

Can teach and prosper? EFL teachers' attitudes, well-being, and coping strategies in an online setting

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Abstract

The global Covid-19 pandemic led to the turn toward online learning and the need to adapt to new ways of English foreign language (EFL) teaching. This mixed-methods research aimed to examine teacher attitudes, well-being, and coping strategies related to online EFL teaching. The results indicated that Croatian EFL teachers had a positive attitude toward online teaching and acknowledged the importance of being digitally competent. EFL teachers were unsure about their ability to deal with online teaching and indicated their need to improve their IT skills. They revealed more negative than positive responses regarding their well-being and showed that they tried to actively cope during the pandemic. Results also showed better coping strategies among female teachers.

Key words: online EFL teaching; teacher attitudes; teacher well-being, teacher coping strategies.

1. Introduction

The relationship between computer technology and education can be traced to the introduction of personal computers in the 1970s (Sangwan et al., 2021). Computer technology has grown exponentially since then and is used in all branches of society, including second language (L2) teaching. The use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has become a regular part of the L2 classroom (Brown & Lee, 2015). With the advent of the World Wide Web, a new phase in the use of CALL emerged, which gave rise to interactive communication and collaboration through the Internet (Warschauer & Healey, 2009). One of the problems related to the use of digital technology that L2 teachers have encountered is the 'digital native student and digital immigrant teacher' problem (Gebhard, 2017). Prensky (2001) used the term 'digital natives' to describe individuals who were born in the digital age surrounded by computers and cell phones, while 'digital immigrants' are those individuals who grew up with pre-digital technology such as typewriters and audio

cassette players. Older teachers can be considered digital immigrants; however, as Gebhard (2017) states many have adapted to the newest technologies, and some teachers have even welcomed technological change. Nevertheless, other teachers continue to struggle with staying abreast of the newest technologies which can be a challenge both for them and their students. During the recent global Covid-19 pandemic, many L2 teachers were forced to adopt a new way of teaching and adapt to new circumstances, including online teaching. The manner in which L2 teachers have adjusted to these challenges can be investigated by focusing on cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of their professional identity. For instance, studies have shown that teacher attitudes toward teaching online can affect the success of online teaching (Wasserman & Migdal, 2019). In addition, a shifting teaching environment, accompanied by a heightened need to fulfill professional obligations can cause stress which, in turn, can negatively impact teacher well-being. Furthermore, the way that teachers deal with new teaching situations can be ascertained by the coping strategies that they use. Taking all these issues into consideration, the major aim of this paper was to investigate L2 teachers' attitudes toward online teaching, the extent to which it affected their well-being, as well as the coping strategies they used to deal with the new teaching situation created by the pandemic. In particular, the study focused on English foreign language (EFL) teachers in the Croatian context which could be a starting point for cross-cultural comparisons among other L2 teachers who have had to deal with this global teaching challenge. The paper is organized in the following manner: firstly, the theoretical background is provided, followed by the aim and method sections. The results of the questionnaire are presented, and then an analysis of the interview data is given. The results are summarized and discussed in the discussion section and conclusion.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. *Teacher attitudes towards online learning*

One area of research interest in education, as well as foreign language learning and teaching, is a focus on learner and teacher beliefs. According to Williams et al. (2015), the manner in which individuals approach learning and teaching can be affected by their beliefs concerning the nature and processes involved in the learning and teaching of a foreign language. In the same way, attitudes can reflect how a person thinks or feels about a given aspect of learning and teaching. Numerous studies in various contexts have focused on teachers' attitudes toward the use of digital technology in the L2 classroom, which have generally shown positive attitudes (Ahmed, 2019; Cheng, 2018; Heirati & Alashti, 2015; Lys, 2013; Sari et al., 2017). Studies focusing on the use of online learning have suggested that attitudes can be affected by computer

efficacy, technology attitude, and computer anxiety (Alanazy, 2017), as well as usefulness, ease of use, and compatibility (Chien et al., 2018). Similarly, studies focusing on L2 teachers' attitudes showed several challenges to online learning and the use of digital tools. For example, Sari et al. (2017) found a lack of technical support, lack of software or websites that support teaching and learning, and a lack of digital-based teaching materials in teaching and learning in school to be major issues, while Sadeghi et al. (2014) indicated that English L2 teachers were concerned with the decrease in the amount of teacher-student and student-student interaction, a lack of attention to individual student needs, and the fact that some students simply might not like this form of communication.

In addition, it has been found that attitudes toward digital technology may vary according to numerous individual differences (Heirati & Alashti, 2015; Lateef & Alaba, 2013; Summak et al., 2010). Studies focusing on gender differences and attitudes toward technology have shown different results in various contexts. For example, Summak et al. (2010) found higher levels of technical readiness among primary school male teachers compared to female teachers, while Lateef and Alaba's (2013) study among pre-service teachers showed more positive attitudes and use of online education among female teachers. On the other hand, Heirati and Alashti (2015) found no differences in attitudes toward online teaching among English language teachers. Concerning other differences, Summak et al. (2010) found no differences in teachers' attitudes toward technical readiness among different age groups, while Gururaja (2021) found more positive attitudes among secondary school teachers compared to primary school teachers.

2.2. Well-being

Approaching the concept of well-being can be daunting at first, given the existence of a variety of interpretations. Even though a plethora of definitions can be found in various sources, several of the most notable ones are provided. Ryan and Deci (2001: 142) have defined well-being as "optimal psychological functioning and experience." Diener et al. (2003) have interpreted it as the presence of pleasant emotions, a lack of unpleasant emotions, and a sense of general life satisfaction. Ryan and Deci (2001) suggested two views to construing well-being, namely the 1) hedonistic (e.g., well-being comprises pleasure or happiness) and 2) eudaimonic (e.g., fulfilling an individual's true nature or 'daimon' lies at the crux of well-being). Gregersen et al. (2020) indicated two main approaches, specifically 1) subjective well-being, which focuses on a balance between pleasant and unpleasant emotions, as well as one's sense of general contentment (Diener, 1984), and 2) eudaimonic, which underscores one's perception of self-actualization. It is worth noting that well-being does not imply the absence or denying of unpleasant emotions, but

rather accepting them and integrating them into one's everyday existence (Diener et al., 2003). To further clarify the concept of well-being, the PERMA framework that embodies both hedonic and eudaimonic facets are discussed.

PERMA is an acronym that stands for Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment and it represents a well-known framework introduced by Seligman (2011). To exemplify, *positive emotion*, also referred to as a pleasant emotion in the literature, covers a range of emotions, such as joy, pride, and happiness. *Engagement* pertains to one's immersion in a task that one finds enjoyable. *Relationships* are related to the necessity of having relations with other individuals, i.e., being socially connected. *Meaning* pertains to us determining the essence of our existence, as well as our actions. Lastly, *accomplishment* is tied to our experiencing success and being validated for it. According to Mercer and Gregersen (2020), well-being rests upon the positivity that transects all of these domains.

When discussing well-being, it is important to mention the notion of stress. Stress represents a discrepancy between the pressures caused by the perceived demands at work and our capacity to deal with them (Education Service Advisory Committee, 1990). An individual's (in)ability to cope with different stressors is tightly connected to their well-being. When defining stress, several types can be differentiated, including distress, eustress, and tolerable stress (Rogers, 2012). While distress is generally considered unpleasant, debilitating, and negative, eustress is deemed a 'good stress' as it keeps us alert, energized, and focused. Tolerable stress, also referred to as day-to-day stress, is the kind of stress when something bad happens, but we possess the inner resources or a social support system to manage it (Rogers, 2012). Contrary to stressors, or our perceptions of pressures and demands from the environment, there are uplifts or pleasant situations in our lives (Kanner et al., 1981). As previously mentioned, our well-being is rooted in the balance between the experienced stressors and uplifts. Research has shown that higher levels of well-being are directly linked to better physical health (Diener & Seligman, 2004), improved social relationships, and social equity (White, 2010).

Resilience is another concept that is closely related to well-being. To elaborate, resilience is a process which showcases how individuals are capable of recovering from unfavorable situations (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2015). Akin to the situation with well-being, resilience has also undergone a series of interpretations, but it can be stated that scholars have found resilience to be a highly changeable process that develops in accordance with the environmental/situational elements. According to Troy and Mauss (2011), it has also been tied to the notion of emotion regulation. In other words, resilient individuals have the capacity to regulate their emotions and offset unpleasant and stressful situations. This process enables them to maintain their sense of well-being and prosper in their place of work.

