

‘Moving your language teaching online’ Toolkit: teachers’ early reflections on their experience and skills

Introduction

As the Covid-19 virus spread in spring 2020, educational institutions of all levels were forced to shut their doors, and conventional ways of teaching and learning were interrupted across the world for months or years (UNESCO, 2021). The need to uphold access to education led to a sudden move to online teaching. This new experience was challenging for many practitioners with no or little practice in online teaching, and particularly daunting and stressful for language teachers whose practice usually involves emphasis on interactivity and communication between teachers and learners, often perceived as more difficult online.

Internationally, language teachers sought support from the UK Open University (OU), where distance and online language teaching is long-established. In response, experienced online language teachers and researchers at the OU rapidly developed the ‘Moving your language teaching online’ Toolkit to assist Higher Education language teachers during the crisis. It was produced and shared as a free open digital resource (OpenLearn Create, 2020), and free workshops were organised online to share expertise and ideas, reflect on experiences and discuss good practice. The Toolkit was accessed and downloaded thousands of times, and nearly 200 teachers attended the free workshops in late 2020, confirming that the initiative met considerable demand.

This presented a unique opportunity for researchers to investigate the experience of a large cohort of practitioners moving to online teaching at scale and at pace. This chapter examines this through the analysis of the reflections of teachers collected during a ‘Moving your language teaching online’ workshop. With reference to the key principles of online language teaching which underpin the design of the Toolkit, and to Hampel and Stickler’s skills pyramid framework (2005), we examine how teachers perceived their proficiency in terms of online language teaching skills after the move to online teaching, how they experienced this move, and how they perceived their role as online language teachers during the crisis.

Key principles of online language teaching

Online language teaching is a long-established field, branching out from the wider and earlier field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) that has existed for over three decades and predates the emergence of online technology. Both fields also build on principles of distance education, developed well before computers became mainstream. This section outlines the principles of online and distance language teaching which underpinned the design of the ‘Moving your language teaching online’ Toolkit and structured the workshop discussions which form our research data.

Despite decades of successful implementation, CALL and online learning and teaching scholars sometimes feel that they have to defend their research or its definition (Levy and Hubbard, 2005) to colleagues in language studies and the humanities (Gillepsie, 2020). But due to the pandemic, language teachers now need knowledge of online learning and teaching principles to adapt to their new teaching environments.

Early work on teacher training and CALL focuses on establishing whether specific online pedagogy is needed when being assisted by a computer to teach languages. Colpaert (2006) suggests that there is no online pedagogy, arguing that teaching online forces us to reconsider our assumptions about language teaching, but that technology should not shape teaching methods. We agree with Colpaert, but in our experience technologies make new and different cognitive demands on teachers (Hampel and Stickler, 2005; Stickler and Hauck, 2006; Comas-Quinn, 2011). Even though language teaching pedagogy overall heavily relies on communicative and task-based approaches, teaching languages online requires factoring-in new elements. These can be grouped into the four key principles outlined below.

Defining online learning spaces

Language teaching today is mainly based on socio-cultural theories of learning informed by pedagogical principles such as interaction, collaboration, learner control and community (Beaven *et al.*, 2010). The online environment provides opportunities for a more learner-centred approach and increased interaction among students and between students and teachers, for socialising, communicating and collaborating. Students can work with peers and teachers but also with the wider world, accessing authentic online materials and communities or participating in virtual exchanges. The teacher's role in facilitating this is crucial. Teachers need to be aware that online environments provide potentially different spatial and temporal characteristics and different rules of engagement compared to face-to-face classrooms. Learning spaces (such as learning management systems, forums, and online rooms) need to be defined in order to avoid misunderstandings, confusion, or unacceptable behaviour (Stickler and Hampel, 2015).

