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**Title of Thesis:**

Technology in Foreign Language Education: A Comparative Examination of the Impact of the Transfer from a Hybrid Teaching-learning Approach to a Virtual Teaching-learning Approach on Foreign Language Teachers and Learners at the UWI St. Augustine.

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the impact of the transfer from a hybrid teaching-learning approach to a virtual teaching-learning approach on foreign language teachers and learners at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. Using a qualitative research approach, twenty-four (24) level II and III Spanish, French and/or Portuguese students, and four (4) lecturers in the Spanish, French and Portuguese sections shared their experiences and opinions of the transfer. This study examines the change in the teaching-learning approach, necessitated by the transfer from a hybrid system to a virtual system by assessing four main areas: student and teacher motivation, participation and communication between students and teachers, student autonomy and the role of the teacher. The results gathered from questionnaires and interviews uncover the factors that motivate and inspire communication, participation and autonomy among foreign language learners and teachers. This study explores the foreign language components that have been ameliorated and/or severed as a result of the transfer. Given that this teaching and learning approach is fairly new at the UWI, St. Augustine this research gives insight to how students and teachers have adapted to the transfer. Furthermore, the results were discussed with the intention of finding possible solutions for both blended and virtual settings.

Key words: Virtual Class, Physical Classroom, Hybrid, Motivation, Communication, Participation, Autonomy, Students, Teacher

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## **Introduction**

Over the past two decades, educators from all quarters of the world have sought to integrate technology into the traditional classroom. Pedagogues regarded technology as a way to manipulate class time efficiently, expose students to culture and allow students to build relations with persons beyond their local region. These aspects are particularly beneficial to foreign languages learners in achieving their linguistic goals. The integration of technology in the teaching-learning process is popularly known as the hybrid teaching-learning approach. However, it is important to acknowledge that the aforementioned term is interpreted differently by different people (Lee, 2007). Nevertheless, the definition of hybrid learning best suited for this form of study is defined by the University of the West Indies as the combination of “face-to-face and online strategies and technologies to advance student-centred learning” (Blended learning).

Today, educators and learners face a new challenge which no longer demands technology as a tool of integration within a physical classroom but rather, it must become the classroom. In other words, virtual teaching and learning has become the only means of study at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. This transfer to a virtual environment brings to light the question of whether student-centered learning can be maintained without the advantage of hybridity. Although the motive for this transfer was unforeseeable and inevitable, there is no empirical evidence that translates the impact of this transfer on foreign language students and teachers at the UWI. Moreover, while previous studies have examined the incorporation of technology in foreign language education, the topic of technology as the sole method of learning a foreign language is far from being exhausted as a research area. It is for these reasons that

studies need to be conducted to compare the impact of the transfer from a hybrid teaching-learning approach to a virtual teaching-learning approach.

As an undergraduate student of both Spanish and French, this researcher acknowledges the importance of autonomous learning and the contribution of technology in this domain of her study. In addition, this researcher recognizes that the hybridity of the learning methods, offered by the University, enables greater efficiency than the simple traditional classroom. Both in class and via online forums, students are able to communicate with foreign language lecturers about their ideas, perceptions and understanding in the language of their pursuit while maintaining the advantage of advancing in their studies using technological aids. However, the researcher had not expected that learning a foreign language in a virtual setting was possible although the technology that currently exists facilitates this transfer. This change in the teaching and learning approach and emphasis on student autonomy peaked the researcher's interest and thus guides this study. This study examines the impact of the transfer from a hybrid teaching-learning approach to a virtual teaching-learning approach, with primary focus on second and third year students and teachers' motivation, autonomy, communication and participation in learning and teaching foreign languages at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

Although distance learning is a newly adopted approach for most educational institutions, this study focused primarily on the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine as opposed to lower educational institutions. This is because students at the primary and secondary schools were never as exposed to a hybrid teaching environment like students at the tertiary level. Furthermore, current Caribbean literature lacks extensive research on the topic. As a result, this researcher had to thoroughly analyze international studies, and find commonalities which best related to the learning and teaching strategies of the University.

