FROM ON-SITE TO ONLINE AND BACK AGAIN: INTERPRETER TRAINING AT ISCAP BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 has changed our way of life as a society, affecting many professional sectors. In this sense, educational institutions in general were also forced to change their teaching methodologies and strategies. From the outset, there was a need to transfer *curricula* designed for in-person teaching to a fully online model. Particularly in the case of interpreter training at ISCAP-Porto Polytechnic, which requires a significant practical component in laboratory and simulation environments in professional settings (*auditoria*, meeting rooms, etc.), this transition unexpectedly deemed impossible several specific features of two interpreting course units precisely with these characteristics. However, having followed the evolution of videoconferencing technologies for over a decade, the authors, as teachers of the course unit Teleconference and Remote Interpreting, were already experienced in using this type of tools for teaching interpreting. This contributed positively to the rapid adaptation of a teaching model for the various interpretation courses, allowing for the virtually uninterrupted continuation of teaching activities in synchronous classes. Classroom activities continued under these circumstances

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until the end of the academic year 2020-2021, returning to in-person teaching in the following school year.

This paper will discuss various constraints caused to interpreter training by the measures implemented by the Portuguese health authorities to combat the pandemic and how attempts were made to mitigate any damage to the objectives defined in the teaching-learning process in interpreter training. The results of two surveys conducted among students will be presented, focusing mainly on expectations and ways of overcoming difficulties caused by a teaching model adapted to these unexpected circumstances. In retrospect, we will show which methodologies adopted during the pandemic can now be applied in the classroom, thus enhancing the range of tools, resources, activities and teaching methodologies available after the return to in-person teaching.

Keywords: Interpreting Training, Remote Interpreting, Videoconferencing Tools, Distance Interpreting Training, COVID-19.

Resumo

A pandemia causada pela COVID-19 veio alterar o nosso modo de vida enquanto sociedade, afetando muitos setores de atividade profissional. Neste sentido, também as instituições de ensino, de uma forma geral, se viram obrigadas a alterar metodologias e estratégias pedagógicas. Desde logo, houve a necessidade de transpor *curricula* vocacionados para ensino presencial para um modelo totalmente online. Particularmente no ensino da interpretação no ISCAP-Politécnico do Porto, com uma componente prática significativa em ambientes laboratorial e de simulação em cenários profissionais (auditórios, salas de reunião, etc.), esta transição anulou inesperadamente diversas especificidades de duas unidades curriculares de interpretação precisamente com essas mesmas características. Contudo, e tendo acompanhado a respetiva evolução de tecnologias de videoconferência há já mais de uma década, os autores, enquanto docentes da unidade curricular Interpretação Remota e de

Teleconferência, possuíam já experiência na utilização deste tipo de ferramentas para o ensino de interpretação. Este facto contribuiu positivamente para uma rápida adaptação de um modelo de ensino das diversas UC de Interpretação permitindo, neste contexto, a continuidade praticamente ininterrupta das respetivas atividades letivas em aulas síncronas. As atividades letivas prolongaram-se nestas circunstâncias até ao final do ano letivo 2020-2021, tendo regressado ao regime presencial na totalidade no ano letivo seguinte.

Neste artigo discutir-se-ão diversas condicionantes causadas na formação em interpretação pelas medidas implementadas pelas autoridades sanitárias portuguesas no combate à pandemia e a forma como se procurou mitigar eventuais prejuízos nos objetivos definidos no âmbito do processo ensino-aprendizagem na formação em interpretação. Apresentar-se-ão os resultados de dois inquéritos realizados com estudantes focados principalmente em expetativas e em formas de ultrapassar as dificuldades causadas por um modelo de ensino adaptado àquelas circunstâncias inesperadas. Em retrospetiva, procurar-se-á explorar que metodologias adotadas no período pandémico podem ser aplicadas, de forma vantajosa, em atividades letivas depois do regresso ao regime de ensino presencial.

Palavras-chave: Formação em Interpretação, Interpretação Remota, Ferramentas de Videoconferência, Ensino de Interpretação a Distância, COVID-19.

1. Introduction

Interpreting has long been recognised as a highly practical discipline that requires extensive, hands-on training. In-person instruction has traditionally played a fundamental role in interpreter education, providing students with the opportunity to engage in direct practice, immediate feedback, and real-time interaction. Nevertheless, the steady development of videoconferencing technologies has expanded the feasibility of remote training. As Kalina and Barranco-Droege (2021) note, "[t]raining in conference interpreting has traditionally been provided on site, but distance courses are gaining ground" (p. 324).

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the interpreting field was undergoing a gradual technological transformation, which blurred traditional boundaries between translation, interpreting, and other language mediation practices (Carl & Braun, 2018).

Technological progress initially materialised through early forms of Distance Interpreting (DI), defined as the use of technology to connect interpreters working from different locations (Grieshofer, 2022, *apud* Uachave, 2023). The origins of this practice can be traced back to Telephone Interpreting (TI) in the 1970s, followed by early experiments with Remote Simultaneous Interpreting (RSI) carried out by several international organisations. Prior to 2020, however, DI was primarily employed in public service interpreting rather than in conference settings, where concerns about sound quality and technological reliability generated resistance (Braun, 2019; Saeed *et al.*, 2022). Despite these reservations, the progressive incorporation of technology into interpreter education opened new pedagogical opportunities. It became possible for aspiring interpreters to receive high-quality instruction from experts around the world and to participate in flexible learning formats which accommodated diverse personal and professional circumstances. At the same time, such flexibility introduced new pedagogical challenges, particularly the loss of immediate feedback and collaborative interaction, characteristic of traditional classroom environments. Without sustained real-time contact, students risk developing their competences in isolation, with fewer opportunities to refine accuracy, intercultural awareness, and communication strategies.

Curricula in interpreter education have historically emphasised practice over theory, as "[p]ractical skills development is prioritised in the *curriculum*, whereas training related to theory and research is considered peripheral" (Lee, 2022, p. 162). This practical orientation, while essential, may limit students' ability to adapt to evolving technological and professional contexts. A more balanced approach that integrates theory with applied training allows

learners to understand the underlying cognitive and communicative mechanisms of interpreting, strengthening their problem-solving and adaptability skills.

