Europe (Genç, 2021).

Two days later, on March 13, 2020, education was interrupted to prepare for a state of emergency. Information about the infrastructure at universities and relevant human resources was collected and the Pandemic Consultation Committees were established. On March 18, 2020, the Higher Education Digital Transformation Committee and the Executive Committee finalized and issued the *Road Map for Distance Education Practices During Pandemic* (YÖK, 2020b), which covered issues of legislation, infrastructure, human resources, content, and practice. One hundred and twenty-three universities were found to have distant education infrastructure, while the rest had to expedite its establishment.

This chapter aims to shed light on how community interpreting courses were delivered at some Turkish universities during the pandemic with the assistance of information technology. By way of providing background information, we will first describe how community interpreting has developed in Turkey over the last few decades, followed by the current landscape of its training and education. We will then present the survey conducted by the current authors to share the findings.

[1] https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/. Retrieved on 29 April 2022.

2 Community Interpreting in Turkey

Community interpreting in all countries emerged as a solution to language barriers which newcomers faced when trying to fulfill their needs in the new land. Turkey, being at the crossroads of three continents, has always been attractive for people in the nearby countries for various reasons. Public and private institutions traditionally resorted to their staff who could speak foreign languages to overcome language barriers when they needed to communicate with people who do not speak Turkish. Back in the 1970s, these staff members acting as translators/interpreters were mostly graduates of university language departments. It was also around this time that the first attempts to train conference interpreters started. The first Translation and Interpretation Department was established at Hacettepe University in Ankara in 1982, when conference interpreting was the focus in response to its dominant market demand. The need for community interpreters emerged only after the two devastating earthquakes in 1999. "Emergency and Disaster Interpreting" came into existence before "community interpreting" emerged later in Turkish contexts. From then through to the mid-2000s, various courses referring to "community interpreting" started to emerge at universities, which later evolved into catering for specific settings such as healthcare and courts (see Dogan, 2004, 2010, 2022; Genç Tercümanlar Çalıştayı [Young Interpreters' Workshop], 2015). Important steps have been taken in the last decade by the Vocational Qualifications Authority to firstly standardize and then approve the qualifications in various types of translation and interpreting, while qualifications in community interpreting are still in the process of being approved. Community interpreting in Turkey came into being in three challenging situations: first, the earthquakes mentioned above; second, the influx of Syrian refugees; and third, the tourism industry.

The earthquakes in 1999 catastrophically affected the Marmara region, with a total death toll reaching 30,000. The incoming search and rescue teams from many countries and the presence of foreigners at that time in that region suddenly gave rise to communication problems not previously encountered on such a scale. This experience brought about the realization of the need for interpreters in disaster settings.

Soon, the Organization of Emergency and Disaster Interpreters, or ARÇ, the Turkish acronym, was established under triadic cooperation: (1) Directorate General of Civil Defense (now AFAD—Turkish acronym for Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) to represent government; (2) Association of Translation and Interpreting—Turkey, affiliated with the International Federation of Translators and Interpreters (FIT), to represent NGOs; and (3) Istanbul University to represent academia. Soon the first course for training interpreters was launched in the summer of 2001. AFAD is a voluntary organization, which has, over the years, improved its operations and training to respond to the ever-evolving situations they have to respond to (see Bulut & Kurultay, 2001; Dogan, 2016; Doğan & Kahraman, 2011). During the COVID-19 pandemic, it provided online training for new volunteers on the waiting list.

The influx of Syrian refugees, or officially "the beneficiaries under protection," since the outbreak of its civil war in 2011 prompted the Turkish government's attention. The number of arrivals steadily increased to more than 2.5 million by 2015 in Turkey. A specific administration system was established, and the arrivals were accommodated in well-equipped camps established at the border. Additionally, the government recruited Arabic-Turkish speakers to mediate language barriers. These were mostly bilinguals who had been given a three-day training on the basics of interpreting processes and skills by the interpreters working with the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees. Later, the Association of Translation and Interpreting-Turkey launched a project to provide more advanced training in various cities, which covered community interpreting as a professional activity, methods of community interpreting in different settings, and interpreting role plays. Teaching staff from different universities who were experts in CIT contributed to this project. The training was delivered in selected Turkish Red Crescent community centers in the southeastern region of Turkey. The number of community centers around the country receiving the training added up to 16 over time, with the first one starting in Şanlıurfa on January 20, 2015 (Türk Kızılay, 2022). During the pandemic, the association maintained connections with the interpreters through messaging applications and shared their expertise for hands-on solutions to their questions.