This study consists of four chapters. The first chapter entitled, "Review of Literature", presents secondary data on the theme of virtual and hybrid classes from different regions of the world. It focuses on three main aspects of the topic, that is, communication and participation, motivation and autonomy. The second chapter entitled, "The Impact of the Transfer on Student-Teacher Communication and Participation", examines how communication and participation have been altered since the transfer to a virtual setting. It presents a comparative analysis of the benefits and challenges encountered by lecturers and students in the physical and virtual classroom of the UWI, St. Augustine. Lastly, it determines the efficacy of the virtual platform as it relates to communication and participation. The third chapter entitled, "The Impact of the Transfer on Foreign Language Student and Teacher Motivation", examines the extent to which students and teachers are motivated. It compares how students and teachers are similarly or differently motivated in the two settings. Furthermore, this chapter assesses how the transfer has impacted teachers' and students' motivation, and consequently students' desire to continue learning foreign languages.

Lastly, the fourth chapter, "The Impact of the Transfer on Foreign Language Students' Autonomy and the Role of the Teacher", explores the methods adopted by teachers to encourage student autonomy in both the physical and virtual class, and the student's efforts for autonomous learning. This chapter examines the changes in students' methods and desire to study independently. Essentially, this study seeks to provide suggestions that will ameliorate the physical and virtual teaching and learning settings while respecting both foreign language students' and teachers' perspectives.

## **Methodology**

This research paper examines the impact of the transfer from a hybrid teaching-learning approach to a virtual teaching-learning approach on Year 2 and 3 foreign language learners and teachers in the Modern Languages and Linguistics Department at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. This research employed a qualitative methodological approach. The research approach enabled the researcher to gather information that would answer the complexity of the study and provide better understanding of the topic as it relates to the individuals involved (Clarke 178). The data collection process consisted of questionnaires that had both closed-ended and open-ended questions and allowed for an ease of delivery. It also employed interviews to collect teachers' perspectives.

A small group of students, namely 24, in the year two and year three classes were selected at random to represent the target population of the study. These students are registered full time at the University as French and/or Spanish majors. The study consisted of twelve (12) Year two Spanish and/or French majors, and twelve (12) Year three Spanish and/or French majors, three (3) of which are studying Portuguese as a minor. Due to the challenges posed by Covid-19 in delivering physical questionnaires, virtual questionnaires were delivered using the Google Forms platform. In acquiring participants, the researcher contacted, via email, three foreign language lecturers who had the most contact hours with students. In that email the researcher requested permission to speak with the respective classes.

All three lecturers allowed the researcher to contact students either during their class or via a class group chat on WhatsApp. In October, the virtual questionnaires were administered to the selected undergraduate foreign language students via WhatsApp, and via email. Questionnaires

were completed and submitted in a timely manner. Although the virtual questionnaires allowed ease of delivery, Internet availability seriously affected the completion of questionnaires.

Foreign language teachers from the Spanish, French and Portuguese section at the UWI, St. Augustine were interviewed to understand their perspectives on the transfer. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were then read and analyzed to identify the teachers' opinions and compared to the literature of the study. Teachers' perspectives were also cross referenced with students' perspectives to determine commonalities.

This researcher acknowledged that as a result of the current health crisis of COVID-19, both students and teachers required time to adapt and find methods that are best suited for their learning and teaching needs. Therefore, external factors such as the influence of the current health crisis and the impact of other courses on students' desire to continue learning foreign languages, were considered when deciding on the research method and target population. Thus, open-ended questions allowed students and teachers the opportunity to clarify what they meant and felt. Therefore, truly collecting their perspectives as a Foreign language community.

## Chapter 1

### Review of Literature

Although a plethora of literature examines the benefits and challenges of the hybrid teaching-learning approach for foreign language teachers and students, there is a gap in research as it relates to the impact of the virtual teaching-learning approach on foreign language students and teachers across the Caribbean. Henceforth, there is a need to examine this aspect of teaching and learning to add to the existing literature.