Against this backdrop, technology has increasingly influenced interpreter education through the development of Computer-Assisted Interpreter Training (CAIT) tools that also marked a turning point in how trainees learn. As Xu highlights, "[t]he frequently used technologies or technological tools in interpreting include videoconferencing technology, information communication and technology (ICT), web-based video platforms (e.g., YouTube), Speech Repository by the European Commission, speech banks, [and] digital recording technologies" (Xu, 2022, p. 406). These resources enable instructors to provide immediate performance feedback and offer students greater exposure to authentic linguistic material. Similarly, technologies such as digital pen can be used for both providing feedback in the classroom and teach techniques such as note-taking or hybrid interpreting (Orlando, 2015). Together, these tools reflect an evolving pedagogy that incorporates multimodal feedback and fosters learner autonomy.

Within the field of technology involved in the training of interpreters, Distance Interpreting Training (DIT) represents a specific pedagogical response to the geographic and institutional barriers traditionally associated with interpreter education. As Ko defines: "In the context of interpreter education, e-learning refers to teaching and learning interpreting using electronic devices" (Ko, 2015, p. 139). Through this mode, interpreters gain access to specialised training and collaborative opportunities that transcend physical borders. Yet DIT is not without challenges: "Students learning in an environment without visual interaction tend to perform less satisfactorily in terms of paralinguistic skills than those who learn face-to-face" (Ko, 2008 *apud ibidem*, p. 140). Maintaining engagement, simulating real-world interpreting pressure, and ensuring adequate feedback remain persistent concerns.

The COVID-19 pandemic radically accelerated the adoption of these technologies. "The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an abrupt transition to remote

instruction in many translation and interpreting programs" (Sawyer, 2022, p. 291). The crisis disrupted conventional teaching models and rendered in-person conference interpreting unfeasible: "The global health crisis created an abrupt breakdown of the conventional model, with the status quo of conference interpreting rendered impossible or heavily limited" (Jayes, 2023, p. 218), leading to "a sudden incompatibility between conventional operating practices and requirements on the ground" (*ibidem*, p. 219). For educators and students alike, this period demanded rapid adaptation to new platforms and the reconfiguration of pedagogical strategies. As Seeber and Fox note, "[t]he number of meetings mediated through online conferencing tools (e.g. AdobeConnect, Google Hangouts Meet, Skype, Webex, Zoom, etc.) skyrocketed […]" (Seeber & Fox, 2021, p. 500). Remote training thus became both a necessity and an opportunity for innovation, promoting digital literacy and highlighting the importance of flexibility in both teaching and learning.

As restrictions eased, interpreter training gradually returned to in-person formats, though the pedagogical landscape had been irrevocably altered. "[This] can be attributed to a return to normal routines, with the receding of lockdowns and a resurgence of in-person conferences" (Saeed, 2023, p. 167). Yet, as the same author further observes, "[r]emote assignments maintained a relatively higher frequency compared to the pre-COVID era, indicating a transformed landscape" (*ibidem*, p. 167). This persistence of remote practices suggests that the pandemic acted as a catalyst for permanent change, embedding technological competence as a core element of interpreter education.

Reflecting on this evolution, Sawyer argues that "[a]s the pandemic subsides and attention turns to the lessons learned from this public health crisis, questions arise about the experience with instruction during this period" (Sawyer, 2022, p. 291). Educators have since sought to identify which innovations from remote teaching should be retained and how best to integrate them into future *curricula*. In this context, blended learning approaches which combine advantages of digital and in-person methodologies have gained prominence.

Indeed, "[i]nstructors and students tended to view online instruction as a highly useful supplementary tool to in-person teaching" (*ibidem*, p. 306). This hybrid feature of interpreter education allows for greater accessibility and sustainability while preserving the authenticity of in-person practice.

The widespread adoption of technology has also led to broader acceptance of remote interpreting as a professional norm. "Based on the judgments expressed after […] the pandemic, most surveyed interpreters believe that remote interpreting will become a regular part of their professional practices" (Przepiórkowska, 2021, p. 153). Such acceptance underscores the necessity for training programmes to embed digital proficiency into their *curricula*. Carl and Braun foresee that "[t]he future is likely to bring an increase and diversification of teleconference and remote interpreting" (Carl & Braun, 2018, p. 39), adding that "[i]t will be important to investigate how the virtual spaces that these technologies create are able to support the development of 'presence' and the dynamic of the communication" (*ibidem*, p. 40). Technological awareness is therefore no longer supplementary but integral to professional identity and pedagogical design.

Defrancq states that this is an ongoing trend, remarking that "[i]t is likely that a substantial number of interpreters will be exposed to the technology in the near future" (Defrancq, 2023, p. 304). Incorporating these insights into interpreter education will ensure that future professionals can operate effectively in technologically mediated contexts while maintaining the cognitive and ethical standards that underpin the profession. Ultimately, the convergence of technology, pedagogy, and professional practice represents not merely a temporary adaptation but a lasting evolution in how interpreters are trained and how they will continue to shape multilingual communication in an increasingly digital world.

This paper will examine the evolution of interpreter training at ISCAP before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The first section provides an overview of the historical development and current curricular framework. The following section presents a detailed

account of the transition from in-person to exclusively online teaching during the lockdown period, describing the technological and pedagogical adjustments that enabled the continuity of interpreting classes. Subsequently, the research methodology is introduced, followed by the analysis and discussion of two surveys conducted with interpreter-training students: the first addressing their experience during remote instruction, and the second exploring their perceptions upon returning to in-person classes. The paper concludes by reflecting on the pedagogical lessons learned from both periods and by proposing ways in which technology and hybrid approaches may continue to enhance interpreter education in the post-pandemic context.