Developing a teaching presence

Online environments change the nature of interactions between teacher, student and content, requiring a re-examination of teachers' roles in enhancing students' learning (Baran, 2011). As online students are expected to take greater control of their learning and actively stimulate their peers' learning, facilitation emerges as an important teacher role (Vetter, 2004; Comas-Quinn, 2011). While still focussing on their responsibilities as teachers in online courses, teachers move from being at the centre of the interaction and information to being 'animateur[s]' (Vetter, 2004), whilst the approach strongly shifts from instruction to knowledge construction (Stickler and Hauck, 2006). Teachers need to create a new identity for themselves in this environment, having to develop an online teaching presence that consists of designing and organising learning opportunities, providing timely information and direction, facilitating interaction, collaboration and reflection and offering support to learners, ensuring that the community of learners reaches the intended learning outcomes while responding to individual learners' needs. The teaching presence in online learning is a significant influential factor for student satisfaction (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes and Fung, 2010).

Integrating technology and pedagogy

Online environments are dynamic and multimodal. Technology-focused programmes, which consider that separate skills have to be required for different tools, have evolved into integrated approaches

encouraging teachers to engage in pedagogical problem-solving and exploration of online teaching and materials (Stickler and Hampel, 2015). Exploring the new affordances of online tools for synchronous and asynchronous communications, while understanding their constraints, can inspire language teachers to design innovative approaches to teach and assess skills and knowledge. Through exploration of the functionalities of the online environment (e.g. multimodality), teachers can reflect on different approaches to online language pedagogies and take advantage of the affordances of online tools to add value compared to offline learning approaches, e.g. by using forums to foster interaction, wikis for collaborative tasks, or student-managed online rooms for speaking practice.

Supporting students' needs

Murphy, Shelley and Baumann (2010) show that learners reported anxiety in online chat rooms and a greater need for directions, motivation and self-regulation. They concluded that distance language teaching is essentially a learner support role, strongly underpinned by affective and organisational dimensions of tutor practice (p. 132). Murphy *et al.*, (2011) found that distance and online language learners value approachable, supportive, committed, enthusiastic and encouraging teachers especially in online and distance context, where contact might be less frequent and maintaining motivation can be problematic. Equally important is the ability to empathise with students, to understand individual concerns or difficulties with the course.

The above demonstrates that distance and online teaching relies on defined pedagogic principles. Hampel and Stickler (2005) showed it also requires specific and complex skills on the part of teachers, proposing a systematic framework, the skills pyramid, to describe them. Compton (2009) also proposed a framework, which separates rather than integrates technology and pedagogy. Hampel and Stickler revisited their findings ten years after their initial research, to take into account new developments, finding that teachers' online language teaching skills evolved as technology became more widespread. They therefore adjusted their framework in Stickler and Hampel (2015), with significant implications for theory and practice. The move to online teaching at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic provided a new opportunity to examine how teachers' online language teaching skills have evolved since.

Toolkit Design

The 'Moving your language teaching online' Toolkit supports university language teachers in understanding the key principles and developing the skills outlined above. It gives practical advice based on a coherent and pedagogically-informed framework for online language teaching. Associated Toolkit workshops and an asynchronous forum provided spaces for practitioners to exchange knowledge and share good practice as a community.

The Toolkit consists of nine help sheets, reflecting the OU's previously released help sheets on distance teaching (Institute of Technology, 2020). They each cover one aspect of online language teaching, underpinned by the key principles of online language teaching defined above (Table 1).

Table 1 *Content and underpinning principles of the ‘Moving your language teaching online’ Toolkit*

Number	Title	Main underpinning principle
Help sheet 1	Creating an online classroom	Defining online learning spaces
Help sheet 2	Creating an online community	Developing a teaching presence
Help sheet 3	Developing your teaching voice online	Developing a teaching presence
Help sheet 4	Teaching language skills online	Integrating technology and pedagogy
Help sheet 5	Facilitating a language tutorial online	Integrating technology and pedagogy
Help sheet 6	Maintaining motivation	Supporting students’ needs
Help sheet 7	Developing assessment strategies	Integrating technology and pedagogy
Help Sheet 8	Using a learning management system	Defining online learning spaces
Help Sheet 9	Reflecting on the blend that’s best for your own learners	All

The help sheets provide overviews, examples of teaching practices, and advice. For example, ‘Creating an online classroom’ provides introductory ideas using two different scenarios (using a full online platform as a hub for a course, or using just a single tool like a forum as a starting point). It discusses practicalities, advantages and disadvantages of adapting face-to-face classrooms in an online scenario, guiding teachers to list the typical components of their own language teaching (e.g. lesson starters, discussions, lectures, activities developing language skills, etc.), examining ideas to transfer these to an online or blended learning environment. The final section encourages reflection on and adapting to their individual teaching situation by listing further questions to identify relevant issues.