2.2.1. *Teacher well-being*

Those who teach can attest to the fact that teaching is demanding, dynamic, rewarding, and often undervalued. There is also a consensus among scholars that teaching is highly stressful, which leads to high levels of teacher attrition (Swanson, 2008), poor physical and mental health, as well as low levels of job satisfaction (Brown, 2012; Bubb & Earley, 2004; Johnson et al., 2005). Ferguson (2008) claims that stress diminishes our capacity to be productive, negatively impacts our relations with others and, if left untreated, can lead to depression. Moreover, teachers' constant exposure to different types of stressors (e.g., lack of job security, lacking recognition for their work, or heavy workload) can leave them vulnerable to burnout (MacIntyre et al., 2019). According to Mearns and Cain (2003), burnout is described as a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion and cynicism caused by severe stress. It is related to those professions where individuals work with other people. Teachers, for instance, can become highly dissatisfied with their profession as a result of burnout. Several authors have noted a high frequency of teacher burnout and attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Lovewell, 2012). To illustrate, high rates of teacher burnout (up to 50%) have been reported in different countries, such as the United States (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) and Germany (Barth, 1997). To combat the ill effects of burnout, teachers must tend to their well-being and resilience (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). How teachers react to stress has a direct bearing on their general sense of well-being, as well as their ability to adjust (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013; Pyhältö et al., 2020). In addition, their reactions can be adaptive, as well as maladaptive, such as being in denial or resorting to substance abuse (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Coping, then, takes a central role in teachers' lives, especially given the inevitability of everyday stressors and challenging situations. Teachers who report higher levels of well-being are also those that appraise themselves as better teachers (Turner & Thielking, 2019).

2.2.2. *Language teacher well-being*

Language teaching has been marked by a notable increase in stress, burnout, and less-than-desirable working conditions, all of which have a detrimental impact on teachers (Swanson, 2008). As was aptly phrased by Gkonou et al. (2020), language teaching is an emotional rollercoaster, meaning that it comes with its own set of stressors or triggers. To elaborate on some of them, language teachers have to confront cultural differences between themselves and their L2 learners, as well as the price of emotional labor involved (King, 2016). In addition, they have to contend with alternating working conditions and fear for the security of their jobs (Mercer et al., 2016), not to mention the anxiety that comes from having to teach the language that the teacher is still

unsure about (Horwitz, 1996). Another interesting point was raised by King and Ng (2018) who suggested that language teachers, unlike their counterparts that teach other subjects, need to have an emotional comprehension of the connection between their identity and the language they are trying to teach. Day and Gu (2010) have argued that maintaining teacher motivation, energy, and adequate levels of personal well-being has become arduous and costly for teachers all over the world. Being cognizant of the need for additional knowledge of L2 teachers' emotional experiences, and needs, and receiving adequate support to sustain their well-being, a substantial surge of research in the L2 field has been noted.

In brief, L2 scholars have branched out to various domains related to language teaching and teacher well-being. For instance, the role of positive psychology (PP) has been put forth by authors such as Dewaele et al. (2019), Gabryś-Barker and Gałajda (2016), MacIntyre et al. (2019), and MacIntyre et al. (2016). Being a somewhat new subfield of psychology and, recently, in applied linguistics, it explores how people thrive. Subjective well-being (discussed earlier in the text) is at the core of PP as it focuses on one's overall satisfaction, the presence of pleasant emotions, and a lack of unpleasant ones (Diener et al., 2003). The growing interest in language teacher well-being has served as a springboard for many studies conducted in the L2 domain (e.g., Babić et al., 2022; Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2022; Gregersen et al., 2020; Gregersen et al., 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2019; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Mercer et al., 2016; Proietti & Dewaele, 2021; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). These studies targeted, among other things, factors such as teacher stress, stressors, uplifts, coping mechanisms, teacher experiences with online teaching, and solutions to overcome challenges related to either online teaching or the recent pandemic.

2.3. Coping strategies/Coping with stress

Before presenting specific taxonomies and coping strategies, it is essential to elucidate the relationship coping has with one's sense of well-being. To briefly note, well-being is defined by striking the balance between pleasant and unpleasant emotions we experience (Diener, 1984). Larsen and Prizmić (2008) referred to this as 'emotional well-being.' Earlier, the dynamic nature of well-being was discussed, but what is also important to mention is that it calls into action our ad hoc management or regulation (Chow et al., 2005). Larsen and Prizmić (2008) further explained that individuals can pursue various routes to enhance their sense of well-being, for instance, they can take action to adjust to certain events or emotions experienced. Specifically, people can expend their effort in trying to uphold pleasant emotions, downregulate unpleasant ones, or simply cut down on the process of adapting to adverse instances via emotion regulation. Gross (1998: 275) has stated that emotion regulation is

“the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions.”

The coping process regarding stress and one's regulation of behavior needs to be further elaborated. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) presented their transactional model of stress and behavioral self-regulation and made a distinction between 1) emotion-focused and 2) problem-focused strategies. While emotion-focused strategies are aimed at alleviating the perceived emotional distress, problem-focused strategies target the source of stress or attempt to solve a certain problem. While preference was given to problem-focused strategies in early research, recent studies showed that most stressors require the use of both types of strategies (Bonniwell & Tunariu, 2019). The transactional model came under scrutiny and was criticized by Carver and Scheier (1998), who believed that the strategy distinction was overly simplistic and needed to explore additional domains. Carver et al. (1989) proposed a multidimensional model of coping (the COPE inventory) that comprised a total of 60 items. This instrument served as a precursor to the Brief-COPE scale (Carver, 1997) which was used in this study. The scale was modified and shortened to ensure ease of usage. The newly introduced Brief-COPE scale consisted of 28 items that included 14 subscales (two items each). When observing specific strategies, one can generally cluster them around two main groups, namely the 1) approach strategies (such as acceptance, positive reframing, and planning) and 2) avoidant strategies (such as behavioral disengagement, denial, and self-distraction). Items from both the approach and avoidant strategies were used in this study. One should not proclaim that some strategies are better than others, according to Carver (1989). Nelson and Lyubomirsky (2014) further argued that one needs to take into consideration the situation one is in, as well as the coping mechanisms at their disposal.

3. Aim and method

3.1. Aim

Considering the need to shift to online teaching due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the investigators of this study attempted to explore its effects on EFL teaching. The major focus of the study was to investigate EFL teachers' attitudes toward online teaching, how online teaching affected their well-being, as well as the coping strategies teachers used to deal with the challenges of online teaching. The research focused on the following research questions:

1. What are EFL teachers' attitudes towards online teaching and learning, their coping strategies, and how has it affected their professional well-being?

2. Are there differences in EFL teachers' attitudes towards online teaching and learning, well-being, and coping strategies?
3. Is there a relationship between continuous variables and teachers' attitudes, well-being, and coping strategies with regard to online learning?

3.2. Method

3.2.1. Sample

Questionnaire

The total sample number for the questionnaire was 265 Croatian EFL teachers, including 20 males and 245 females. Teachers were employed in various institutions, for example, 135 of them were working in primary schools, 127 were in secondary schools, and only 2 were teaching at the university level. The average age of the teachers was 42 (SD= .265), and the mean average of years of teaching was 17 (SD= 9.04). The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of the sample (Number and percent)

		Number (N)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	20	7.5%
	Female	245	92.5%
	Total	265	
Place of employment	Primary school	135	50.9%
	Secondary school	127	47.9%
	University	2	.8%
	Total	265	

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the sample (Number, mean, and standard deviation)

	Number (N)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Age	265	42.17	.265
Years of teaching	265	16.59	9.043

Interview

Interviews were carried out with 7 Croatian EFL teachers, including 5 females and 2 males. The participants were employed in secondary (4) and primary

schools (3). In the first group (consisting of teachers employed in secondary schools), 3 teachers were employed in grammar schools, and 1 teacher in a vocational school. Their mean (M) age was 42.9 (SD = 10.2), while the mean average related to working experience was 16.1 (SD = 8.0).