2. Interpreter Training at ISCAP – a brief overview

Interpreter training at ISCAP started in the academic year 1997/1998 under the pre-Bologna Bachelor's Program in Languages and Secretarial Skills, structured in two stages, i.e., three with two additional years (Bachelor's Degree with Honours). Over the span of these last two years, students engaged in course units primarily centred on Specialised Translation and Interpretation, comprising three different course units specifically devoted to interpreting across three semesters, namely Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpretation 1, 2, and 3. These course units featured a substantial number of hours in students' schedules, with the mandatory language combination of English-Portuguese and two optional combinations, namely French-Portuguese or German-Portuguese.

As a result of the Bologna Agreement, ISCAP restructured its *curriculum* and launched the new undergraduate degree in Administrative Assistance and Translation in 2006/2007. Apart from course units related to translation and foreign languages, students' training includes also two units in interpretation lectured during their third year, though limited to the English-Portuguese language combination and two semesters only.

The previous Bachelor's Degree with Honours – the above mentioned two additional years dedicated to training in Specialised Translation and Interpretation – was effectively converted into the current Master's Program with the same designation in the academic year 2007/2008. As regards interpreter training particularly during this cycle of studies, students undertook three distinct course units, namely Conference Interpreting, Liaison Interpreting, and Teleconference and Remote Interpreting. These were lectured simultaneously during the second semester of the first year within a 9-hour week schedule in total.

After a recent evaluation and restructuring process, three new course units related to interpreting are currently distributed throughout three different semesters: since the academic year 2023/2024, Interpreting 1 – similar to its predecessor Conference Interpreting – and Interpreting 2, dedicated also to teleconference and remote interpretation, are course units that have been and are lectured in three-hour sessions during the first year. Advanced Interpreting, a course unit in which students work during four hours per week in far more complex institutional environments and specialty scenarios (criminal proceedings, courtrooms, health care, finance, politics, etc.), is currently taught during the first semester of the second year.

Interpreter training has always been and still is mostly conducted in ISCAP's multimedia language laboratories with the use of computers and specific software – until 2004, it had been mainly provided by means of analogical equipment. Training, however, goes far beyond the classroom and occurs also inside our auditoriums equipped with interpreting booths, infrared interpreting consoles, radiofrequency-controlled microphones and receivers, etc. Students have then the opportunity during, for instance, mock conferences or meetings to put in practice skills acquired and learnt in class. Such activities occur in on-site or remote simulated scenarios for simultaneous and consecutive interpreting, involving occasionally a third working foreign language (French, German, Russian, or Spanish), so that relay simultaneous interpreting exercises can also be performed.

Interpreter training is also complemented with other practices. Through both its Languages Department and GAIE[3], the Office for Support to Innovation in Education, ISCAP provides language services (translation, interpretation, etc.) to the community. With the collaboration of its team of experienced translators and interpreters, ISCAP gives its current or former students – generally from the Masters in Specialised Translation and Interpretation – the opportunity to have their first professional experiences. These take place in controlled environments and under the supervision of professionals or faculty members, either within ISCAP's facilities or at different locations in which multilingual events are organised and take place[4].

3. Transitioning from on-site lectures at ISCAP to exclusively online classes

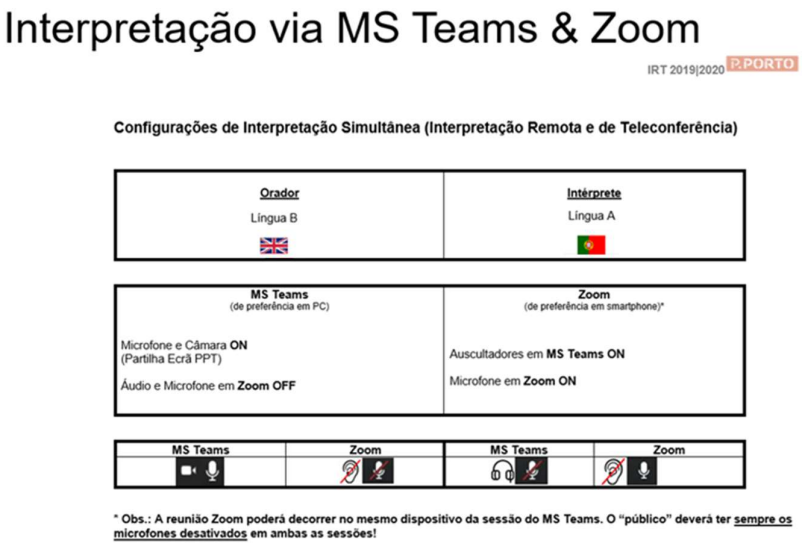
The current study will focus mainly on DIT sessions, in which scenarios for remote interpretation were created, utilising videoconferencing software, such as MS Teams and Zoom. The emphasis on remote interpretation throughout this study arises from the necessity to transition from in-person courses at ISCAP to delivering these from home due to the lockdown which resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite a one-week hiatus for the preparation of our online sessions in March 2020, interpreting lectures were provided without interruption. Intricate plans for both lecturers and students were rapidly established, utilising tools and resources not originally intended for interpretation services, such as MS Teams and Zoom – considering that, at the time, the language interpretation feature[5] was still not available on Zoom. The simultaneous use of the two distinct platforms was, however, essential for the implementation of class activities under such circumstances. That occurred especially during the simulation of usual mock

[3] Gabinete de Apoio à Inovação em Educação
[4] https://www.pea.iscap.ipp.pt/international-1/services/translation-and-interpretation
[5] Despite the fact that it had already been created, it was not put at the institution's disposal, which occurred only by the end of the semester.

conferences, in which students were supposed to deliver speeches individually while these were rendered each time by one of their peers into the target language in a simultaneous interpreting context – either from English into Portuguese, or vice-versa. To prevent disruptive interferences caused by a usually inadvertent wrong use of the equipment, students were provided with the necessary procedures indicating which individuals should have their specific devices such as cameras, microphones and/or headphones activated or deactivated. The rest of the class serving as an audience was advised to have their equipment completely deactivated, as highlighted in the following image:

Figure 1 – Simultaneous Interpretation using two distinct communication platforms