The theme of technology in Foreign Language Education has been brought into sharp focus within recent decades. Technological advances have facilitated the transfer from a traditional classroom and allowed academic institutions to take a virtual pedagogical and distance learning approach. This is because technology allows persons to communicate across borders without having to leave their local region. Today, due to these technological advances, it is evident that technology has an integral role in the desire and need to learn a Foreign language.

In recent decades, universities have sought to implement hybrid learning systems in order to facilitate the working population and provide an effective form of teaching. Technology when implemented in the physical class environment is accepted as a means of changing the learning environment from a teacher-centered environment to that of a student-centered environment. This shift in focus allows students to work at their own pace and take control of their learning. Nevertheless, researchers lament that both teacher and student should become acquainted with technology before attempting to use it during the teaching-learning process. In response to this suggestion, Warschauer mentioned in a study that “the appropriate and effective use of computer networks... is partly a technical issue, but primarily a pedagogical one.” (9).

The critics, Nike Arnold and Lara Ducate (2006), explain that the manner in which teachers and students use technology determines how tasks and activities are completed. However, one study carried out by Taylor et al. postulates that technological literacy is irrelevant to the efficacy of the digital language learning process (26). According to the findings of that study, although students with greater computer familiarity performed at a more advanced capacity, a student's ability to perform is more accurately linked to his/her language opportunities rather than his/her familiarity with a computer system. In addition, the findings indicate that as students progress through the semester, their computer competence is inevitably improved. Interestingly, Galusha indicates that “the lack of support and services such as providing...technical assistance” is an area of concern for students (10). She emphasizes that students depend on lecturers to act as facilitators of their study and guides to the acquisition of technological literacy. However, the role of the teacher goes beyond their input in providing technological assistance. In fact, the teacher's role in the learning of a foreign language impacts the student's appreciation for a course. Therefore, the performance, communication and participation of foreign language learners on a virtual system are easily linked to their enthusiasm and fondness of the teacher (Ushida 68).

According to Arnold and Ducate, when it came to distance learning and student participation on online discussion forums “students not only progressed in their cognitive understanding of the pedagogical topics, but also employed social presence, the more dominant of the two...” (42). They argued also that this form of collaborative learning serves as a catalyst to student autonomy. This is particularly beneficial to foreign language learners who are required to adopt language and intercultural awareness. This can be achieved by autonomous learning, class participation and group work, which online forums allow. In fact, with online forums students

engage in critical thinking, they are exposed to distinct perspectives and the pressure of inequality is removed in a virtual environment.

However, it is important to consider that student activity on online platforms should not be misinterpreted for student learning. Foreign language teachers, being a learning resource for students, are required to incorporate collaborative work in the class to encourage student autonomy and L2 acquisition. Using virtual forums teachers would have a greater opportunity to share ideas, solve problems and review student progress. In this way, both teacher and student can evaluate progress, gain knowledge by sharing ideas and perspectives as well as fulfil tasks and projects (Aljohani 105).

Distance learning requires that students adopt the role of a teacher and this approach to foreign language learning has encouraged students to practice constructivism in their domain of study. This theory is defined by renowned psychologist, Jean Piaget, as a student's ability to be proactive in his/her learning progress. That is to say students are encouraged to learn autonomously while teachers can only act as a guide to their study (Aljohani 106). Thus, the blended approach has been praised for its ability to foster optimal learning since the flaws of the traditional face-to-face classroom are corrected by the online setting and vice versa, ensuring that students learn at their greatest capacity. As it relates to the constructivist approach in teaching, it is understood that foreign language teachers should not impose their personal perspectives on students as each student has his/her personal experience. As a result, many teachers doubt the efficacy of learning foreign languages online. Nevertheless, constructivism requires that teachers challenge their students, communicate the work being taught effectively and shape lessons around students' learning abilities and responses.