3.2.2. Instruments

A mixed-method approach was used in the study. Quantitative data were gathered using a four-part questionnaire. The first part included background information related to gender, age, years of experience, and place of employment. The second section included an adapted version of Sangwan et al.'s (2021) questionnaire 'Attitude Scale towards Online Teaching and Learning.' The questionnaire asked the participants to grade the items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and included four factors: i) appreciation for online teaching, ii) responsiveness towards online education, iii) proficiency in handling online teaching, and iv) knowledge of technological reforms. The third part of the questionnaire contained the Teacher Well-being scale, an adapted version of Collie et al.'s (2015) scale, in which the participants were asked the extent to which the given statements affected their well-being as a teacher on a 7-point Likert scale (1 - negatively, 7 - positively). The scale consisted of three factors: i) workload well-being, ii) organizational well-being, and iii) student interaction well-being. The fourth part of the questionnaire involved an adapted version of Carver's (1997) Brief-Cope (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced) scale. The participants were asked about the degree to which they were coping with online learning based on a 4-point Likert scale (1 - I haven't been doing this at all, 4 - I've been doing this a lot). It was comprised of four factors: i) active coping, ii) planning, iii) self-distraction, and iv) behavioral disengagement.

Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The questions were focused on three distinct aspects of online foreign teaching, i) teachers' attitudes toward online teaching, ii) teacher well-being, and iii) teachers' coping mechanisms. The average length of each interview was approximately 20 minutes.

3.2.3. Procedure and data analysis

The questionnaire was distributed online through Google Forms at the end of 2021. The participants were informed about the aim of the study. They were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their responses were completely anonymous. Data analysis included the use of descriptive statistics and other statistical analyses. In addition, t-tests and ANOVA analyses were used for the comparison analyses, while relationships between variables were investigated using correlation analysis.

Before carrying out the interviews, the teachers gave their informed consent. The aims of the study were clearly explained, and they were told that their responses would be anonymous. The interviews were carried out over the phone, and the conversations were recorded and transcribed. Data analysis involved content analysis of the data, including coding the results, followed by clustering into categories based on the frequency of responses.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive analyses

4.1.1. Teacher attitudes towards online teaching and learning

The results of the descriptive analysis show a moderately high mean ($M = 3.80$, $SD = .584$) regarding teachers' attitudes toward online teaching. In other words, the teachers generally appreciated some of the advantages of online teaching and being digitally competent. Their responsiveness toward online education was somewhat low ($M = 2.13$, $SD = .597$) indicating that teachers did not consider online teaching as being better than classroom teaching. For the most part, the participants felt moderately competent in teaching online ($M = 3.65$, $SD = .648$). Nevertheless, teachers were somewhat ambivalent regarding their knowledge of technological reforms ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .701$). The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Teacher attitudes towards online teaching and learning (Item number, sample number, mean, standard deviation)

Attitudes scale (1 - Strongly disagree, 5 - Strongly disagree)	Number of items	Sample num- ber	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
F1. Appreciation for online teaching	9	265	3.80	.584
F2. Responsiveness toward online educa- tion	7	265	2.13	.597
F3. Proficiency in han- dling online teaching	7	265	3.65	.648
F4. Knowledge of technological reforms	5	265	3.40	.701

4.1.2. Teacher well-being

The results focusing on the teachers' well-being, in particular workload well-being ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.13$), suggested that their online workload affected their

well-being more negatively than positively (e.g., marking, time management, administrative work, etc.). Although the mean average on the organizational well-being scale was somewhat higher ($M = 3.76, SD = 1.22$) it should be noted that a score of 3 on the well-being scale indicated 'more negatively than positively,' while a score of 4 indicated 'neither positively nor negatively.' Therefore, it would appear that the teachers were somewhat undecided, but again more negative, about how administrative support for online teaching affected their professional well-being (e.g., relations with administrators, recognition for effort, school procedures during the pandemic, etc.). Furthermore, teachers showed a slightly higher mean average on the scale related to their well-being connected with student interaction ($M = 3.94, SD = 1.24$); however, this average was still on the negative end of the scale. The items on this scale focused on such aspects, as online student behaviour, student motivation, and online classroom management. The results for the teacher well-being scale are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Teacher well-being (Item number, sample number, Mean, Standard Deviation)

Teacher Well-being scale (1 - Negatively, 7 - Positively)	Number of items	Sample number	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
F1. Workload well-being	6	265	3.20	1.13
F2. Organizational well-being	6	265	3.76	1.22
F3. Student interaction well-being	4	265	3.94	1.24

4.1.3. Coping strategies

With regard to coping strategies, the results indicated that teachers attempted to actively cope with online teaching ($M = 3.36, SD = .614$). In addition, teachers actively planned and sought strategies to deal with online teaching ($M = 3.45, SD = .628$). On the other hand, the strategy of self-distraction was moderately low ($M = 2.57, SD = .820$) considering that a score of 2 on this scale reads: 'I've been doing this a little bit.' In other words, they somewhat tried to use self-distraction to deal with online teaching (e.g., doing activities to take their mind off things). Nevertheless, the low score on the Behavioral disengagement scale ($M = 1.87, SD = .801$) shows that teachers did not 'disengage' from the situation, in other words, they did not give up trying to deal with the new situation they found themselves in. The results of the coping scale are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Teachers' coping strategies (Item number, sample number, mean, standard deviation)

Coping scale (1 - I haven't been doing this at all, 4 - I've been doing this a lot)	Number of items	Sample number	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
F1. Active coping	2	265	3.36	.614
F2. Planning	2	265	3.45	.628
F3. Self-distraction	2	265	2.57	.820
F4. Behavioral disengagement	2	265	1.87	.801

4.2. Comparison analyses

4.2.1. Gender differences

Comparison analyses were carried out to investigate differences based on gender on all the scales. The results showed significant differences between males and females on only two factors on the Coping scale. Firstly, females showed that they put a higher level of effort into actively coping with online learning (Females: $M = 3.40$, $SD = .594$); Males: 2.90 , $SD = .681$). Moreover, it was also found that females put more effort into planning strategies to deal with the online situation compared to males (Females: $M = 3.47$, $SD = .614$; Males: $M = 3.18$, $SD = .748$). Table 6 shows the results of the t-test.

Table 6: Results of comparison analysis between males and females - Results of independent samples t-test (Significant differences)

Scale	Gender	Number	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	df	P
Brief-Cope scale Active coping	Male	20	2.90	.681	-3.57	263	.000*
	Female	245	3.40	.594			
	Total	265					
Brief-Cope scale Planning	Male	20	3.18	.748	-2.026	263	.044*
	Female	245	3.47	.614			
	Total	265					

4.2.2. Differences among teachers: Level of teaching

In order to study differences in attitudes among teachers according to levels of teaching, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The

results indicated no significant differences between teachers in primary schools, secondary schools, universities, and foreign language schools on the Attitudes towards online teaching and learning scale, as well as the Teacher well-being scale. Moreover, although differences were found on three factors on the Coping scale (Active coping, Planning, and Behavioral disengagement), post hoc tests were not possible as the groups had fewer than two cases.

4.3. Relationships among variables

In an attempt to answer the third research question, that is, if there is a relationship between continuous variables (age and years of experience) and the three scales (Teachers' attitudes, Well-being, and Coping strategies), the correlation analysis was performed. The results showed a significantly negative relationship between age and active coping ($p = 0.15$, $r = -.149$) suggesting that the older the teachers were, the less able they were to actively cope with online teaching. However, a significant negative relationship was found between age and behavioral disengagement ($p = .026$, $r = -.137$) indicating that older teachers were not ready to give up dealing with the situation. Another significant negative relationship was found between years of experience and technological knowledge ($p = .028$, $r = -.135$). It appears that the more experience teachers had (which may also be attributed to age), the less knowledge they had of technological reforms. Furthermore, significant negative relationships were found between years of experience and organizational well-being ($p = .012$, $r = -.154$). Teachers with more experience showed more frustration with the level of support from the administration. Also, a significant relationship was found between years of experience and self-distraction ($p = .005$, $r = -.173$) implying that the more teaching experience teachers had the less they used self-distraction as a coping mechanism to deal with the situation. Finally, a significant negative relationship was found between years of experience and behavioral disengagement ($p = .043$, $r = -.125$) showing that the more experienced teachers were, the less likely they were to give up dealing with the online teaching situation (the items on this scale were negatively connoted). However, despite the fact that significant differences were found ($p < .05$), it should be noted that the strength of the association between variables was small considering the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) results. The results showing the significant relationships are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Correlation analysis of continuous variables – Age and years of experience (Pearson correlation values – r) Significant differences (p)

Variable	Significance (p)	Pearson correlation (r)
Age and Active coping	0.15*	-.149
Age and Behavioral Disengagement	.026*	-.137
Years of experience and knowledge of technological reforms	.028*	-.135
Years of experience and Organizational well-being	.012*	-.154
Years of experience and Self-distraction	.005*	-.173
Years of experience and Behavioral disengagement	.043*	-.125

* $p < .05$

4.4. Qualitative analyses – Interviews

The interview results are presented in three general sections: 1) teacher attitudes toward online teaching, 2) teacher well-being, and 3) coping mechanisms. The findings are clustered in categories (where possible) and shown in accordance with their frequency. Most frequent examples are discussed, whereas the least frequent ones are only mentioned. To ensure clarity, a specific set of findings are preceded by the question from the interview.