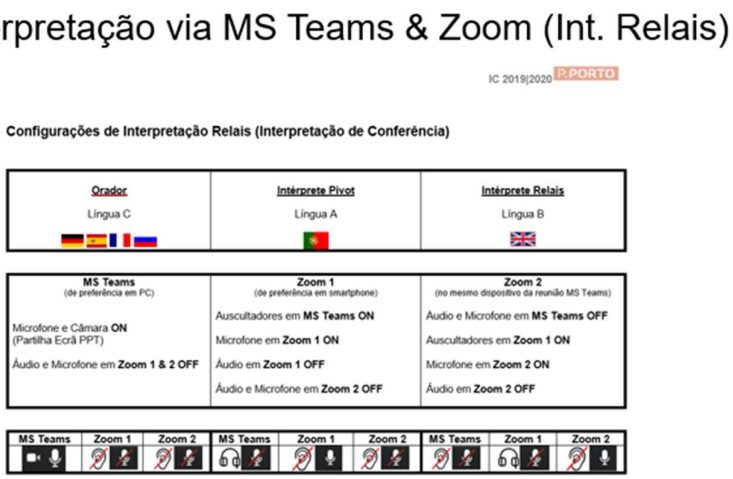


Source: Own elaboration

Initially, the creation of such schemes was helpful to better understand how to best set up and design sessions in which interpreting exercises needed to be performed. The use of the above-mentioned distinct software applications was, therefore, relatively uncomplicated. Establishing these setups was, however, even more crucial for mock conferences with relay interpretation tasks. Due to the complexity caused by the lecturers' and students' use of several devices and parallel sessions – at least three different ones on Zoom and MS Teams,

each one with distinct usernames and accounts – these procedures became essential to highlight which equipment needed to be activated or deactivated under those circumstances. Figure 2 shows how a configuration in this situation needed to be executed:

Figure 2 – Relay Simultaneous Interpretation using three distinct communication platforms



Source: Own elaboration

Student 1 (speaker) would deliver his/her speech through the MS-Teams-channel either in French, German, Russian, or Spanish, turning his/her camera and microphone on and sharing a PowerPoint presentation. In that situation, it was crucial to have both microphone and speakers deactivated on Zoom-sessions 1 and 2. In order not to cause any interference, the pivot interpreter (student 2) needed to turn off his/her microphone on the MS-Teams-channel. This student-interpreter had to activate his/her earphones on that same channel and to turn on a microphone on Zoom-session 1. All other devices needed to be deactivated. Relay interpretation from Portuguese into English was provided by a third student who accordingly only had to activate earphones on Zoom-session 1 and a microphone on Zoom-session 2.

A similar configuration needed to be set up by the lecturers at home while simultaneously assessing the students' performance during the delivery of their live, real-time

speeches and their interpretation tasks (pivot and relay). Such assessment was significantly simpler when students were instructed to upload their individual interpretation files on online folders shared with the lecturers, for instance, during continuous assessment tests or final exams. In such situations listening to only one singular voice, one at a time, was thereafter required.

4. Research Methodology

The transition from in-person interpreting lectures to fully online sessions, particularly in the two course units — Conference Interpreting and Liaison Interpreting — that were never intended for DIT delivery, motivated the present study. It examines how this unforeseen change affected the training of our interpreter-students. Fortunately, another course unit had always been included in the *curriculum* since the creation of the Master's Program, namely Teleconference and Remote Interpreting. Although this course unit had always been lectured inside ISCAP's language laboratories and never by distance mode, a long-term experience in the whole context of developing class activities simulating remote interpretation gave lecturers a better understanding on how to best transition from in-person to online lectures.

To assess and to have a better insight about the impact caused by the transition from in-person to online classes within the interpreter training offered at ISCAP, an initial survey addressed to a first group had been elaborated, i.e., a total number of 19 interpreter-students within the Master's Program in Specialised Translation and Interpretation who suddenly needed to attend interpreting classes from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a situation imposed during the second semester of the academic year 2019/2020. The questionnaire was focused on expectations and ways of overcoming difficulties caused by teaching methodologies suddenly adapted to unexpected circumstances.

Bearing in mind similar purposes, and to better understand student's reactions to returning to a normal situation, i.e., in-person classes without any further restrictions after a two-year lockdown, another questionnaire was later developed for a group 18 students who then had the privilege to benefit from classes provided on site in the academic year 2021/2022.

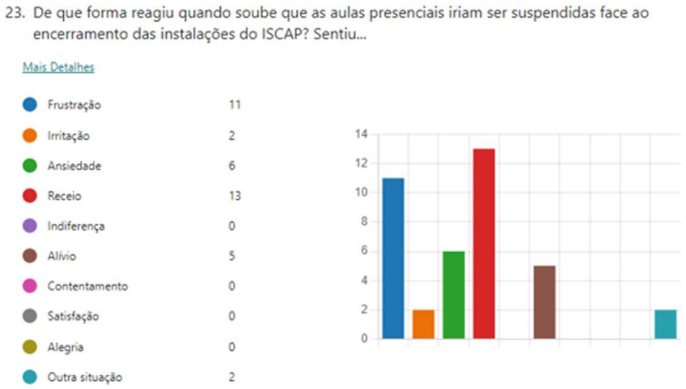
Both questionnaires were based on the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. While the first involve studies that require a more methodical experimental analysis of observable phenomena using numerically expressed methods, for instance in mathematical or even statistical terms, the latter examine non-numerical data and are therefore more descriptive (Mishra & Alok, 2017). Both questionnaires were placed on the Microsoft Office 365 Forms platform by the end of each semester in which the above-mentioned groups of students had interpreting classes, either from home or again inside ISCAP's multimedia language laboratories during the post-pandemic period. In this paper, our focus will mainly be directed on questions related to the (simultaneous) remote interpreting modality during both distinct periods.

5. Results

5.1 Results – Questionnaire 1

The first survey comprised a total of 32 questions. This section will closely examine matters relating to the pandemic period and its accompanying difficulties.

Figure 3 – Reactions to the rapid shift from in-person to online lectures



Question: How did you react when you learned that face-to-face classes would be suspended due to the closure of ISCAP facilities? Did you feel...
Options: Frustration; Anger; Anxiety; Apprehension; Indifference; Relief; Contentment; Satisfaction; Joy; Other situation.