The need for interpreters was temporary in these first two cases, as they arose from emergency situations. In contrast, the third area, dealing with language needs from seasonal population in the west and southwest regions of Turkey—foreign tourists—manifests itself on an ongoing basis. As the summer population in these regions often soars to three times that of their winter one, which is already high in number, the Marmaris Honorary Consulate in the southwest asked the first author of this chapter to assist in improving the interpreting services in the sub-provinces of Muğla. The interpreters working in Muğla region were mostly untrained and non-professional interpreters or bilinguals. So, in 2015, a comprehensive project entitled "Access to Justice Through Better Translation" was launched under the auspices of the British Embassy to address the translation and interpreting needs in the Muğla region. This project is still in progress today, with its scope covering private and public hospitals, the forensic medicine center, notaries, law enforcement, security forces, prosecutors, travel agencies, and candidate interpreters. Interviews have been carried out with the professionals working in these institutions to determine their language needs and associated issues. A comprehensive seminar was subsequently delivered to the abovementioned parties in the Directorate of Security Forces in Marmaris. The next step will be to launch the training for interpreters in various locations once the curriculum and training materials are ready. But due to the pandemic, there have been delays in the progress of this project.

3 Training Community Interpreter: Topics and Skills

CIT in Turkey has been provided by the Translation and Interpretation (T&I) departments at major universities under various course titles at the undergraduate level, e.g., Community Interpreting (Boğaziçi University, Yeditepe University, Haliç University, etc.), Practice in Interpreting Types III (Istanbul University), Interpreting in Public Settings (Bilkent University), Healthcare Interpreting, Emergency and Disaster Interpreting (Hacettepe University). Training opportunities for interpreting in judicial settings, however, are scarce, e.g., Court Interpreting

offered at Hacettepe University. In addition, Amasya University offers Community Interpreting 1—Healthcare and Community Interpreting 2—Law. CIT-related courses are generally compulsory for senior students at these university T&I programs, and they are also available for one semester at the B.A. level. There were 115 T&I programs at 69 universities in 2019 (Eser, 2020, pp. 124–125), with 18 departments offering such training under the course title of Community Interpreting and 25 others using a more generic title of interpreting (Ross, 2019).

Even though Turkey has a critical need for interpreters working with the Arabic-Turkish language pair, Ross (2019) confirms that only eight T&I departments offer undergraduate programs in this language combination, while only three of these have a course for community interpreting. It is important to note here that neither a complete undergraduate nor a graduate program titled CIT was offered in Turkey. Yet, there are in-house CIT programs offered by government departments such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Family and Social Services, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. T&I academics are engaged by these ministerial training programs to deliver theoretical and practical contents which range from two to five days. Toker's (2019) study on the interpreters working for the Ministry of Health points out that those recruited to provide interpreting services were called "patient guides," as they not only perform dialogue interpreting but also help with tasks such as assisting patients on to a stretcher. Toker (2019) finds that the training offered by the Ministry merely covered topics related to official work processes, rather than the actual interpreting. The researcher, therefore, put forward some recommendations, including the training of interpreting skills, which have recently been adopted by the Ministry.

Interpreter training for different departments and organizations obviously should take into account topics and skills required for their specific setting. For example, five domains are covered under the Turkish Red Crescent training: protection; re-establishment of family ties; development of means of livelihood; social cohesion; and healthcare and psychosocial support. Interpreting trainees, therefore, not only acquire knowledge in all these areas, but also receive instruction on interpreting skills. They must also have ethical competence to support their decision-making when situations arise, as is advocated by Duman (2018) and

Kalina (2015) (see also René de Cotret et al., 2017). For example, a migrant may become confused when the interpreter correctly uses the first-person voice to render utterances from the psychologist or the physician, thinking the interpreter is the medical personnel. So to avoid further confusion, the interpreter may need to make a decision to switch to reported speech to ensure the migrant clearly understands who the medical personnel is and what the messages are, and be able to justify the reason for doing so. Further aspects such as eye gaze during an encounter are also important to cover, as it importantly helps with meaning assembly in the mind as well as the formation of enunciation and reciprocating co-enunciation (Özsöz, 2021). Also, physical and psychological positioning as well as rules of turn-taking in the triadic dialogue setting, note-taking for longer speeches, and sight translation are all important topics not to be overlooked in community interpreting.