In doing so, the advantages associated with teaching and learning a foreign language online can be acquired. Studies suggest that the virtual system permits students to learn in a comfortable environment (at home) that removes the pressure of being in a physical classroom. Indeed, a students' access to education is no longer determined by their geographical location; instead, education is perceived as accessible to all. Learning and teaching on a virtual system allows both teachers and students to have greater control over the content that is taught and learnt. It is also expected that distance learning improves students' performance since they can take advantage of being able to interact with school materials synchronously and asynchronously. Furthermore, the virtual system reduces educational costs and consequently provides more opportunities for students across the globe (Lai 2).

Nevertheless, studies have revealed challenges that counter the expected advantages of teaching and learning online. In fact, the transfer to a virtual system and the change in the foreign learning environment may serve as a deterrent for students and teachers. Galusha postulates that students tend to feel isolated when separated from the physical and social aspect of the university (11). This feeling of isolation intensifies as a result of poor communication between students and teachers which potentially impact a student's desire to continue his/her online study. It is the role of a foreign language educator to help students find value in their studies and encourage students to maintain a high performance (Isisag 3). Teachers provide a humanistic approach to teaching and learning, that is they consider student feelings, abilities and intellect and use these factors to place students at the center of the classroom.

This is a major feature that is lacking in the virtual teaching and learning approach. In the virtual classroom, students depend more on online facilities, however these programs and the associated artificial intelligence is unable to respond to student doubts as thoroughly as a teacher

can (Lai 4). Furthermore, it is expected that in order to maintain virtual systems, the educational costs will inevitably increase, which contradicts the advantage of saving money from distance learning (Lai 3). Therefore, the growing popularity of distance learning and the shift of control in the classroom has facilitated the marginalization of the role of the teacher. Consequently, teachers feel frustrated (Warschauer 9).

Despite the challenges and advantages that are faced by foreign language teachers and students, there are other factors that contribute to the impact of the virtual experience. According to Gardner's socio-psychological theory of second language learning, the attitude and the motivation of a student plays a role in a student's success in learning a foreign language. In addition to the student's motivational needs as outlined by Gardner, Galusha asserts that students' personalities also influence how or whether a student can perform well on a virtual system (Galusha 6). These factors are catalysts to a student's attrition and completion of a degree online. Nevertheless, they cannot guarantee one's success. In fact, AlDahdouh speculates that although negative emotions felt by students are a result of their inability to adapt fully to a virtual forum, these emotions actually motivate students to do better academically (2020). Therefore, emotion and motivation determine how students perform and adapt to a virtual teaching-learning approach. The following chapter evaluates student-teacher communication and participation and the way it has changed since the transfer.

## Chapter 2

### **The Impact of the Transfer on Student-Teacher Communication and Participation**

A foreign language student's willingness to participate and communicate in the classroom has an immediate impact on his/her ability to acquire competence in the said language. This study asked 24 foreign language students, 18 of which study Spanish, 13 who study French and 3 who study Portuguese, questions concerning communication and participation. In addition, four foreign language teachers from the Spanish, French and Portuguese section, who were identified as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3 and Teacher 4, answered similar questions (see Appendix B). This chapter compares communication and participation in the physical and the virtual classroom setting, examining the way in which teachers and students have adapted to this shift.

Teachers at the UWI affirm that their enthusiasm and level of motivation have an impact on student participation, communication and performance. Teacher 4 explains, "Ultimately how motivated you are is going to affect how much the student learns because everything is *interligado*" meaning interlinked. The teacher clarified that there is a need for educators to remove the chasm which separates them from students so that teachers are more approachable outside of the classroom and connections can be built with students. In fact, this response correlates with the study by Ushida that states the performance, communication and participation of foreign language learners on a virtual system are easily linked to their enthusiasm and fondness of the teacher (Ushida 68). It was not surprising then that a student admitted, "I genuinely like my lecturers and classmates so I'm always comfortable participating in class. I assume this attitude just transferred to my online courses." This suggests that regardless of the setting for teaching or learning, the fondness for the teacher impacts the student's appreciation for a course.