The students' responses to the transition to an online format predominantly highlighted negative feelings, specifically frustration (11), anger (2), anxiety (6), and fear (13). Some students experienced relief (4), probably attributable to the opportunity for more consistent lecture attendance – given that many at this academic level hold part-time or full-time jobs throughout the day and had, therefore, the opportunity to attend more or even all classes. Another possible reason for highlighting this perspective could have been closely linked to less exposure to fellow students, hence minimising the risk of infection.

Other emotions emphasised by students were uncertainty (1) and mixed feelings related to the imposed shift of lectures taught (1) "*that, nevertheless, rapidly turned into ease, due to the fact that classes were conducted smoothly in a controlled environment created by the lecturers*" (anonymous student).

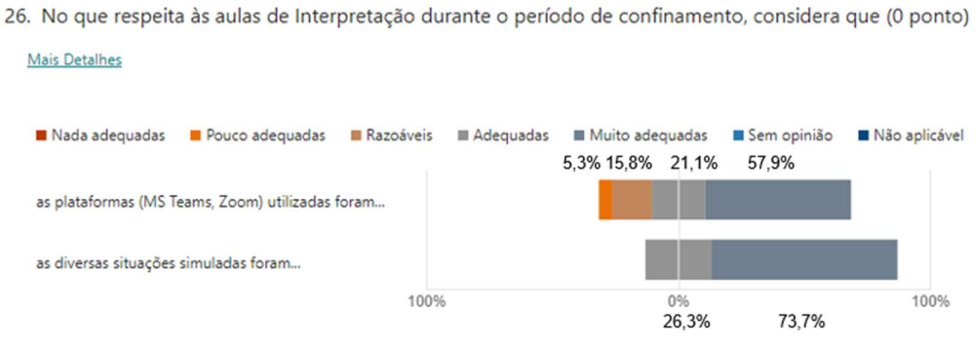
Figure 4 – Nature of online lectures during the lockdown

Question: With regard to the lockdown period, and taking into account the lessons taught online, did you ever think that the lessons could be…
Options: ... synchronous and exclusively theoretical?; ... asynchronous and exclusively practical?; ... synchronous and exclusively practical?; ... asynchronous and theoretical-practical classes?; ... synchronous and theoretical-practical classes?; ... asynchronous and exclusively theoretical? I don't know

Regarding lectures, a significant number of students anticipated that the sessions would be synchronous and theoretical-practical (8), rather than exclusively theoretical. Many others (7), however, were uncertain about their nature for the remainder of the semester, as indicated in the brown bar at the bottom of figure 4.

Figure 5 refers to the suitability of the utilised tools revealed by the group. Although platforms like MS Teams and/or Zoom were not originally intended for interpretation services. As noted above, only a minor percentage of students (slightly above 20%) considered these to be inappropriate or less appropriate for their lectures. Nonetheless, students typically deemed the simulated circumstances and scenarios (all conducted remotely) appropriate (26.3%) or very much appropriate (over 73%) for their training during the lockdown semester.

Figure 5 – Suitability of MS Teams and/or Zoom for interpreter training



Question: With regard to interpreting classes during lockdown, do you consider them
Options: The platforms (MS Teams, Zoom) used were...; The various simulated situations were...
Scale: Not at all suitable; Not very suitable; Reasonable; Suitable; Very suitable; No opinion; Not applicable

When asked about their stay during the lockdown period, most of the students (18) within the group stated to have remained at their own homes (figure 6), with just a small number of students (3) considering their facilities unsuitable for the interpreting tasks and activities organised for their training. The rest of the group stated that they had attended DIT lectures under reasonable (6), suitable (3), or very suitable (7) circumstances (figure 7).

Figure 6 – Type of accommodation chosen by students

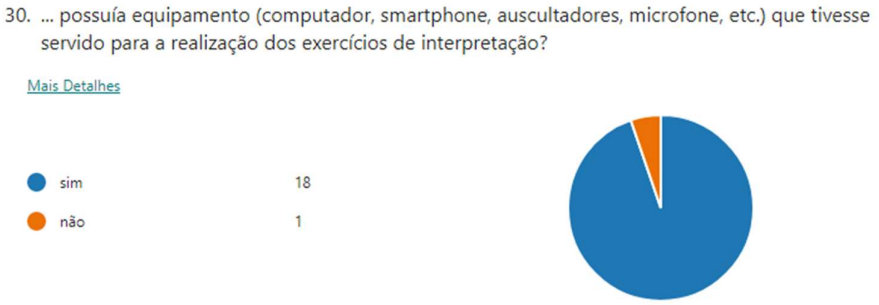
Question: Did you attend online sessions in ...
Options: Home; Colleagues'/friends' home; Neighbours' home; Other situation

Figure 7 – Suitability of facilities for interpreter training

Question: The conditions of the space you used were…
Options: Inadequate; Slightly adequate; Reasonable; Adequate; Highly adequate; No opinion

As regards personal equipment (computer, Internet connection, microphone, headphones, etc.), a significant number of students (18) possessed it prior to the lockdown period. These devices are commonly found in nearly every household, especially among individuals of their generation.

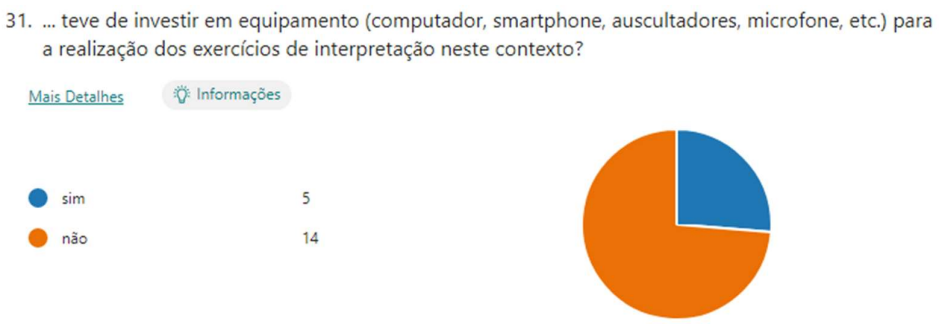
Figure 8 – Possession of equipment used for interpreter training