4 Study on Distance Education During the Pandemic

Education is defined as the process of providing a desirable change in human behavior through intentional, planned, and organized experiences (Ertürk, 1982). But changing conditions due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus followed by campus closures necessitated a new way to deliver education to maintain the intended outcomes and desirable experiences that education institutions aim to provide. In Turkey, certain universities and programs had started using Learning Management Systems (LMS) before the pandemic. Therefore, these programs were able to transfer to distance education more rapidly. Some universities had to develop a new system in response to the pandemic, while others simply allowed their individual academics to decide what communication tools they preferred to use for remote teaching.

The equivalent term for LMS in Turkish is UZEM, which means Centre for Distant Education. Some universities may include this acronym in the names of their own platforms, e.g., HUZEM (for Hacettepe University) or DEUZEM (for Dokuz Eylül University). Others came up with a different name altogether, e.g., Haliç-X (for Halic

University). In addition, there are other products on the market such as Perculus, Moodle, Google Classroom, and Sakai LMS. It should be noted that some systems are free-of-charge, while others are not. Universities made their own decisions on which system to adopt or how to combine what suited them. For example, Huzem as an LMS integrates Moodle, Zoom, and Big Blue Button.

In order to understand the uptake of technologies by T&I educators and their experience of remote teaching, the current authors conducted an online survey targeting those who teach community interpreting in university T&I Departments in Turkey. Twenty participants were recruited by purposive and snowball sampling. Once the current authors had designed the questionnaire for the survey, three experts were consulted, including one from the Education Department who provided advice on measurement and evaluation, and two T&I academics who offered feedback on content validity. The findings of the survey will be discussed in three categories in the following sections: (1) systems used for teaching; (2) pedagogical tools and practices; and (3) positives and negatives of distance education.

Systems Used for Teaching

At the start of the pandemic in 2020, in response to the need to deliver distance education, those universities which did not have an LSM had to set one up at short notice and deliver education in an asynchronous mode, e.g., using PowerPoint presentations and recorded lectures. As time went by, some universities started to add synchronous teaching elements, therefore making their course delivery a hybrid-flexible of some synchronous and some asynchronous components. For synchronous teaching, some universities chose a videoconferencing system such as Zoom, while others allowed their teachers to decide on any videoconferencing or educational tool of their own preference. Our survey findings show, as per Fig. 1, that half of the respondents ($n = 10$) delivered asynchronous teaching on LMSs, 30% ($n = 6$) used videoconferencing systems to deliver synchronous teaching, and the remaining 20% ($n = 4$) used a combination of both. Of the ten and

Fig. 1 Use of learning management system

four respondents who reported using LMSs or LMSs plus videoconferencing, further probing shows that the most popular ones they used were Perculus and Huzem, followed by Moodle and Google Classroom.

It should be noted that some videoconferencing systems used were free, while others were fee-paying. The participants shared that some licensed systems include premium features such as transcripts, online classrooms, video breakout rooms, multi-sharing, and subtitles, as well as the ability to adjust the number of participants. While the open-source tools may be free of charge, their privacy policy can raise concerns because they can collect users' personal information.[2] Figure 2 shows the popularity of the systems used by the 20 respondents. As multiple answers were allowed, the total count in the figure exceeds 20. Zoom appeared to be the most popular ($n = 15$), followed by Teams ($n = 4$). Google Meet ($n = 2$), Big Blue Button ($n = 1$), and Perculus ($n = 1$) were much less used in comparison.

Figure 3 shows the satisfaction rates for those who used LMSs (on the right) vs who used videoconferencing systems (on the left). It appears that higher numbers of respondents were either satisfied (55%) or partially satisfied (45%) using videoconferencing systems compared to those who used LMSs (50% and 40% respectively). The reasons why the respondents appeared to be happier with using videoconference systems than LMSs are worth further investigation. One possible reason is that an

[2] Refer to https://bigbluebutton.org/privacy-policy/.