4.4.1. Teacher attitudes toward online teaching

Q1: What are the pros and cons of online teaching?

The teachers in the study listed various pros and cons of online teaching. In regards to the pros section, five categories emerged: (1) student performance, (2) online resources, (3) learning experience, (4) teaching experience, and (5) miscellaneous. Concerning pros, the first three categories were the most frequent and are briefly illustrated. Student performance encompassed various notions, such as students being more active and less shy online, feeling more relaxed, and generally less apprehensive about asking questions. Student ease and increased participation can be observed in the words of one teacher:

Well, the most obvious pros would be, for instance, for students who are a bit shy, and don't really feel comfortable talking, sticking out in the classroom. They really get the chance to come up and speak their minds or volunteer for some answers to those questions that they were given or some tasks and so on.

Regarding online sources, the teachers' responses revolved around utilizing different online sources and apps to create tests, quizzes, and various tasks. These seemed to make the online learning experience more dynamic and engaging. One of the teachers reflected on the benefits of using online resources by saying "Another pro is that, well, it's much easier to make different types of tasks on the Internet, because there are so many programs. And, well, they get, they can easily access it." In terms of the learning experience, the respondents believed that online learning and teaching allow students to acquire new knowledge (e.g., online tools), make the learning process relaxed and fun, and facilitate learner agency (e.g., learners search for certain materials on their own). Attempting to illustrate the ease of online learning, one teacher commented that "For some children, I think that it is easier to learn over them all online because they think of the teaching or learning as part of the game." Another teacher referred to their students' agency when they explained that "They searched some materials by themselves. Since I didn't have first graders freshman, it wasn't that difficult for me."

With respect to the cons section, a total of three categories can be observed, namely student behavior, technical issues, and miscellaneous. Student behavior was the most frequent category and it involved different instances, such as students studying less when learning online, cheating in online exams, acting irresponsibly (e.g., not seeing the importance of learning), and lacking in focus and participation. Addressing student lack of responsibility, one teacher commented that "...some of them don't participate, and they are very hard to reach. They also study less because they're often left their own devices when their parents are at work." The teacher that mentioned game-like traits of online teaching in the pros section also brought up the unfavorable aspect of it by stating "But this can also be a big minus because some take this as a game, and they don't actually do anything." Regarding the technical issues, Croatian L2 teachers recalled encountering problems with the Internet connection, students having poor technical support at home (e.g., many children and only one computer, no access to the Internet, and power outage. Such issues were broadly covered by one of the teachers:

[...] things like the Internet access, having a computer or not in a family for your personal use. So, there might be more members of the family using the single computer or laptop. Things such as, I don't know, electricity, it happens at a time of the day the electricity goes out, then that student cannot follow my online class.

The findings related to both the pros and cons categories can be observed in Table 8.

Table 8: Pros and cons of online teaching

Pros	Frequency	Cons	Frequency
Student performance (e.g., students being more inclined to participate)	3	Student behavior (e.g., cheating)	8
Online resources (e.g., using online quizzes)	3	Technical issues (e.g., poor Internet connection)	5
Learning experience (e.g., various online tools)	3	Miscellaneous (e.g., 'phantom presence' in class)	3
Teaching experience (e.g., teaching flexibility in isolation)	2		
Miscellaneous (e.g., extra time left in the day)	2		

Q2: Do you think that classroom teaching is better than online teaching? Can you elaborate on why?

When asked whether they believed that classroom teaching is preferable to online teaching, all of the respondents' responses were affirmative. Their responses were grouped around three categories, namely the class interaction and teacher-student rapport, student monitoring and assessment, and miscellaneous. The first category was the most frequent and it pertained to reasons such as the teachers being able to obtain feedback from students easier in the real classroom, face-to-face interaction yielding better results, students' attention can be grabbed quicker, and teachers can tend to students' needs more efficiently. One teacher elaborated on the class interaction by saying "I guess I prefer classroom teaching. I, I find it easier to get information from children, they have understood things." In terms of student monitoring and assessment, a general consent was that it is easier to supervise, test and gauge students' comprehension in the real classroom. The same teacher referred to non-verbal cues as being important for student assessment "So you notice on their faces if they don't understand things. So, I think I prefer a classroom teaching for me. Online can be interesting, but not for a long time." Another teacher concurred with this argument by highlighting the importance of "...being able to read facial expressions of people. Also, when I'm staring at those white names on a black background, I can't really know who hasn't understood when I was explaining who needs a little bit more help..." The findings can be viewed in Table 9.

Table 9: Classroom vs online teaching

YES	Frequency	NO	Frequency
Class interaction and teacher-student rapport (e.g., easier to get students' attention)	5	No answers were provided for this category.	-
Student monitoring and assessment (e.g., easier to test and grade students)	4		
Miscellaneous (e.g., students handle the workload better in real classrooms)	1		

Q3: Do you feel comfortable dealing with the challenges of online teaching, such as time constraints, student interaction, or the use of various tools? And can you explain why?

The findings in this section were not categorized due to their distinct nature, however, they are presented individually and simply sorted according to the respondents' sense of comfort when teaching online. As can be seen in Table 10, the majority of the teachers (5) stated that they feel comfortable teaching online and handling various online challenges. They listed several reasons that seemed to offset any undesirable effects related to teaching L2 in a virtual setting. Specifically, the teachers claimed to have an innate interest in technology, they believed that online instruction is the next step in education development, they appraised themselves as both knowledgeable and proficient in the use of online tools, and they appreciated the learning experience. One teacher summed up these aspects in the following way: "I do feel comfortable dealing with various tools because I've always been interested in technology. And I think that that's the future of education, which is why it presents a certain challenge for me." Conversely, a few teachers (2) did not feel comfortable teaching online. One teacher reflected on their unpleasant experience by explaining that "Okay, it was very, very stressful for us. We work all day long. Definitely very stressful and hard, difficult..." Another teacher did not appreciate having a certain online platform imposed on them. In her words:

So, we had to use Microsoft Teams. And the platform itself is really, really problematic. I don't know if it has some bugs or something or was it just maybe the issue of overload of all of it because all of us, primary schools, primarily, primary school, and we're on it all at us or most of the nation at the same time, but that was my problem with it.

Table 10: Teacher comfort dealing with challenges of online teaching

YES	Frequency	NO	Frequency
Interest in technology	5	Unpleasant experience with online teaching	2
Proficiency in technology use		Imposed use of online platforms	
Online teaching is the future			
Learning new things			
Knowledge of various online tools			

Q4: Which aspects of online teaching do you find challenging? Can you provide some examples?

The teachers addressed different challenging aspects of online L2 teaching. Their responses were categorized into four groups, namely learner interaction, learner conduct and motivation, classroom management, and miscellaneous (Table 11). The most frequent category is discussed briefly, while the less frequent ones are listed. The majority of teachers agreed that learner interaction was a significant challenge in an online domain. They found it lacking in genuineness and frequency. To elaborate, one teacher addressed the students' absence when being required to speak. She recalled that "I really wasn't able to make my students interact the way I wanted to, because of the aforementioned issues. They weren't... They just weren't there." Another teacher's response enveloped several aspects, such as learner interaction, conduct, and classroom management. According to her:

[...] that's just the issue of not seeing your students and them not really paying attention and you not being able to see if they're paying attention. And also, you catch them not doing that you can really punish them because they say, give you an excuse about the mic or something like that. So actually, in Croatia, we can't do anything about this. There are no, let's say, for formal reprimands we could do with those students who are not being active and online teaching.

