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Motivation to Learn Italian Language during Online Classes²

Extended summary

In this paper we have presented the means and the extent of the e-learning changes introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic to the university teaching of the Italian language as an elective and compulsory-elective subject. The research was conducted among students of different study groups at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. The study involved 136 students of Italian (85% of female respondents), age 19 to 33 (AS = 20.55), who attended the classes in an online context. The transition from classroom teaching to online teaching (pure e-learning, blended learning) in synchronous and asynchronous form significantly influenced several factors important for the acquisition of the Italian language.

The research aimed to examine the results of the success of organized (a)synchronous online teaching, to find out the extent to which this second method of teaching affects students' academic motivation to learn Italian as an optional second foreign language, and to establish the prerequisites for achieving various aspects of motivation: experience in online teaching, achievements, and attitudes about online teaching. The Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A; Ryan & Connell, 1989), adapted for the conditions of online teaching of the Ital-

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ian language, was used in the research. Using Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) in the Mplus software package, four profiles of academic motivation were registered: Extremely motivated (8% of respondents), Low autonomously motivated (17%), Very unmotivated (26%) and Medium motivated (49%). The profile of the Extremely motivated is typical of the smallest number of students who are, despite the reduced interaction due to online teaching, very motivated and active in their studies, and maintain a high level of motivation. Students with the profile of the Low autonomously motivated have a low expression of identified motivation and below-average expression of the controlled forms of motivation and they learn Italian because they understand the importance of learning for their development, so they want to understand the presented material and achieve higher levels of knowledge. However, this profile is not eager to learn out of personal curiosity and love for acquiring knowledge.

Almost a quarter of the sample consists of students with very unmotivated profiles, in which all forms of motivation to learn Italian online are extremely low. The largest number of students belong to the profile of the Medium motivated, whose motivation remained at the optimal level despite the transition to online teaching. The paper also presents affiliations with profiles concerning the experience in online teaching before the pandemic, success in studies, difficulties with the Internet connection during online teaching and attitudes about online teaching. The results of the research indicate that the largest number of students prefer live teaching to online, but also that previous experience in online teaching has a significant impact on maintaining optimal or achieving a high level of motivation.

It has been shown that students need greater interactivity, diversity of digital material, continuous digital literacy, as well as support in overcoming the psychological barrier due to exposure to the digital context as still new and insufficiently accepted. To improve online teaching of Italian as a foreign language it is necessary to involve team cooperation of experts in the field of foreign language teaching methodology (teacher), IT technology and psychology with continuous monitoring of changes in the epidemiological context. Pioneering experiences in online teaching, as well as few studies of motivational profiles in university teaching, leave space for other studies, on a wider scale and with the inclusion of several parameters for amotivation, as well as an objective assessment of knowledge and behavior, not covered by this study.

Keywords: Italian language, (a)synchronous online teaching, academic motivation, latent profile analysis, theory of self-determination

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