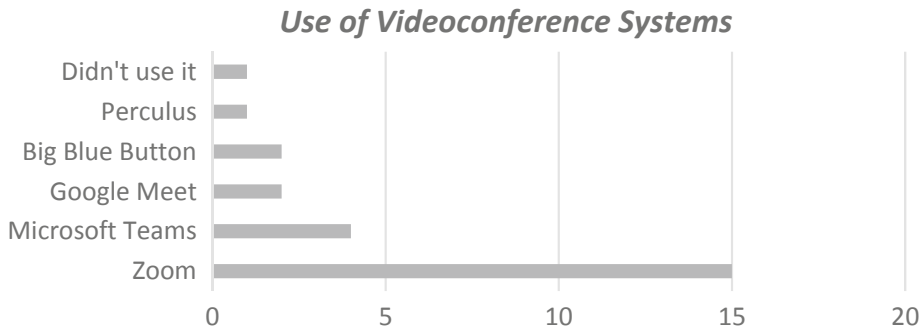

Fig. 2 Use of videoconference systems

LMS may require more time and energy in order to become proficient, given its more complex functionality.

A further question aimed to understand what additional equipment the respondents had to acquire in order to deliver remote teaching. Headsets with microphones ($n = 11$) ranked the highest among the items of acquisition, followed by desktop microphones ($n = 5$), and monitors ($n = 4$). Other items such as voice amplifiers, HDMI and/or VGA cables, and stylus pens were also among those mentioned. Most laptops or desktops these days come with a built-in microphone and camera. Although good sound quality is crucial in the context of interpreting teaching, together with good picture quality through cameras, whether these are by themselves enough to compensate for the challenging aspects of distance education needs to be further explored.

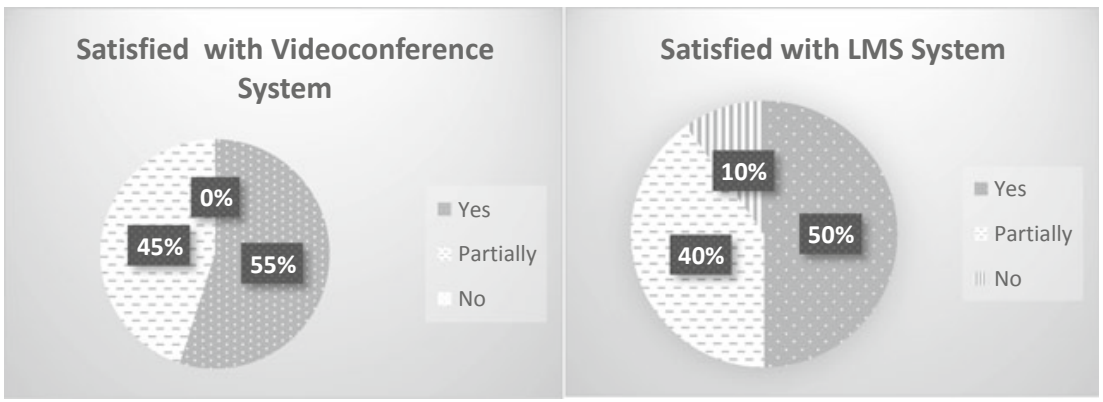

Fig. 3 Satisfaction with system used

Pedagogical Tools and Practices

Respondents were asked to '…pick from a list of interpreting skills which interpreting skills they thought could be covered effectively in their remote teaching (multiple answers allowed). Figure 4 shows the following results: eye contact ($n = 17$), interpreter's intervention to clarify their role ($n = 16$), turn-taking ($n = 15$), usage of notepad ($n = 15$), body language ($n = 15$), sight translation ($n = 15$), self-positioning ($n = 14$). It appears that establishing eye contact was the skill that most respondents said they covered; but others also seemed to have been covered well by a 70% of the respondents.

Respondents were then asked which of these skills they were able to practice in exercises in their virtual classroom; a lot fewer replied positively here, as shown in Fig. 5. All respondents appeared to be able to make students practice sight translation ($n = 20$) in the remote setting, possibly because students could access the text on their own screen and they could follow the teacher's cursor movements on the text. Respondents also shared that some students used their tablets and stylus pens to make notes in the digital material during the exercises, which turned out to be helpful for practice. On the contrary, less than half of the respondents said they were able to effectively make students exercise on self-positioning ($n = 9$) and body language ($n = 8$), which seemed to suggest that the respondents viewed these practices as difficult to execute in a