When students were asked about communication using a virtual platform (see Appendix A, no. 12), most students rated, as seen in Fig. 1, student-teacher communication as five. Although the majority of students (19 students) rate communication between five and ten, they admitted that they prefer communication in a face-to-face setting.

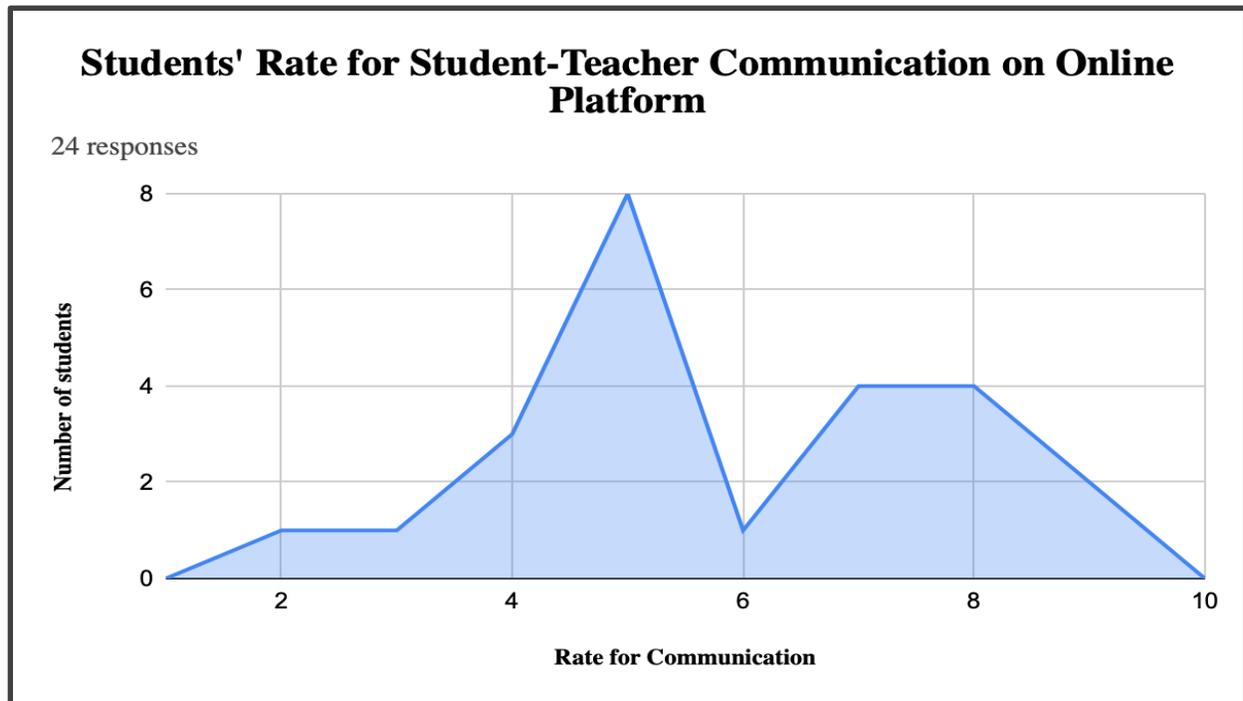


Fig. 1: Line graph showing how Students Rate Student-teacher Communication

In fact, when students were asked to identify elements of the physical classroom that they missed (see Appendix A, no. 8), they mentioned face-to-face interactions between their peers and teachers, the class environment and class activities. Based on their responses, it is evident that the virtual setting lacks a communicative element that students desire. Therefore, the communication and interactions in the virtual classroom, although effective, is incomparable to that which is permitted in the physical classroom.