Table 11: Challenging aspects of online teaching

Categories	Frequency
Learner interaction (e.g., poor interaction online)	4
Learner conduct and motivation (e.g., students cheating)	2
Classroom management (e.g., enforcing rules/punishments)	2
Miscellaneous (e.g., longer preparation for classes)	2

Q5: How confident are you when using online platforms? Can you explain

your answer?

When inquired about their perceived efficacy in using online platforms, the teachers' responses were diverse. The majority of them assessed themselves as highly confident in their abilities. This assessment was supported by their interest in technology and different online platforms, and their aptitude for ICT use. One teacher explained that "I'm very interested in technology, which is why I always like exploring new tools, new ways of how to teach students, new things, and so on." Another teacher reflected on her experience with Zoom and rated herself as "Sometimes excellent, but very good. Especially Zoom, I like it really a lot, much better than Teams. We were supposed to do on Teams. But I think that Zoom is really great. Especially those break out rooms." On the other hand, fewer teachers felt moderately confident when using online platforms. The reasoning behind it was either their lack of preference or experience with such tools. One teacher used a scale to rate herself. In her words, "[o]n a scale of, from one to five, I'd say about three, I'm pretty average. I, as I already said, I'm not really tech-savvy, so I don't really enjoy using them, but I can. I can learn, I can adapt." Another teacher expressed her attitude by saying "...I'm not so crazy about them. They're fine. They're fine. But I think that teaching in a real classroom is much better than using two platforms." The findings can be seen in Table 12.

Table 12: Teacher confidence when using online platforms

Highly confident	Frequency	Moderately confident	Frequency
Interested in technology	4	Average	3
Catches up quickly		Able but not keen on using apps	
Explores apps on their own		Not techno-savvy or interested in online platforms	
Very proficient at using online platforms (e.g., Zoom breakout rooms)			

Q6: Do you believe that students are motivated and prefer to learn online? Can you elaborate?

When observing the results, it can be noted that the teachers have mixed feelings about their learners' preferences. Some of them (2) believed that their students are positively disposed toward online learning because it appears as easy, game-like, and dynamic. This question prompted one teacher to illustrate his experience with his learners. He said:

[...] they prefer online because they feel that it's more of a game and that they, some of them feel that they can cheat it through that online schooling. They can do it fast, quickly, and then they have the rest of the day for themselves to, I don't know, play games, go out.

Another teacher attested to this while expressing her bewilderment at the same time. She stated that "...they told me that it was great for them, that it was much easier than in the classrooms. And they would like to continue like that till the end of the school year. So, it was shocking for me." When discussing the ambivalent stance toward online learning, one teacher's account summed up both pros and cons of this approach to learning. He claimed that his learners:

[...] they're motivated in the beginning because they like exploring the benefits of the internet and social media, which they are already partly familiar with. But in time, this motivation decreases because they start missing socializing with other students, which leads to a lack of enthusiasm, sometimes anxiety and indifference, and disinterest.

Lastly, most teachers (3) claimed that their students do not prefer online learning. They believed such a means of language learning did not yield the results, nor did it contribute to their students' social needs. This was reflected in the words of one teacher who claimed that "...many of them said that they didn't like all the Internet and screens and that they, they wanted to be together that to socialize with us and with other students and communicate in any other way." Another teacher briefly reflected on her students' learning habits by saying that "...most of them, from my experience, don't really learn as much as they should and they don't really study as much as they should while they're online." The results are presented in Table 13.

Table 13: Student preferences related to online learning

YES	Fre- quency	PARTLY	Fre- quency	NO	Fre- quency
Online classes are fast-paced and fun	2	Initially yes, later no	2	Students miss socialization and dislike learning online	3
Online learning easier for students				Students take online learning less seriously	
				Students lack concentration	

4.4.2. *Teacher well-being*

Q7: What aspects of online teaching do you believe affect your well-being the most?

The teachers revealed several different aspects of online teaching directly related to their well-being. Their responses were grouped into three clusters in order of frequency: preparation for online classes, marking students' work, correspondence with students and/or parents, and the least frequent examples, such as lack of student preparation. Several teachers agreed that preparing for online classes, which involves creating online exams, and handouts, or searching for adequate tools, was a major factor. In the words of one teacher, "Okay, so preparation affects my well-being the most because sometimes it takes me hours to make presentations and to prepare for online tests and exams." Another teacher concurred with this by saying "It takes more time because we have to choose. You choose which tool you're going to use. You need to have more material, you have to prepare all of that. It takes time, right?!"

Marking students' work was another prominent aspect of online teaching that affected the teachers' well-being. When inquired about their reasoning, the teachers explained that the usual approach they used in classrooms proved to be ineffective and the situation warranted a different approach. One teacher described this in detail when she said:

But when it comes to grading, to giving them tests, it was really hard. And I really felt very bad. But I realized that testing them, the way we did in classrooms is really science fiction, it is impossible. And that's why I turned to projects.

Besides testing, another teacher reflected on marking in general. She addressed it in addition to preparation for classes and stated that "...marking work, not only preparation, but definitely marking and correcting and instant feedback that we had to give to them..." was what impacted her well-being. Another interesting category revealed how communication with students and/or parents influenced the respondents' subjective sense of well-being. In their recollections, the teachers mentioned issues with parents not respecting their free time, as well as students believing teachers are available 24/7. One teacher specifically mentioned having trouble with "difficult questions from the parents. Idiotic questions from the kids that didn't read through their tasks, which are really easy, because I think all of us tried to be as clear and short in our descriptions of the tasks..." Another teacher shared this experience with their learners. When asked about it, he said "...kids have feelings that they can contact me anytime, no matter what. I had messages arriving at around midnight." The findings can be found in Table 14.

Table 14: Aspects of online teaching that affect teacher well-being

Categories	Frequency
Preparation for online classes	3
Marking students' work	3
Correspondence with students/parents	2
Lack of student preparation; technical issues	1

Q8: Did you get enough support from your school or the Ministry?

According to the findings (Table 15), the majority of the teachers (5) believed that they had received adequate support from their schools and/or the Ministry in regard to online teaching. These teachers revealed that the Ministry had ensured video lessons, lesson plans, instructions, and equipment, as well as the organization of different webinars. One teacher claimed to have received support from their school; moreover, their school administration organized meetings and peer-to-peer teacher assistance. In terms of Ministry assistance, one teacher recalled many online seminars. According to her, "I am very keen on taking part in any webinars. But during that time, I must admit that there were a lot of webinars, which really helped me a lot." Another teacher recalled receiving help from the Ministry and not finding it as useful, "...the ministry did prepare some lessons that can be used for online teaching. But they're too general simply work in a vocational school..." On the other hand, one teacher felt satisfied with the support received from the Ministry. In his words, "Okay, it [Ministry] made sure that we have enough video materials created by different teachers and other professionals. There are also different lesson plans online that can help teachers to organize classes better..." To briefly reflect on the teachers that did not believe they had received adequate help during the pandemic (2), one teacher focused on the Ministry guidelines for online teaching. She found that "... they [Ministry] don't have any new set of rules for this kind of teaching. There are no repercussions for students who don't do their work." Regarding the technical issues, another teacher felt that both the Ministry and her school had failed in that area. According to her:

Oh, I never had any help from either of them. So, I'm, I'm not really sure if they would react if I needed help. The difficulties we do have, regardless of our teaching, I mean, we have problems with the Internet connection all the time throughout the school year.

Table 15: Support from the school/Ministry

YES	Fre- quency	NO	Fre- quency
Educational and technical assistance (e.g., video lessons and lesson plans)	5	Ministry did not issue new guidelines for online teaching	1
		Ministry did not help with technical issues (e.g., Internet connection)	1

Q9: How do you feel about your relationship with students during online classes? Would you say that it is harder to manage classes online?

This two-part question elicited mixed opinions from the teachers. When observing the first segment related to the teacher-student relationship, the teachers used various words to illustrate their online rapport with the students. To elaborate on a number of them, some found it distant due to the absence of physical contact. This argument was raised by one of the teachers who said, "It is harder because I don't have physical contact with them... which I find very important in the language learning process." Some regarded it as strained because the students refused to show their faces on camera. According to one teacher, "It [the relationship] was changed because they didn't want to, to see me to see their faces. I was even, I was very angry at them. But I didn't want it to show that... but that was the problem." Another view was that of a controlled relationship owing to the nature of online teaching (students muted until they are permitted to speak). On the other hand, some teachers believed their rapport with the students was more honest because they were more forthcoming in their interactions online. One teacher attested to this by saying "I think that they that they maybe were even more honest with me during that time. Maybe I got to know some things about them that they tried to hide."