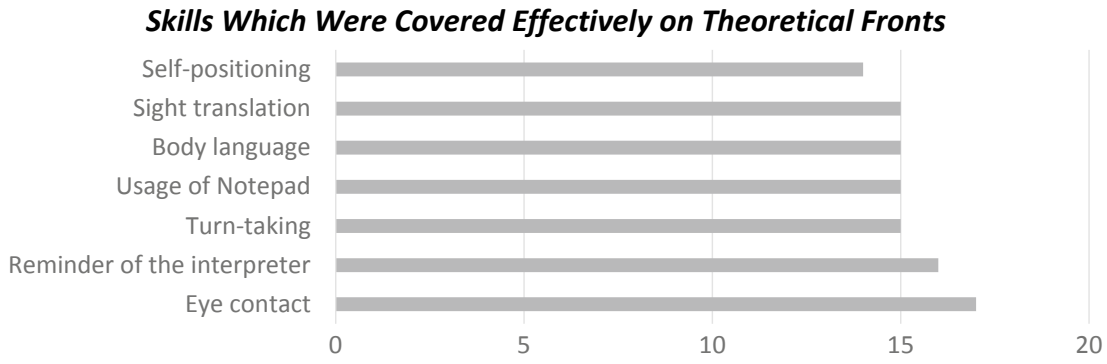

Fig. 4 Skills which were covered effectively on theoretical fronts

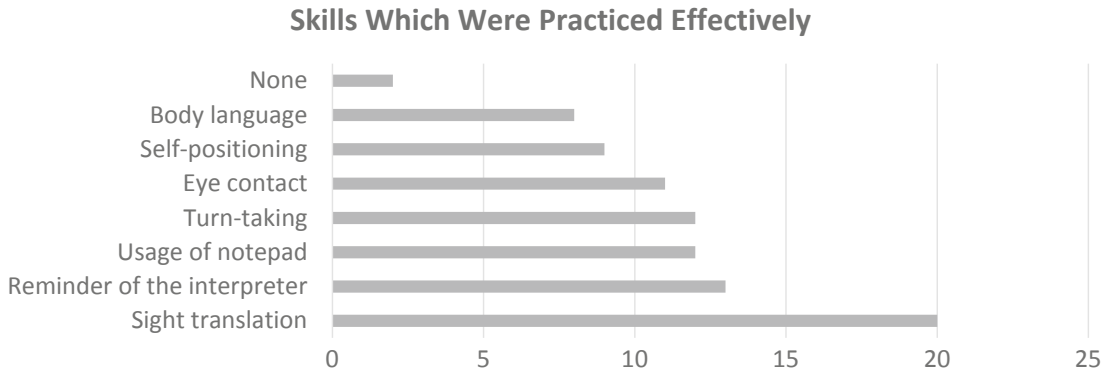

Fig. 5 Skills which were practiced effectively

virtual classroom. Overall, except for sight translation, all the other items were regarded as harder to tackle in practice (compare Figs. 4 and 5).

With respect to the medium used for course materials in distance education (see Fig. 6), video ($n = 17$), pptx ($n = 14$), audio files ($n = 13$), text (script) sharing ($n = 13$) seemed to be most popular with the respondents. Respondents were also able to name other media; those named include Edmodo (a virtual class platform), Voyant (web-based reading and analysis environment), and Lextutor (language learning website for EN and FR). Some respondents also reported having used these media of materials before the pandemic. Figure 6 also shows what the respondents regarded as the most effective media for materials in their experience; this confirmed that the four most used media were also considered to be the most effective, with a slight reverse order between pptx and text (script) sharing. This points to the respondents practice of using what they regard as the most effective media for course materials in their online class delivery. The respondents added that the materials they used were largely warmly welcomed by the students.

The authors have anecdotal evidence pointing to the fact that, during the pandemic, when a question was asked about a topic which had just been presented in PowerPoint, most students failed to reply if the question taxed their understanding. We can refer here to the second level of the cognitive domain in Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. If students are unable to simply respond to certain questions, we can only imagine what would happen if they were asked to show that they could transfer or apply such