Question:... did you own equipment (computer, smartphone, headphones, microphone, etc.) that was used to perform the interpreting exercises?
Options: Yes; No

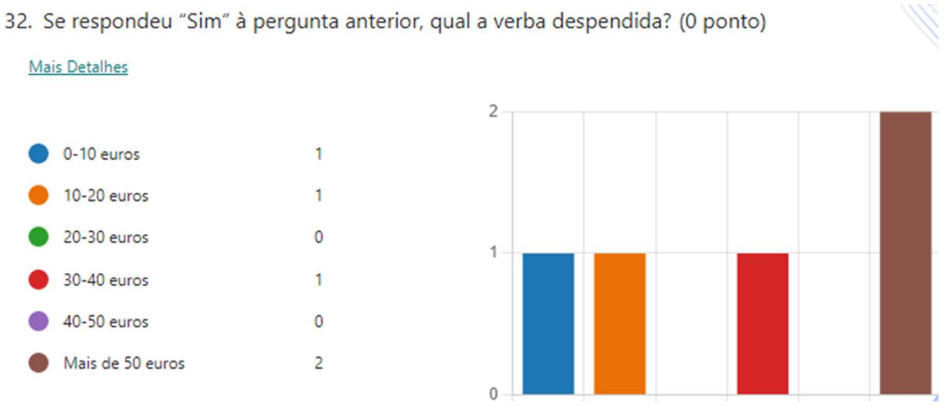
Only 1 member of the group did not possess such kind of equipment. Additionally, students were asked whether it was necessary for them to invest in diverse tools (figure 9). For 5 members of the group, it was a requirement to invest in appropriate devices, with 2 students incurring expenses of over 50 euros, to attend online lectures adequately. (figure 10). Other students (3) spent lower amounts of money on the acquisition of equipment.

Figure 9 – Requirement to invest in equipment for DIT



Question: ... did you have to invest in equipment (computer, smartphone, headphones, microphone, etc.) to perform the interpreting exercises in this context?
Options: Yes; No

Figure 10 – Amount of money spent on equipment



Question: If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, how much did you spend? (0 points)
Options: 0-10 euros; 10-20 euros; 20-30 euros; 30-40 euros; 40-50 euros; More than 50 euros

Finally, students were asked to provide qualitative feedback, emphasising both favourable and unfavourable elements concerning their DIT courses. On the one hand, positive feedback predominantly highlighted the uninterrupted resumption of lectures: "*The teachers of the interpreting courses did everything they could to ensure that we continued to learn and have beneficial lessons.*" (anonymous student). Several students also expressed that they felt they had performed remote interpreting tasks akin to real-world scenarios: "*Carrying out remote interpreting and teleconferencing exercises in a real environment and under real conditions*" or "*It was possible to carry out remote interpreting and teleconferencing exercises in a truly remote way, rather than just simulating them in the classroom*" (anonymous students).

On the other hand, negative aspects referred mainly to being absent from on-site interpreting contexts, such as simulated within the course units Conference and/or Liaison Interpreting: *"In terms of conference interpretation, the simulations were very different from reality"* (anonymous student). Notably, remarks concerning technical difficulties ("*Communication difficulties due to internet failures.*" *or* "*Internet failures were sometimes disturbing*" - anonymous students) and a sense of isolation were also observed, likely resulting in feelings of alienation due to the social distance from the classroom setting: "*No face-to-face interaction with colleagues and lecturers*" (anonymous student).

5.2 Brief discussion of results

The transition from in-person interpreting lectures to fully online instruction during the second semester of the 2019/2020 academic year represented a challenging and largely unprecedented shift for both students and lecturers. This abrupt change, occurring during a period of uncertainty, may have contributed to feelings of stress and apprehension among the students. The survey responses suggest a general sense of unease, as many participants reportedly experienced negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and frustration upon learning that all interpreting sessions would be delivered remotely. Some answers also indicate concerns about a potential loss of practical components, as several students seemed to fear that online classes might focus predominantly on theoretical aspects, possibly limiting opportunities for hands-on learning.

Almost half of the respondents considered the conditions under which they attended classes from home to be either unsuitable or merely reasonable. This perception could be partly related to the scheduling of evening classes, a period when household activity tends to increase, which may have led to background noise and interruptions that affected concentration. The challenges of sharing space and resources with family members might

also have made it more difficult to maintain the focused, professional environment typically required for interpreting practice.

Nevertheless, despite these potential obstacles, both students and lecturers apparently adjusted quickly to the new format, allowing teaching activities to continue and learning objectives to be largely maintained. These findings suggest that this period was characterised by adaptability and collective effort, as well as by the recognition that remote interpreting instruction – although not without its shortcomings – offered valuable insights into the flexibility and resilience required of professional interpreters.

Although most students responded positively to the scenarios simulated within their DIT lectures, experiencing real remote interpreting situations, technological issues and failures occurred. The fact of not being physically present in the classroom setting, in which usually a more immediate resolution of such problems is found, may have caused feelings of isolation and alienation. These are factors that align with reactions expressed by experienced professional interpreters when remote interpretation was implemented as a working method in numerous worldwide multilingual organisations (see, for instance, Moser-Mercer, 2003 & Mouzourakis, 2006).