The Toolkit is not intended as a one-size-fits-all key to successful online language teaching, but as a point of reference for online language teaching and thus as support and inspiration to teachers designing their distance classes according to their and their students’ needs.

Two online workshops accompanied the Toolkit publication, providing an opportunity for participants to discuss the principles of online language teaching that underpin the Toolkit design, and to reflect on their own experience and skills. The research presented in this chapter focusses on the reflections of teachers following the transition to online teaching collected at the first of these workshops.

Research methodology

Research questions

The aim of our research was to explore, through discussions about the Toolkit, the experience and skills of teachers following the move to online teaching triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Three research questions guided the workshop discussions:

1. What was the participants’ perception of their level of proficiency in terms of online language teaching skills?
2. How did university language teachers experience the move to online teaching in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?
3. How did participants perceive their role as online language teachers in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Data collection

Data was collected during two workshops (see Table 2) with a self-selected group of higher education language teaching practitioners. Attendees from 36 UK universities and seven universities in four EU countries represented twelve different languages taught. 72% had not taught languages online before the start of Covid-19, and 28% had received no specific training on online language teaching. 66% were teaching online only at the time of the workshop, 28% were delivering a blend of online and face-to-face teaching.

Much of the interaction between participants and between facilitators and participants took place in writing, through a synchronous chat discussion involving 185 participants who posted a total of 856 contributions. The text chat follows the sequence of the workshops' spoken discussions and reveals the questions and reflections of the participants based on their experiences. This data can be described as brief textual contributions, sometimes fragmented, part of a fast-paced, highly interactive informal exchange. Their concise and fragmented nature means that the depth of arguments is limited, but because they involve many more participants than the spoken contributions, they better represent the diverse experiences and views of the participants.

Table 2 *Summary workshop information*

Launch event dates	30 October and 13 November 2020
Number of registrations	400
Number of attendees	Over 200 (exact number unavailable)
Number of participants in the text chats	185
Number of contributions posted	856

Data analysis

This chapter is based on the data collected at the first of the two workshops. The content of the text chat, fully anonymised, was coded using qualitative data analysis software. We analysed the data iteratively, taking both a deductive and inductive approach. Firstly, we used the online language tutors skills pyramid levels developed by Hampel and Stickler (2005), later adapted in Stickler and Hampel (2015), as a framework for coding. The 2005 model was used primarily as it allowed for more fine-grained coding whilst still enabling us to match the analysis and findings to the 2015 model. This led to a quantitative (Neuendorf, 2017) and qualitative (Dörnyei, 2007) content analysis based on the framework. For this dual analysis, the content of the text chat contributions was matched to the levels of Hampel and Stickler's 2005 skills pyramid. Codes were checked for accuracy and consistency, and adjustments were made before analysis. However, our coding and analysis must be understood as forming part of an interpretative qualitative research approach, and we acknowledge the subjectivity of the coding and understand the limitations of the consistency we make claims for.

Figure 1 provides definitions and explanations of the levels based on Hampel and Stickler (2005, pp. 319-320) and Stickler and Hampel (2015, p. 66), and examples of content from our corpus coded at those levels.