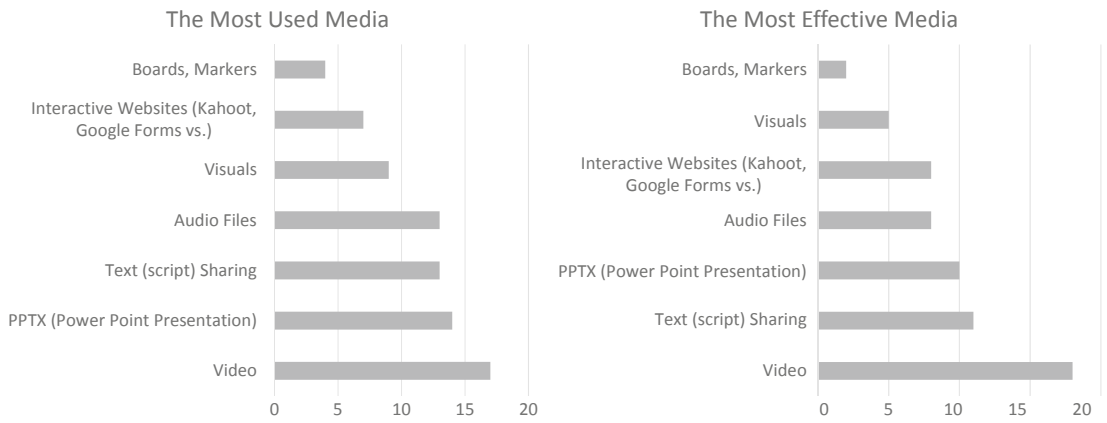

Fig. 6 Course media

understanding in a similar situation, perform analytical thinking, or evaluate and create behaviors which draw on the upper intellectual levels of the cognitive domain. The current authors posit that PowerPoint presentations as a pedagogical tool are not conducive to stimulating higher level functioning in the cognitive domain; rather, they tend to encourage lower level memorization and information recall at best.

The current authors were also interested to know what didactic methods the respondents used in their remote teaching practice. Figure 7 shows that most of the respondents ($n = 16$) used the direct instruction method, *i.e.,* lecturing, together with a combination of other methods. Some did not use any lectures at all, but rather a combination of other methods. It appears that brainstorming is the least popular method, with half of the respondents reporting using it. The other methods all seemed to be used widely by 70% or more respondents. They include role plays ($n = 15$), question–answer drills ($n = 15$), videos and case studies ($n = 15$), and discussion ($n = 14$). We also investigated how role-play was used by the respondents. Nine respondents stated that they assigned students individual roles in their virtual classroom. Five others used the breakout rooms in Zoom or MS Teams. One respondent reported using script writing assignments in group work. Another respondent reported that their students provided a voluntary interpreting service for exchange students at their university when the latter needed to interact with public institutions during the pandemic. In addition, one of the respondents reported using the Conversation Analytic Role-play Method

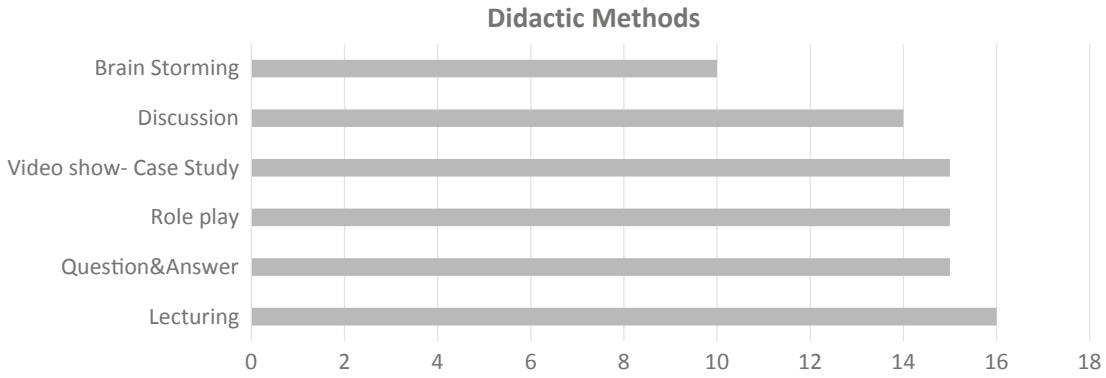

Fig. 7 Didactic methods

(CARM), which is based on playing and pausing authentic audio or video recordings of encounters to discuss and to identify together with the students the illocutionary force of the discourse.