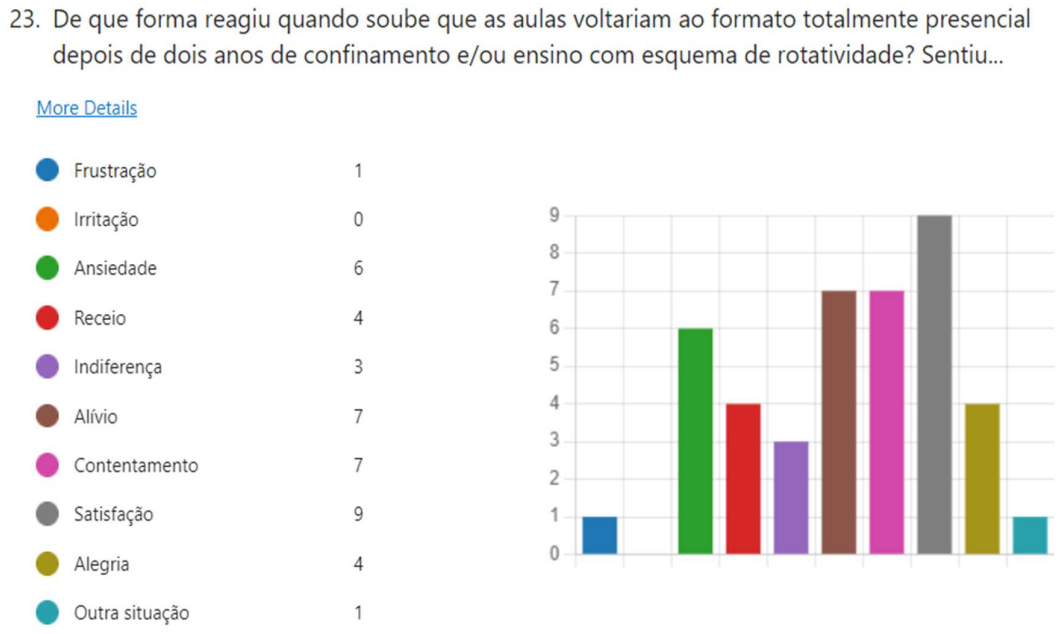
5.3 Results – Questionnaire 2

The return to in-person learning in the school year following the strict lockdown was welcomed with a lot of uncertainty by the academic community. Students and teachers alike were still getting reacquainted with onsite classes although with some restrictions still in force like the use of masks and other health and safety related procedures.

To assess the way students felt when returning to interpreting classes in the language labs, a second survey was carried out in which students were asked 31 questions related to this change. In this analysis we shall focus on the questions related to the impact caused by the return to in-person interpretation classes.

The first question referred to how students felt when getting the news that they would return to fully in-person classes.

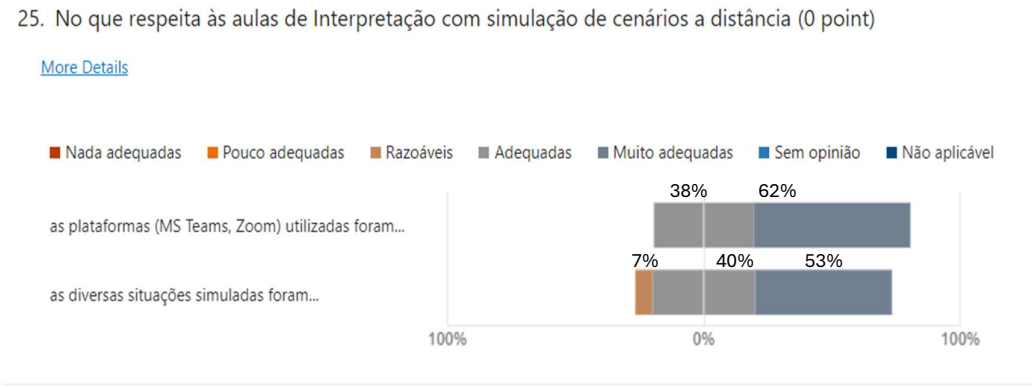
Figure 11 – Reactions to the return to in-person classes



Question: How did you feel when you learned that interpreting classes would return to a fully in-person format after two years of lockdown and/or a rotation-based teaching model? Did you feel…
Options: Frustration; Anger; Anxiety; Apprehension; Indifference; Relief; Contentment; Satisfaction; Joy; Other situation.

Most members of the group expressed appreciation for the restoration of interactive and practical components, particularly the opportunities to perform in live classroom and auditorium settings. Their reactions to the announcement of a complete return to in-person classes were predominantly positive. Satisfaction was the most frequently reported emotion (9), followed by relief and contentment (7 each). Feelings of anxiety (6) and apprehension (4) indicate some lingering uncertainty about the transition, while frustration (1) and indifference (3) remained marginal.

Figure 12 – Suitability of MS Teams and/or Zoom for DIT

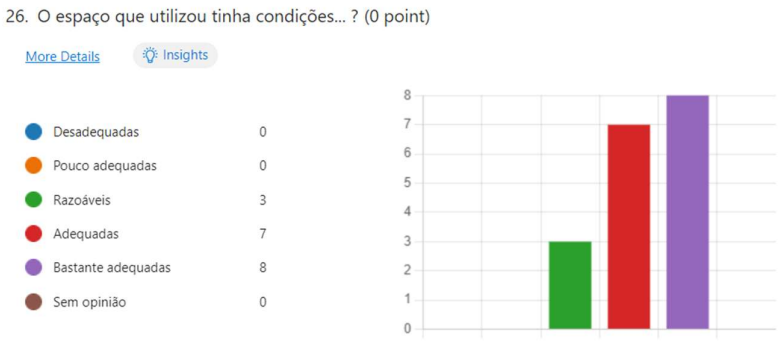


Question: Regarding interpreting classes with remote simulation of scenarios…
Options: The platforms (MS Teams, Zoom) used were...; The various simulated situations were...
Scale: Not at all suitable; Not very suitable; Reasonable; Suitable; Very suitable; No opinion; Not applicable

Despite the return to in-person classes, remote sessions to simulate this type of scenario were still carried out within the course unit Teleconference and Remote Interpreting. The group evaluated two components for classes or mock conferences simulated remotely, namely the used platforms (MS Teams and Zoom) and simulated scenarios accordingly. Responses for both sub-items were mostly in the categories adequate and highly adequate. This reveals that respondents generally liked the digital tools and training settings used during DIT lectures. Almost two-thirds of the group (62%) thought that the chosen platforms were useful and helpful for learning. Most students (93%) thought that the simulated scenarios were realistic and helpful for skill development. Only a small percentage of students (7%) found they were only reasonable (or slightly adequate), which suggests technical problems or limitations. Overall, the results show that students understood the educational value of remote simulations. A preference to practise in person was, however, emphasised for the most authentic experience.