With respect to online classroom management, several teachers agreed that online teaching is challenging when it comes to tracking their students' participation and general activities during an online class. One teacher mused about her experience in that regard, and she admitted that:

I can't control I can't really see what they're doing because, first of all, I don't see them. We are not, we can't make them turn on their cameras. This is my school. I mean, yeah, maybe some schools have to make the students turn on their cameras. We don't. So that's the first thing. I have no idea what they're doing. Secondly, I have no idea whether they are cooperating.

A somewhat different position was observed among a small number of teachers who did not find online classroom management that demanding.

One of them found live classes to be more challenging due to rowdy students. Another teacher felt there was not much difference when comparing live and online classes. The only thing they stressed was the fact that students seem to be a bit more relaxed online. The findings can be observed in Table 16.

Table 16: Teacher-student relationship and classroom management

Teacher-Student Relationship	Frequency	Classroom Management	Frequency
More honest	2	Difficult to manage online	2
Strained	1	Can't track student participation	1
Informal rapport	1	Live classes more challenging to manage	1
Controlled	1	There is no difference in classroom management (real vs online)	1
Depends on the class, not the mode of teaching	1		
Distant	1		

Q10: Does online teaching make you experience stress? Can you elaborate on your answer?

The findings showed that the majority of the teachers (6) experienced stress while teaching online. Their reports indicated various sources of stress, including experiencing technical difficulties, spending long hours in front of the screen, being unable to control events in the outside world, and not seeing students' faces online. The findings are shown in Table 17. Starting with the most frequent antecedent of stress, technical difficulties, such as poor connection or not being able to access the Internet, were reported by two teachers. One teacher explained that her stress "... stems pretty much solely on the technical issues, so Microsoft Teams, the freezing of it and, and the Internet when we hadn't, didn't have any connections." Another teacher attested to experiencing technical issues related to online teaching. He depicted an instance with the Internet connection. In his words:

A few times, I had problems with Internet in my area. And I was about I had, I had to put a quiz exact time. And I didn't have Internet, so I had to rush to school to use school Internet to put up the quiz.

The remaining sources of stress were equal in their frequency of occurrence, therefore, only some of them will be briefly illustrated. One teacher recalled experiencing stress due to the inability to control what is going on in the outside world while she was conducting an online class. She distinctly remembered a situation when her neighbors were remodeling their apartment.

According to her:

[...] the drill was so loud, I mean, I just had to turn off my mic, and I sent them [students] a message. Okay, well do this task, please. I'm very sorry, I hope in five minutes you will be able to hear me. That was the only thing that I could do. I mean, I can't really change it.

Another source of stress was related to student testing and grading. Specifically, one teacher recalled a stressful and somewhat shocking event – after administering and evaluating the tests she realized that the students in one class had scored practically the same results. She described her emotional episode as “I was really desperate. And I started crying, and I didn't know what to do. And I said, now it's the end, I really don't want to do this anymore.”

Table 17: Causes of stress related to online teaching

YES	Fre- quency	NO	Fre- quency
Technical issues	2	No expla- nation was pro- vided.	1
Not knowing if the students really ac- quired the content	1		
Inability to control things in the out- side world	1		
Not seeing students' faces online	1		
Spending long hours in front of the computer	1		
Testing and grading students	1		
Communicating with parents outside of working hours	1		

4.4.3. Teacher coping mechanisms

Q11: Have you made an active effort to deal with online teaching challenges?

The majority of the teachers (6) made an active effort to cope with the challenges of online teaching. Only one teacher admitted to not having invested any effort into changing their situation. Their responses were categorized into three clusters, namely introducing new teaching approaches/content, providing corrective feedback, and miscellaneous (Table 18). Regarding the first category, teachers attempted to introduce different tasks and games to their online classes. Moreover, they did their best to adopt a different approach to lesson planning, as well as explore various online teaching tools. One teacher admitted to making a significant effort to reduce the burden of online teaching. She explained that:

[...] I changed, almost completely the way I not completely, but a big part of it,

how I prepared for the lesson. I mean, it was different. And when I go to school in the morning, and I'm back at one o'clock, I feel as, I mean, I could say as I was somewhere in the park, chatting with my colleagues. It really, let's say, doesn't make me tired.

Another teacher recalled making an active effort in the form of seeking out new online content and tools to improve his teaching. He responded that he:

[...] did make an active effort because I looked for different types of programs to make things more interesting for children... tried to make, to use different types of tasks to combine them, to make it more interesting to them, [...]

Regarding providing corrective feedback in class, one teacher recounted trying to be specific and aiding her students as much as possible. She said that "I gave them instant feedback. I was supporting and helpful." Another teacher described her process of dealing with online challenges. She made herself available, provided feedback, and explained that learners:

[...] have a habit of contacting you whenever they have a problem or they're not certain about something. There's much more work when it comes to communication and explaining since you do everything, many more times than you would usually do in a classroom.

Table 18: An active effort to deal with online teaching challenges

YES	Frequency	NO	Frequency
Introducing new teaching approaches/content	5	I went with the flow.	1
Providing (corrective) feedback	2		
Miscellaneous	1		

Q12: Have you used any particular strategies to deal with online teaching? If so, which ones?

Most teachers in the study (4) recounted utilizing specific strategies to help them deal with online teaching. A smaller number (3) reported not having used any strategies to that effect (Table 19). Regarding the larger sample of teachers, their responses revolved around strategies such as adjusting the expectations of their students, reaching out to international colleagues with the aim of seeing how they are coping, involving students in interesting projects, and venting to their colleagues. Given that all examples are the same in their frequency of occurrence, only some will be elaborated on. Regarding modifying expectations, one teacher explained that:

The strategy is not to expect the same as in the classroom, to see that some students are completely, especially in the vocational school, that some of them are really completely lost, that they didn't know how to, or that they don't know how to

record themselves, how to send me that assignment [...]

Another example encompasses both venting to colleagues and communicating with international colleagues. Given that it was a single teacher that introduced them, her detailed recollection is provided below. When asked how she coped with online teaching, she answered:

Umm, well, venting to my colleagues, that always helps. I mean, no one else understands, other than your colleagues. Also, talking to colleagues from other countries, which I was able to do because I am involved in a few projects, international ones. And sometimes it really helps you because you see that there are people, there are countries where they have it worse than you do.

Table 19. Strategies for dealing with online teaching

YES	Frequency	NO	Frequency
Adjusted expectations of their students	1	No particular strategies were used.	3
Vented to colleagues	1		
Communicated with international colleagues	1		
Reduced the number of classes per week	1		
Gave students interesting projects	1		

Q13: Have you been doing any other activities to help take your mind off things?

According to the findings, the majority of the teachers (5) admitted engaging in various activities that allowed them to redirect their attention from online teaching. A smaller number of teachers did not seem to partake in any coping activities (2). The proactive teachers revealed a number of diverse activities, including exercising, spending time outdoors, doing yoga, or listening to music. To briefly reflect on the most frequent examples, several teachers engaged in physical activity to offset the negative effects of online teaching. One teacher said that "I was exercising, driving the bike a lot more, just to go outside and relax and put my mind off school and any other work." Another teacher admitted using several activities, such as "I'm just, also finding time to watch my favorite shows, to go for a walk. I don't, taking up physical activity. Also, spending time with my dog, and in most cases, it really helps to vent with your colleagues." One teacher recounted her frequent nature visits, as well as doing yoga. She admitted that "Yes, I walked a lot. And I did yoga. It really helped me a lot." The results can be seen in Table 20.

Table 20: Activities that help teachers take their mind off things

YES	Fre- quency	NO	Fre- quency
Exercising	4	None	2
Going outside	4		
Riding a bike	1		
Yoga	1		
Turning off the Internet overnight	1		
Listening to music	1		
Spending time with pets	1		
Watching TV shows	1		
Venting	1		

Q14: Have you given up attempting to deal with the current situation?