Positives and Negatives of Distance Education

When teaching transitioned to the digital environment during the pandemic, most students were able to adapt well, possibly because they were used to working with digital devices on a daily basis. Having said that, distance education technologies fundamentally differ from the personal devices they were used to as the aim is to facilitate student engagement within the framework of ethical information-sharing and accountability. In our survey, we asked the respondents to reflect on how learners responded to the CIT course deliveries in distance education settings. We coded the data collected into "positives" and "negatives." Among the "negatives," technical problems related to infrastructure, connectivity during courses and/or exams, and power cuts were by far the most prominent themes ($n = 19$). Ensuring attendance ($n = 6$) and active participation ($n = 6$) were also regarded as "negatives." Providing course recordings for synchronous sessions so learners could play back and revise was also viewed as "negative." Many respondents reported that although the recordings offered flexibility for the students, i.e., they could watch the lecture later at a time that suited them, it actually prevented shyer students from participating in class as they feared they would give a wrong answer and it would be recorded. Another "negative"

was a lack of motivation reported by the respondents ($n = 4$). Some respondents highlighted that high numbers of students in a course, especially in public universities, led to difficulties in classroom management and feedback provision to each student in role-plays in large groups—regardless of whether the mode of delivery was face-to-face (F2F) or remote. A possible solution suggested was to involve students in class management by designating students as coordinators to be responsible for organizing fellow students in taking notes of the information and activities in each class. The notes would also be useful for those who had been unable to attend class.

When it comes to the "positive" themes, class recordings were favorably received by students as it enabled them to listen to the lectures as many times as they needed. Respondents also said that students were appreciative that they could receive assignments, lecture notes, and feedback in electronic formats. Some respondents ($n = 4$) were of the view that remote teaching of interpreting presented a unique opportunity for interpreting programs to get prepared for the emerging trend of video remote interpreting. The respondents were pleased with group practice which took place in the breakout rooms and the fact that they could be recorded in order for feedback to be provided. Using breakout rooms was also beneficial in the sense that students could role play and practice interpreting in a virtual triadic interpreting encounter, although the limitation of this remote setting should be acknowledged: it was not conducive to teaching students about seating arrangements compared to what can be achieved in the F2F setting. In a F2F encounter, the contribution of body movements and gaze to meaning assembly can be practiced more easily.

Some further observations can be added here to the responses made in the survey. We observed that during the pandemic, holding online T&I conferences and workshops through Zoom was very popular, appealing to academics and students alike. A lot of these online events were organized by enthusiastic students who were members of T&I student unions of different universities in Turkey. In this way, T&I departments around the country had the chance to meet and listen to each other's lectures. Everyone was happy to meet others in the comfort of their own home. As

stated by one respondent, these opportunities signaled a digital transformation in CIT courses and allow scholars to share their expertise easily with communities of learners who are physically far away.

The Zoom online meeting system was regarded as extremely practical by academics that they wanted to make use of it for their meetings in addition to their courses. However, the downside of this convenient tool was that, invariably, after a long day of lecturing online, many colleagues also attended administrative and academic meetings late into the night. This situation went on till the spring term of 2022. An unprecedented outcome was that many colleagues reportedly developed health issues due to a lack of work-life balance. Dogan discovered that her memory was adversely affected due to overwork. Being a researcher on mental processes of interpreting, she posits the negative effect on the episodic memory (responsible for spatio-temporal coding) may be due to long hours of online academic and administrative work without change of place and room light. She said these symptoms disappeared when F2F teaching resumed.

5 Conclusion and Suggestions

Switching to a distance-education mode to teach community interpreting as a result of the pandemic in a very short timeframe caused many challenges as well as bringing about advantages. This chapter has presented a study the authors conducted on a group of T&I educators to understand their practice and reflections.

The survey results show divergent practice in the use of LMSs for asynchronous teaching (50%), videoconferencing systems for synchronous teaching (30%), and the rest have access to both. Despite all endeavors, some skills were not as easy to practise effectively in the virtual classroom, e.g., interpreter's intervention to clarify their role, seating arrangement, eye contact, and turn-taking. Sight translation, however, was regarded as most suitable to be practiced in distance education. It was found that lecturing was still a dominant didactic method, and the media of didactic materials include video, PowerPoint presentations, text sharing, and audio files. The breakout room function was received favorably due

to the facilitation of small-group practice of a triadic interpreting setting. Learner motivation of and active participation in a remote class is a concern which needs addressing in future distance education.

In the light of the survey coupled with our course delivery experiences, the current authors firmly believe that technology will keep playing an important role in the future of community interpreting and its education. We have seen the expansion of virtual networks for teachers and students through many online conferences and events during the pandemic. The benefit of using technology to build these virtual networks should continue to be part of our future endeavors. We may have started distance education in community interpreting in the early days of the pandemic feeling unsure of what to do and how to do it. We can say with confidence now that we know a lot more about what has worked and what needs to be adjusted. We were never better placed to move the education of community interpreters forward.

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