On the contrary, the teachers who were interviewed said that the transfer online has provided an opportunity for ease of communication since teachers are more accessible through different means of communication including email, Facebook and WhatsApp. Indeed, Teacher 3 laments that communication outside of the classroom is important for foreign language students and teachers as it not only allows teachers to assist students during their language acquisition journey, but it is also necessary to ensure student wellbeing. Notably, however, this type of communication, as Teacher 4 explained, is easier to attain with Year 2s and 3s because teachers have already established a relationship and understood the personalities of these students. Therefore, it is more difficult to communicate with students who have not experienced the hybrid teaching approach.

The teachers acknowledged the limitations of virtual communication. They all shared similar opinions as it relates to students, they explained that students no longer have the opportunity to approach them in the corridor or in the staff rooms. Teacher 1 and 2 clarified that although they are more accessible online, the transfer to a virtual setting has removed the human element of communication and has created a distance between them and the students. Consequently, there is a need to establish a connection within the physical classroom, before the transfer to a virtual setting.

Without an established connection between teachers and students, participation in the classroom is affected. Questions surrounding student participation had the following results (see Fig. 2). Approximately forty-two percent (42%) of students affirm that their level of participation in class has remained the same since the transfer to virtual classes. Whereas approximately 38% of students admit that they participate more in face-to-face classes and only 21% of students participate more in virtual classes.

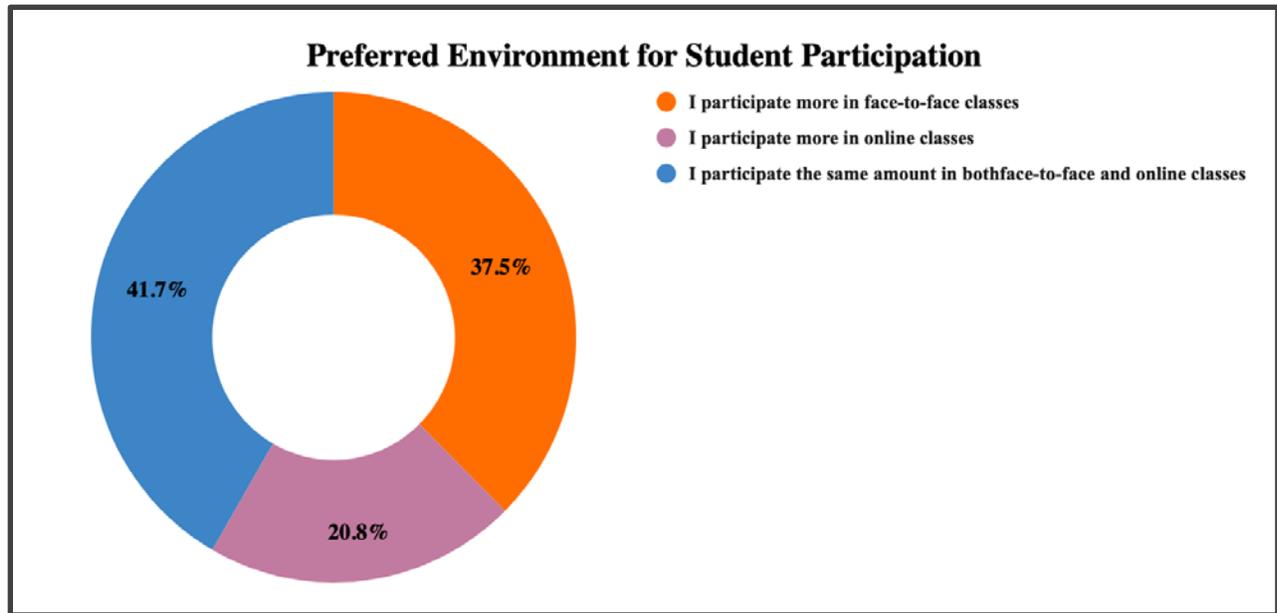


Fig. 2: Pie chart showing Student Participation in the Physical and Virtual classroom.