The findings indicated that the majority of the teachers (6) had not given up trying to deal with the situation at hand. In other words, despite the challenging circumstances related to online teaching, they found ways to cope. Conversely, one teacher was unable to see a viable solution. She felt as if she had been banging her head against a wall. When reviewing the results (Table 21), the most prominent examples are tied to the teachers' need/desire to deal with the situation at hand, as well as expending effort in making things better for their students. In terms of handling the online teaching situation, one teacher simply responded: "I will deal with it. And I think I'm dealing with it...." This was reflected in another teacher's statement. She said that "There is no choice. So, I do have to teach, I do have to give them grades, I do have to check homework. So, whatever the situation is, so I have to deal with it. One teacher, for instance, strived to motivate their learners by encouraging their participation. In her own words:

[...] I am still doing my best to motivate them with plusses, that really helped. Like, if they're active at an online class, they get a plus. And if they collect, I don't know, certain number of clusters, they can get a grade for that. For those students who really wanted to get their grades up, they were active during online lessons.

Table 21: Giving up attempting to deal with the current situation

YES	Fre- quency	NO	Fre- quency
No visible solution	1	Dealing with it	2
		Trying to make things better for students	2
		Being a fighter	1
		The current situation has had no effect on teacher	1

Q15: If you had to give your colleagues some advice on how to manage the online teaching situation better, what would you tell them? Your advice may be directed toward novice, as well as more experienced teachers.

The teachers in this study offered different pieces of advice to their colleagues. Given the nature of this question, their responses are listed and not presented in a table. The participants used the following starter to share their wisdom – 'I would tell them to:

- adjust the expectations you have of your learners
- include your learners in the decision-making process (check with them what works and doesn't work)
- set clear boundaries with the learners and their parents (in terms of behavior and correspondence)
- engage your learners during class
- make things easier on your learners and remember yours is not the only school subject they have
- try to make things interesting and ask for your learners' feedback
- be mindful of their mental health
- involve the community, alongside your learners, in the teaching process
- relax, try to have fun, and be patient with your learners
- motivate learners through various activities that promote language learning
- not be overly eager'

5. Discussion

The general aim of this study was to examine EFL teachers' attitudes toward online teaching and learning, their professional well-being, as well as the coping strategies employed to deal with the challenges of online teaching. The discussion of the findings is organized around the three major factors, namely the teachers' attitudes toward online instruction and learning, their professional well-being, the use of coping strategies, as well as differences and relationships among the variables.

5.1. *Teachers' attitudes toward online teaching and learning*

The results of the quantitative analysis indicated that Croatian EFL teachers generally had a positive attitude toward online teaching, appreciated its advantages, and acknowledged the importance of being digitally competent. The qualitative results also confirmed positive attitudes towards online teaching and revealed aspects such as increased learner participation (especially shy students), dynamic and engaging lessons through the use of online sources, as well as positive learning experiences for learners (it was fun for

them), as some of the positive elements of online teaching. These findings are similar to other studies focusing on online learning during the pandemic in different contexts. For example, Civelek et al. (2021) found that Turkish EFL teachers had positive attitudes toward online teaching during the Covid-19 outbreak when it came to aspects such as increased usage of multimedia and materials, the development of their computer competence, as well as the cost-effectiveness of online teaching. Moreover, Khatoony et al. (2020) found that EFL teachers considered the use of technology as an important instructional tool during the Covid-19 pandemic in Iran. The second factor on the Attitudes scale addressed the issue of classroom versus online teaching. The results showed a low average indicating that teachers did not perceive online teaching to be more interesting than classroom teaching, student participation was in fact more prominent in the classroom, and student progress could be monitored more efficiently in the classroom to name only a few of the statements on this sub-scale. All of the teachers in the interviews substantiated the view that classroom teaching is better than online teaching citing better teacher-student interaction and rapport in the classroom along with more accessible monitoring and assessment as advantages. The lack of interaction was also cited as a major challenge to online teaching later in the interview. These results are similar to the study carried out by Civelek et al. (2021) who found that L2 teachers were concerned about aspects such as student motivation, equal opportunities to learn English, and student interaction in online learning during the pandemic. Sadeghi et al.'s (2014) investigation also showed teachers' concerns about the lack of interaction in online L2 teaching. Housseine and Kabba (2020) focused on Moroccan teachers' attitudes toward online teaching, and the authors also found the lack of interaction to be a challenge during the pandemic. The teachers in the interviews in this study also stated that some of the negative aspects of online teaching, included student behaviour (cheating on tests, irresponsible behaviour, and lack of participation by some learners). Technical issues, for example, a bad internet connection, a lack of access to a computer, or a power outage were also considered some of the problems with online learning. Likewise, technical issues were also found to be a major challenge noted by teachers in studies carried out by Civelek et al. (2021), Housseine & Kabba (2020), and Sari et al. (2017).

Concerning proficiency in handling online teaching, the teachers' responses were somewhat cautious. It appears that teachers felt moderately confident in teaching online, preparing videos, and using different platforms and tools. The majority of interviewed teachers, on the other hand, showed greater confidence in their abilities to teach online with only two teachers expressing stress with online teaching. The relatively low number of interviewed teachers (7) needs to be taken into consideration when viewing these results. The fourth factor in the questionnaire addressed teachers' knowledge of technological reforms which also showed a somewhat moderate average.

Teachers were undecided or unsure about their knowledge of different tools for use in online classes, their command of Google Workspace, and their ability to stay updated with new technological innovations in the field of teaching. Some studies (Alanazy, 2017) have suggested that attitudes toward online learning and teaching can be influenced by teachers' computer competency, which may indicate that Croatian teachers are in need of more training to help increase more positive attitudes toward online teaching. Nevertheless, a need for more technical knowledge for online teaching during the pandemic appears to have been an issue for L2/EFL teachers worldwide as several studies showed similar concerns as shown in studies carried out in Turkey (Civelek et al., 2021), Iran (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020), and Indonesia (Nugroho & Mutiaraningrum, 2020).

5.2. Teachers' professional well-being

According to the findings collected through the online questionnaire, EFL teachers' online workload had a more negative than positive impact on their professional well-being. Workload well-being was defined by various teacher duties, such as time management, marking, and administrative work. Several studies have investigated L2 teachers' well-being, specifically, elements such as perceived stressors, and coping strategies. For example, Gregersen et al. (2020) focused on teacher workload and reported that it was a notable stressor for L2 teachers in their study which was based on case studies. According to their findings, teacher workload appeared to be a potent stressor for several of their participants who recounted high levels of stress due to workload that called for long or irregular working hours, as well as a lack of control over work-related situations. The heavy workload was also underscored by MacIntyre et al. (2020) in their study on an international sample of L2 teachers' coping strategies while teaching online during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the findings, the most prominent stressors among teachers were the workload, family health, and loss of control over work. Similar stressors were also emphasized in an earlier study carried out by MacIntyre et al. (2019) on stressors, personality, and well-being among L2 teachers at the university level. When focusing on the teachers' stressors, the findings uncovered several factors tightly related to their work, such as workload, financial stress, irregular hours, and lack of control over situations at work. These findings correlate to the findings in this study as it appears that the language teachers in Croatia and abroad generally find it difficult to maintain their sense of well-being while contending with the heavy workload, and a shifting working climate.

In addition, the effect of organizational aspects related to online teaching was investigated. Specifically, the respondents in this study revealed that their relationship with their administrators, the (non)existing school policy

during the pandemic, as well as (not)getting recognition for their efforts, affected their professional well-being more negatively than positively. In terms of organizational well-being and interaction with students, these were also noted by different authors when discussing teacher well-being. Using semi-structured interviews, Babić et al.'s study (2022) was aimed at exploring the well-being and needs of L2 teachers coming from different countries at different levels. They found issues such as workplace culture, including work support systems, atmosphere, teacher autonomy, hierarchy, as well as social relationships, and sense of meaning and purpose to be important elements related to teacher well-being which are somewhat similar issues found to affect teacher well-being in this study. The last factor that appeared to be significant in regard to the teachers' well-being in this study was their relationship with the students. The findings related to this particular element pointed more toward the negative end of the scale, meaning that the teachers' sense of well-being was negatively affected by their students' demeanor, motivation, and overall ability to manage the online classroom. The semi-structured interviews shed more light on teachers' well-being and revealed that the participants' sense of well-being was somewhat negatively affected by the preparation of online classes, marking students' work, and corresponding with students/parents (all of which fall under the category of teacher workload). Regarding the relationship between student interaction and teacher well-being, Japanese teachers in Talbot and Mercer's study (2018) believed that their students both contributed and detracted from their emotional well-being. They explained that students are viewed as a positive factor when they evoke pleasant emotions in their interactions, or when they provide positive written feedback to the teacher. On the other hand, they are viewed as a detracting factor when they show minimal interest or barely engage in the teaching process. These findings are similar to the results of this study which showed student motivation to be a factor contributing to teachers' well-being, as well as teacher-student rapport.