	LEVELS IN THE 2015 FRAMEWORK	LEVELS IN THE 2005 FRAMEWORK	DEFINITIONS FROM THE AUTHORS (2005)	EXAMPLES FROM OUR DATA
<p>higher competence</p>  <p>lower competence</p>	Creativity, choice and own style	Own style	Developing one's own personal teaching style, using the materials and media to their best advantage, forming a rapport with students, and using resources creatively to promote active and communicative language learning	none
		Creativity and choice	Creating or selecting online activities with the communicative principles in mind	'I have found useful creating activities that involve collaborative learning, such as peer review podcast, recorded discussions'
	Facilitating communicative competence and online socialization	Facilitating communicative competence	Facilitating communicative competence	'In asynchronous teaching I put as much voice as possible and in synchronous sessions I am as silent as possible and mostly write in the chat and take notes'
		Online socialization	Creating a sense of community in the classroom	'I encourage [students] to join live sessions 15 minutes earlier to chat among each other' 'encouraging emoji use/interactivity is key. And also not interpreting silence as lack of interest or engagement'
	Specific technical competence and dealing with constraints and possibilities of the medium	Dealing with constraints and possibilities of the medium	Dealing with constraints and affordances of the particular software used	'I use breakout rooms for small group work' 'challenge: students are reluctant to put their webcam on'
		Specific technical competence for the software	Using the specific software applications needed to teach	none
	Basic ICT competence	Basic ICT competence	Using networked computers and familiarity with common commands and applications	none

Figure 1 *Online teaching skill levels, adapted from the pyramid from Hampel and Stickler (2005) and Stickler and Hampel (2015)*

We then coded the data inductively, using the thematic analysis methodology (Braun and Clarke, 2006), to identify other common themes emerging from the data, as described in our findings.

Findings

Table 3 presents a quantitative view of the deductive coding of our data based on the seven levels of Hampel and Stickler's skills pyramid framework (2005), reflecting the most frequently discussed skills during the workshops.

Table 3 *Frequency of levels coded*

Pyramid levels (2005)	Percentage of chat contributions coded at levels
1. Basic ICT competence	0
2. Specific technical competence for the software	0
3. Dealing with the constraints and possibilities of the medium	61%
4. Online socialization	26%
5. Facilitating communicative competence	8%
6. Creativity and choice	5%
7. Own style	0%

The highest volume of discussion relates to level 3 of the 2005 skills pyramid: 'dealing with the constraints and possibilities of the medium'. The second most frequent level was level 4: 'online socialisation', followed by level 5: 'facilitating communicative competence' and level 6: 'creativity and choice'. Based on our coding no contribution aligned to levels 1, 2 or 7: 'basic ICT competence', 'specific technical competence for the software' and 'own style'. The findings from our thematic analysis presented below are therefore related to levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the skills pyramid.

Level 3: Dealing with constraints and possibilities of the medium

Two main strands could be identified for this level: contributions centred on technology only, and contributions on the best use of technology for pedagogic purpose.

The first strand mainly consisted in exchanges and recommendations about technology and online tools, especially tools enabling collaboration and gamification in language teaching and learning. Challenges related to using too many different resources were mentioned; for example, one participant wrote:

'when we use too many different tools students can get confused'.

The second strand comprised of contributions relating the use of technology to pedagogy. It included five different types of threads:

- threads on the use and mix of asynchronous vs synchronous online tools to accommodate speaking practice, to operate 'flipped classrooms', or reflecting on how to make best use of synchronous sessions and on what students can do independently and asynchronously, e.g.:

'we use discussion boards, Padlet (asynchronously) as part of the course, and [...] some students have also organised themselves to chat outside the class (Facebook, Whatsapp). Use of breakout rooms for speaking tasks during the live class (synchronously)'.

This links to themes of student independence and student-generated resources (see next section):

- threads on the use of breakout rooms and the affordances of various tools to organise classes and groups, e.g.:

'start with very easy tasks in breakouts so that they get to know each other and gain confidence' ;

- comments on challenges specific to some languages, in particular in relation to developing writing skills in languages with scripts different from English, e.g. in Arabic:

'I find the whiteboard excellent in teaching writing in Arabic';

- mentions of and questions about affordances and constraints of technology for assessment, e.g. invigilating software, e.g.

'Do any of you use proctoring software? What is your experience?';

- threads on the use of microphones and webcams, including comments about muting microphones to boost student confidence, about dealing with shy students and how and when to encourage students to unmute mics and turn on cameras, for example:

'practising language with the mic off is an advantage to online tutorials and quite freeing for students!'

There were multiple contributions about the role of cameras and of non-verbal communication and the use of text chat, emojis and games to encourage communication.