The students were equally asked about the environment where they had to carry out their interpreting activities in online sessions. This aspect represents an important factor for remote interpreting, because interpreters must usually provide for the right working conditions and for the proper equipment.

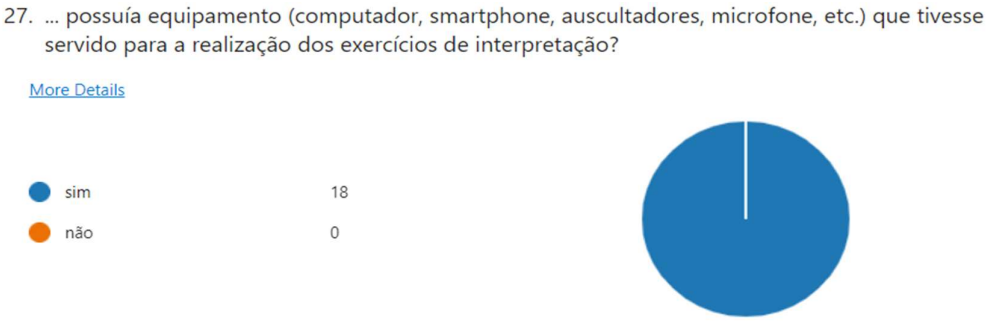
Figure 13 – Suitability of conditions for simulated remote sessions from home



Question: How would you classify the conditions of the space you used during the online sessions? Options: Inadequate; Slightly adequate; Reasonable; Adequate; Highly adequate; No opinion.

Most respondents (8) considered their working environment adequate or highly adequate, while others (5) found it merely reasonable. These results indicate that a majority were able to recreate acceptable interpreting settings at home, with appropriate acoustics, lighting, and privacy.

Figure 14 – Suitability of equipment used in simulated remote sessions from home



Question: Did you already have the necessary equipment (computer, smartphone, headset, microphone, etc.) to carry out the interpreting exercises?
Options: Yes; No.

All respondents stated that they already possessed the minimum equipment required to attend interpreting classes. This confirms a students' basic level of technological readiness after the pandemic period, reflecting both institutional guidance and the personal adjustments made during the remote-learning phase.

Only a small number of students (3) reported having invested in new equipment, with costs up to a maximum of 50 Euros, while the remaining members of the group (15) indicated that their existing devices were sufficient. This suggests that most students entered the post-pandemic phase already well-equipped, whereas a small minority sought to upgrade their setups.

5.4 Brief discussion of results

The survey reveals that the return to in-person interpreting training was widely welcomed and perceived as a return to pedagogical normality, though traces of apprehension and adaptation stress persisted. The data also show that digital methodologies introduced during the pandemic were generally valued, particularly remote platforms and scenario simulations, which students considered adequate complements to conventional classroom practice. Environmental and equipment-related questions indicate a good overall level of technological preparedness, with only limited additional expenditure required.

Moreover, the pandemic experience underscored the importance of resilience, adaptability, and digital literacy as essential skills for both students and instructors. These competencies are now part of the professional reality of interpreters, who must often work in technologically mediated environments.

The above results reinforce a key pedagogical insight: future interpreter-training programmes should maintain the core advantages of in-person instruction – immediacy, embodied interaction, and authentic communication – while integrating selective digital components that extend flexibility, foster independent learning, and mirror the hybrid contexts increasingly present in professional interpreting. The survey thus supports a vision of training that is both technologically informed and human-centred, preparing students to navigate the evolving realities of the current trends in interpreting practice.

6. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic forced ISCAP's interpreter training programmes to confront unprecedented challenges. Students experienced both opportunities and limitations: while digital tools provided continuity and flexibility, the absence of authentic, collaborative, and in-person practice exposed the inherent constraints of remote learning in interpreter training.

Nevertheless, the lessons learned have had a lasting impact. By integrating the most effective digital strategies into predominantly face-to-face *curricula*, interpreter training can now offer a more versatile and resilient educational model. In this sense, the crisis has accelerated innovation, opening pathways for a future in which traditional and digital methodologies complement one another in preparing interpreters for the evolving demands of their profession. The COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point for interpreter training at ISCAP, as it was in other institutions. It forced a quick switch from traditional, practice-based teaching methods to fully remote classrooms. What started out as an emergency response quickly turned into an unplanned test of new ideas. The sudden change showed both the weaknesses and strengths of interpreter education. It relies heavily on real-time, embodied practice and interpersonal interaction, but it can also adapt through creativity, technological skill, and collaboration between students and teachers.

Still, some benefits, such as more flexible attendance, more exposure to simulated RSI situations, and chances to learn technical skills that are now essential for interpreters could be noted. Our prior experience with teleconference and remote interpreting technologies helped the adaptation process go smoothly.

The return to in-person teaching showed that direct, immersive learning experiences are still important. Students emphasised the significance of direct interaction, peer collaboration, and live performance in cultivating professional interpreting proficiency. But the surveys also showed that some methods used during remote teaching, like online

simulations, digital assessment tools, and hybrid participation models, should not be discarded. Instead, they can be added to the curricula as extra parts that go beyond what is usually done in the classroom.

From an educational point of view, this experience teaches us a lot about how to teach interpreters. Firstly, digital literacy and the ability to adapt to new technologies should now be seen as important skills for interpreter training, not just extra ones. Future *curricula* must explicitly incorporate modules or tasks designed to equip students with the skills to operate professional remote interpreting platforms, resolve technical difficulties, and sustain professional performance in technologically mediated environments. Secondly, training programs should focus on teaching students how to be resilient and how to control their emotions, since remote and hybrid learning requires more independence and emotional control from students.

In the future, the pandemic's legacy will not be seen as a temporary diversion, but as a catalyst for methodological renewal. Interpreter training at ISCAP and similar institutions can now progress towards a more adaptable and inclusive framework that harmonises the invaluable depth of face-to-face interaction with the enhanced opportunities for remote collaboration. By keeping this balance, interpreter education can keep meeting the changing needs of a field that is becoming increasingly involved with both human skills and digital technology.

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