5.3. Teachers' coping strategies

The results of the online questionnaire revolved around four types of coping strategies, such as active coping and planning (approach strategies), as well as self-distraction, and behavioral disengagement (avoidant strategies). According to the findings, Croatian EFL teachers attempted to actively cope with the challenges of online teaching by making the most of the situation at hand; in addition, they engaged in active planning and pursued strategies to contend with online teaching. When it comes to self-distraction, the results suggested that the teachers engaged in self-distraction (e.g., doing activities to take their minds off of things) up to a certain extent, while the results regarding behavioral disengagement indicated that teachers had not given up in

attempting to cope with the predicament at hand. These findings were also supported by those collected from the interviews. When asked if they had made an active effort to deal with online teaching, the majority of the respondents replied positively, stating that they tried to either introduce new teaching approaches/content or provide corrective feedback for their students. Concerning specific strategies and activities intended to cope with online teaching, the teachers revealed various examples, such as trying to adjust their expectations, venting to colleagues, and involving students in interesting projects. Additionally, when inquired about the activities they perform to take their minds off things (a form of self-distraction), several of them recounted exercising, going outside, riding a bike, spending time with pets, or simply going off the grid. Lastly, when asked if they had given up attempting to deal with their current situation (noted earlier as behavioral disengagement), most of the teachers said no, adding that they are still trying to make things better for themselves and their students.

Similar results were found in several studies with regard to L2 teachers' coping strategies. For example, MacIntyre et al.'s (2020) study on an international sample of L2 teachers' coping strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic revealed that teachers mainly employed approach coping strategies, such as acceptance, planning, and reframing; conversely, they infrequently utilized avoidant coping strategies, such as disengagement and denial. The authors highlight the fact that the teachers exhibited a tendency to actively cope to accept their predicament, then handle it by engaging in different activities. Using Carver's (1997) framework, Talbot and Mercer's (2018) study explored language teachers' emotional self-regulation strategies, among other things. The teachers in their study made an active effort to counteract the unpleasant effect of negative events by using strategies such as cognitive reappraisal (similar to Carver's positive reframing), self-comparison, and problem-directed action (which corresponds to Gross's situation modification and Carver's active coping). Ghanbari and Nowroozi's (2022) study with Iranian EFL teachers teaching at the tertiary level suggested different coping solutions for dealing with online teaching challenges, which were similar to the results of this study. While Iranian teachers, for instance, actively coped with technological issues (e.g., breaking connections) by using synchronous and asynchronous devices to maintain the teaching flow, they also acquainted themselves with the online environment and assumed new teacher roles. Furthermore, to alleviate the mental burden on themselves and their students, they also reached out to other teachers and did their best to accept the use of social media in both professional and personal domains. Gregersen et al. (2020) also reported that several language teachers stressed certain uplifts (as opposed to previously discussed stressors), such as doing sports, engaging in hobbies, maintaining social interaction, and exercising as ways of dealing with the stress of teaching.

5.4. Differences among teachers

The second research question addressed the issue of differences among teachers regarding their attitudes toward online teaching and learning, their well-being, and coping strategies. The results of the t-tests showed no significant differences in the Attitudes' and the Well-being sub-scales among gender. However, significant differences were found on the Coping scale, specifically, with regard to the approach strategies used by the teachers. Females showed higher mean averages on the active coping and planning scales compared to males. In other words, females indicated a higher level of effort in actively coping with online learning and made more of an effort to make strategies to deal with the situation. Somewhat similar findings were reported by Klapproth et al. (2020) in their study of teacher experiences and coping strategies employed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their results indicated that female teachers engaged in functional coping strategies more frequently than male teachers. On the other hand, there were no significant differences between the two groups concerning the employment of dysfunctional coping strategies. Contrary to our findings, Jelińska and Paradowski (2021) found no statistically significant differences between male and female teachers in their use of coping strategies related to technological issues while teaching online. It is interesting to note that while Croatian female EFL teachers in this study fully engaged with the challenges presented, female participants in their study seemed to struggle with the process of adjusting to online teaching.

Using an ANOVA analysis, no significant differences in attitudes toward online learning and teacher well-being were found between teachers in primary schools, secondary schools, universities, and foreign language schools suggesting uniformity in attitudes among Croatian EFL teachers on these issues. In contrast, Gururaja's study (2021) showed more positive attitudes toward the use of technology among secondary school teachers compared to primary school teachers. As shown, although significant differences were found on three factors in the Coping scale (Active coping, Planning, behavioral disengagement), it was not possible to discern where the differences were due to the lack of a sufficient number of cases.

5.5. Relationships between variables

The correlation analyses showed several significant differences between age, years of teaching experience, and several of the sub-scales. Notably, older teachers appeared to struggle more with actively coping with online teaching. Moreover, teachers with more experience were more negative toward their perception of their technical knowledge, and the assistance provided by the administration, and they were not prone to self-distraction. Nevertheless, older teachers and those with more experience were resilient in the sense that

they were not ready to give up trying to deal with the situation. However, it must be noted that the relationships between all these variables were weak and considered negligible due to the low Pearson coefficients.

5.6. Limitations of the study

Several aspects of this research need to be taken into consideration which may limit the conclusions. Namely, although numerous EFL teachers were gathered from across Croatia for the questionnaire, a larger sample could have yielded more information on the subject matter. In addition, the qualitative portion of the research would have also benefited from a larger pool of language teachers whose varied experiences and insight might have supplied rich data. Moreover, while the cross-sectional nature of this research gave insight into the subject matter at hand, longitudinal research might have revealed the dynamics of the variables investigated, i.e., if and how the teachers' attitudes changed over time, what other factors shaped their subjective sense of well-being, and whether language teachers resorted to other coping strategies during certain periods.

6. Conclusion

The major aims of this study were to address the issues of teachers' attitudes, well-being, and coping strategies regarding online teaching within the context of the new teaching situation that language teachers had to deal with during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, differences, as well as relationships between variables were considered. The results indicated that the participants in the study, who were Croatian EFL teachers, recognized the benefits of online teaching and the importance of being digitally competent; however, they prefer real classrooms, stating several disadvantages of online learning, including a lack of adequate student-teacher interaction and rapport, problems with assessment (cheating), as well as technical problems. Moreover, teachers were ambivalent with regard to their ability and confidence in dealing with online teaching and acknowledged the need to expand their IT knowledge, although exceptions were also noted. As to the issue of how online teaching affected teacher well-being, teachers responded more negatively than positively when it came to workload well-being (marking, time-management, administrative work), organizational well-being (relations with administrators, recognition for effort, school procedures during the pandemic), as well as student interaction well-being (student behavior during online classes, relations with students online, student motivation and participation, online classroom management). The teachers stated in the interviews that preparation for online classes and marking affected their well-being the

most, and the majority believed they obtained adequate support from schools and the Ministry, while technical difficulties were shown to be the most stressful factor in online teaching. Croatian EFL teachers showed high levels of active coping and planning strategies (approach strategies) to help them deal with the new situation they found themselves in; conversely, avoidant strategies such as self-distraction as a coping strategy were somewhat less used, while behavioral disengagement was quite low. The teachers in the interviews confirmed these results and shared some of the ways that they dealt with the situation, for example, by introducing new tasks and games, changing their lesson planning, and using online tools. The major difference to be noted among teachers included gender differences regarding coping strategies. Namely, females showed higher effort when it came to actively coping with the situation that they found themselves in and used more strategies.

In brief, the study showed several interesting results regarding online EFL teaching. Although Croatian EFL teachers attempted to cope with the situation posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, several challenges were noted, including a decrease in teacher well-being and the legitimacy of academic achievement brought on by the question of student honesty in assessment procedures. In the end, most teachers agreed that in-person language teaching is more preferable and efficient compared to online teaching. The results can be viewed as a reflection of EFL teachers' attitudes toward online teaching in a specific context. However, further research is needed in this area. It could, perhaps, focus on similarities and differences in perceptions of other EFL teachers in different countries. Moreover, if EFL teachers are found in a similar situation in the future, the study can possibly inform policy planners and education stakeholders about the need to ensure adequate support systems.

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