Level 4: online socialisation

On this level, there were contributions on the use of tools (e.g. discussion boards, online polls) and strategies (e.g. group sizes, mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities, use of breakout rooms) to develop a sense of community and facilitate online socialisation and interaction for students. Participants reported organising social events or slots as part of their classes to create and foster a sense of community or break isolation, as described in the following example:

'Many students are probably feeling quite isolated right now, so I reckon building in more interaction is really important both from a pedagogical and more holistic perspective'.

Others linked the social dimension of language learning and the need to develop the confidence of students to interact in the target language, but this angle was not frequently developed, and most of the contributions were about basic socialisation and pastoral concerns for students. Some linked to the theme of students' and teachers' wellbeing, as described in the next section.

Level 5: facilitating communicative competence

Regarding facilitating communicative competence, participants mentioned ideas such as ring-fencing time in synchronous sessions for the development of speaking skills, or the creation of conversation clubs. There was considerable interest in the difference between speaking production and speaking interaction, and how to approach them. Interestingly, some teachers welcomed a renewed focus on pronunciation and speaking production *per se*, e.g.:

'I love the way speaking on vocal forums places an emphasis back on spoken production independently from interaction'

potentially veering away from a communicative approach. Others linked communicative competence to the development of cultural knowledge and discussed using online visual prompts to support this. The relatively low quantity of data related to level 5 will be addressed in the discussion section.

Level 6: creativity and choice

Some teachers were evidently highly skilful in online language teaching and had smoothly transitioned to online teaching. Our data shows that some teachers implemented complex teaching strategies, such as combining the use of different tools, considering the respective roles of synchronous and asynchronous activities, or showing creative pedagogic approaches making use of the affordances of online tools. One participant commented:

'About the webcam topic: previous small games work well! Ask simple questions such as "are you drinking a coffe?" yes = turn on camera / no = turn off camera. Afterwards they are not so shy!'

Similarly high levels of skills were also reflected in text chat contributions related to the changes required to assess students remotely. Some teachers expressed that they had learned new skills or deployed new strategies which they would continue to use after the return to classroom-based teaching:

'the forced move to online can help perhaps bring about long term change'

'I have heard so many other colleagues say this <name>, it's given them a push to do things differently and they really like it!'

Two specific examples of new practices that emerged from the transition to online teaching shared by two participants were 'making much more use of audio recordings' and '[doing] continuous assessment'.

Other levels and findings

We did not code any of our data against level 1, 2, or 7. The inductive coding of the data enabled us to identify different common themes emerging from the teachers' text chat contributions. Both matters will be discussed in the next section.

Discussion

Referring back to our research questions, we now report on what the findings of our analysis reveal about the experience of teachers who moved their language teaching online during the Covid-19 pandemic, and on their perceived skills and role as online language teachers. We consider how this aligns with the skills pyramid conceptualised by Hampel and Stickler (2005) and Stickler and Hampel (2015), and how it compares with the experience of earlier adopters of online language teaching as documented in the literature.

Research question 1: What was the participants' perception of their level of proficiency in terms of online language teaching skills?

First, we found that *skills related to the use of technology can be taken for granted*. There was no match to levels 1 and 2 of the 2005 pyramid in our data, indicating that participants did not seem to have been concerned with the use of technology *per se*. This suggests that the basic use of technology, including generic and specific hardware and software, was unproblematic. This was confirmed by findings presented above, e.g. the fact that training needs reported by participants related to higher levels of the skills pyramid: teachers demonstrated concerns with integrating pedagogy and technology rather than with software-specific training. This probably reflects the generalised use of technology as part of face-to-face and blended language teaching today, which may be considered as normalised (Bax, 2003 and 2011).

Second, we found that *teachers focused strongly on making use of the affordances of the online medium*. Many of the participants' contributions could be matched to level 3 of the 2005 pyramid, 'dealing with the constraints and possibilities of the medium', suggesting that this level of competence was not taken for granted by all of our participants. Most of the questioning related to linking the use of technology to sound pedagogic principles. This is consistent with findings from our thematic analysis showing that many text chat contributions focussed on comparing face-to-face with online pedagogies.

Third, *teachers prioritised creating a sense of community, but not explicitly to facilitate L2 communicative competence*. According to our data, creating a sense of community in the classroom was one of the teachers' strongest preoccupations concerning online teaching. The significant amount

of data related to level 4 of the 2005 pyramid suggests, amongst our participants, a will to address the challenge of fostering exchanges online, and of developing a sense of community for groups of students who were dispersed during the pandemic, consistent with the high interest in the Toolkit help sheets on ‘creating an online community’ and ‘developing your teaching voice online’.

The difference between levels 4 (‘online socialisation’) and 5 (‘facilitating communicative competence’) in our data coding lies in whether socialisation and communication were addressed generically (level 4) or in relation to the development of target language skills (level 5) within a communicative approach to language teaching (Widdowson, 1978; Canale and Swain, 1980). The relatively low volume of data coded at level 5 raises questions about how successfully teachers were able to transfer their specialist language teaching approach and pedagogy to an online setting. Such questions are confirmed by the very high interest shown in the Toolkit help sheet on ‘teaching language skills online’. They are also linked to inductive thematic findings revealing frequent questioning about how to develop speaking and interaction skills online. This suggests a need for subject-specific training for online teaching (Hampel and Stickler, 2005). We acknowledge that the low volume of coded data related to ‘facilitating communicative competence’ could be attributed to the fact that teachers do not always explicitly articulate their pedagogic approaches in training sessions (Ur, 2019).

Our findings related to ‘creativity’ and ‘own style’ of teaching are addressed in the next sub-sections.

Research question 2: How did university language teachers experience the move to online teaching in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

We found that most teachers were enthusiastic about online teaching and some displayed creative student-focused approaches. Our inductive data analysis shows that attitudes towards online teaching were predominantly positive. This is consistent with the information collected during the workshop as part of an interactive poll activity through which 59% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed teaching online, despite mostly feeling ‘challenged’ about it. Many participants had integrated some CALL tools and principles of online language teaching described in Section 2 to their face-to-face teaching prior to the move to online teaching. It is likely that the particularly long history of computer-aided learning within the languages field contributed to the positive outlook of the majority of our participants when they pivoted online.

Some contributions captured in our data evidence that teachers were able to create or select online resources and activities which support the communicative principles underpinning language learning and teaching, matching level 6 of the 2005 skills pyramid, ‘creativity and choice’. For example, some discussed the balance and purpose of synchronous and asynchronous teaching. Their reflections suggest that with time, facilitation of communicative competence could be enhanced as they become more confident at creating and selecting activities creatively, with this aim in mind.

Research question 3: How did participants perceive their role as online language teachers in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Emerging own styles

We did not code any of our data against level 7, ‘*own style*’, defined as ‘personal teaching style, using the materials and media to their best advantage, forming a rapport with [...] students and using the resources creatively to promote active and communicative language learning’ (Hampel and Stickler, 2005, p. 319). Caution is needed before interpreting this. Evidencing the development of a personal teaching style requires time and deeper exchanges than text chat contributions allowed. The absence of references to level 7 could be explained by the fragmented nature of brief text chat contributions

which are less likely to reflect the complexity of personal, creative approaches and skills. It is also possible that there was a low number of teachers with sufficient prior experience of online language teaching to have developed skills at the highest level only a few months after the move to online teaching and learning due to Covid-19, or that highly skilled teachers may not have signed up for our workshops.

However, our inductive thematic analysis indicates that participants saw their own role online evolve from teachers to facilitators whose main focus was student-centred. It also suggests that teachers focussed strongly on forming a rapport with students, *supporting their wellbeing* and developing more *student-centred pedagogies*, revealing emerging aspects of their 'own style'.

The role of online teachers, from the early days of online language teaching to the Covid-19 pandemic

Our analysis reveals similar conclusions concerning the challenges faced by online language teachers compared to those we encountered when we introduced online language courses at the Open University in the early 2000s. It also reflects what the literature has documented: teachers are concerned with integrating technology and pedagogy (Ertmer, 2005; Colpaert, 2006; Stickler and Hauck, 2006), recognising the importance of considering affordances and constraints of online tools and design activities carefully (Hampel, 2009). They see it as their role to help students navigate the increased complexity of their learning environment (Hampel and Stickler, 2005), acknowledging that teaching language skills online effectively presents challenges (Beaven et al., 2010), and understanding that their role has to change as they become facilitators of learning (Stickler and Hauck, 2006; Comas-Quinn, 2011) while their classes become more student-centred and their role takes a pastoral dimension (Hauck and Hampel, 2005). Some of our participants took this further, trialling the use of student-generated content as part of encouraging students to play a more active part in their learning. This suggests that *'teaching with students'* is perhaps a new dimension of the portfolio of skills evidenced by highly proficient online language teachers.

Implications for theory and practice

The first change in Stickler and Hampel's revised model (2015) was to focus 'more on the levels beyond the basic ICT competence which today tends to be taken for granted' (p. 65). Their adapted skills pyramid (p. 66) therefore labels 'basic ICT competence' as level 0. Our data suggests that this evolution has continued: for our participants, 'specific technical competence' can also be taken for granted and integrated alongside 'basic ICT competence'.

In our data, 'dealing with the constraints and possibilities of the medium', however, is a step up from competence in using basic and specific technology and cannot fully be taken for granted. Furthermore, for our participants, 'facilitating communicative competence' requires a higher level of experience and skills in online language teaching compared to 'online socialisation'. This differs from Stickler and Hampel's adapted pyramid (2015) which merged the two levels. However our participants' perceived role related to socialisation involved the additional aspect of supporting their students' wellbeing. Finally, the 2015 skills pyramid merges levels 6 and 7 of the 2005 model into a single level 3 labelled 'creativity, choice and own style'. Our data does not bring evidence that this might have changed, but suggests that 'teaching with students' is perhaps an additional dimension evidenced by the most proficient of online language teachers.

Figure 2 summarises how our findings align with the 2005 and 2015 versions of the skills pyramid, reflecting how our participants' competence with online teaching skills in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic compares with previous research findings.

	Levels in the 2005 framework	Levels in the 2015 framework	Our data
<p style="text-align: center;">Higher competence</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lower competence</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Taken for granted</p>	7. Own Style	3. Creativity, choice and own style	4. Creativity, choice and own style; teaching with students
	6. Creativity and choice		
	5. Facilitating communicative competence	2. Facilitating communicative competence and online socialisation	3. Facilitating communicative competence
	4. Online socialisation		2. Online socialisation and student wellbeing
	3. Dealing with constraints and possibilities of the medium	1. Specific technical competence and dealing with constraints and possibilities of the medium	1. Dealing with constraints and possibilities of the medium
	2. Specific technical competence for the software		
	1. Basic ICT competence		
		0. Basic ICT competence	0. Basic ICT competence and specific technical competence for the software

Figure 2 *Aligning our data to the skills pyramid frameworks of Hampel and Stickler (2005) and Stickler and Hampel (2015)*

In terms of practice, our data demonstrates that participants welcomed the workshops as an opportunity to share and reflect on their experience. They felt reassured to see that they faced the same challenges, and expressed a need to discuss pedagogy and an interest in sharing good practice with each other. This will guide us in further developing the Toolkit initiative to continue supporting colleagues. Further research can ascertain whether the initiative was effective in creating a community of practice and whether it successfully improved online language teaching practice in Higher Education.

Conclusion

The Toolkit was designed primarily as a practical tool to support teachers in a time of crisis. The high attendance and lively discussion at the launch workshops, including the numerous text chat interactions, as well as the Toolkit's high download numbers suggest that it addressed a need for language teachers in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our research provided valuable data to examine the actual online language teaching practices of a diverse group of teachers, albeit on the basis of a self-selecting group, and to compare this to the research findings of the past three decades. While it remains to be seen whether online teaching will

remain mainstream, a move towards a wider and more general application of online language teaching principles might allow for verification and further investigation of our findings.

The workshops provided an insight into participants' perception of their role as online language teachers in the difficult conditions of the pandemic, which in the future could be used as a starting point for investigating the experiences and perceptions of language teachers in an increasingly digitalised learning environment. We need further data to explore teachers' practices in online language teaching post pandemic. This could be examined together with the questions of whether and how the Toolkit may have supported the professional development of language teachers and/or provided strategies for online language teaching.

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