Although Teacher 2 admitted that measuring student participation is difficult for some teaching components, all interviewees acknowledged that students participate less in the virtual setting. Teacher 4 tries to encourage participation by calling students' names, a method used in both the hybrid and virtual class. Whereas Teacher 3 prefers to contact students outside of the classroom to ensure that the student is coping. However, all interviewees expressed challenges as it relates to knowing whether or not a student is truly present behind the computer since silence is often met during lecture and tutorial hours. They recognized that at home distractions may hinder student participation as they (teachers) sometimes are distracted by activities in the household.

Nevertheless, students were asked questions concerning their participation in the virtual and physical classroom (see Appendix A, no. 9). Students that participate more in face-to-face classes credit their current lack of participation to at home distractions, lack of class engagement, ease of discretion and concealment behind a computer, technological hindrances such as delay and lag in communication due to internet problems, the increased feeling of isolation and anxiety and

the desire to have face-to-face interactions which boost confidence. A Year 3 student expanded, “In face-to-face classes, the synergistic benefits of 3D communication, body language and the presence of peers boosts class participation and confidence, while decreasing feelings of isolation and depression.”

Ironically, some of these responses are the same reasons students participate more in the virtual setting. In fact, the minority of students that participate more in the virtual setting credit their participation to increased isolation, concealment behind the computer and reduced anxiety. This shows that student participation is strictly dependent on the individual. A fact which both Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 easily linked to student personalities. Teacher 3 said:

The agility of the student has impressed me a lot, I've seen students bloom, literally have performed better, maybe because they were a little inhibited in the face-to-face and they feel more comfortable behind the screen, which is kind of strange for a foreign language student, but not every personality is the same. But I've also seen students suffer and I mean literally suffer.

Based on the students' responses, student personality does in fact play a role in their willingness to participate. For example, a student who prefers to participate in virtual classes explained, “In online classes it's easier for me to participate because I do have anxiety so it's easier being removed from the in-person stress” [SIC]. Likewise, a student who finds it difficult to participate anywhere but in the physical classroom admitted:

I am naturally a very extroverted person and I thrive in face-to-face interactions. Being home all the time now, with having to be in front of the screen practically all day... it is not as easy

for one to assert him or herself, nor is it as fun to interact with everyone else due to delays, lags in communication and lack of physical presence.

Nevertheless, teachers shared a common perspective on the importance of student participation in the classroom. According to the teachers, students will not know if they are able to communicate effectively in the target language unless they actively participate in class. Similarly to the work of Nike Arnold and Lara Ducate which highlights that collaborative learning encourages student participation, teachers discussed the importance of student participation not only in relation to class activities but also to participation in groups which helps foreign language students' acquire intercultural awareness.

In the physical classroom, some teachers promoted student participation by allowing them to do group work during class time. This was meant to remove anxiety and fear of judgement. Prior to the transfer online, both Teacher 2 and 4 encouraged group participation by using online forums such as Wiki or the Myelearning discussion forum. This allowed students to engage in critical thinking, expose themselves to diverse perspectives and remove inequalities from the physical environment.

As a result, teachers acknowledged that although students participate less in the virtual class setting, when put into groups with their peers, students talk more, especially in the target language. Furthermore, administering Breakout rooms on the online platform, Zoom, which most students preferred, facilitated collaborative work since students were separated from their lecturer so that they could carry out activities without intervention. Teachers, as meeting hosts, entered and left the Breakout rooms freely. Teacher 1 communicated surprise when it came to the efficacy of these group activities and getting students to participate. However, although it is an effective method, students prefer to work collectively in the physical environment than the virtual. Teacher

1 clarified that “group work in the [physical] classroom allowed them [students] to create relationships that did not exist before.”

This chapter revealed student and teacher opinions on communication and participation in the hybrid and virtual classroom. It showed that these two aspects are dependent on the factors that inspire students. The next chapter further examines the factors that motivate both student and teacher, and the manner in which motivation has changed since the transfer to a virtual setting.

## Chapter 3

### **The Impact of the Transfer on Foreign Language Student and Teacher Motivation**

Motivation is defined by Williams and Burden as a “state of cognitive and emotional arousal” which results in a persistent intellectual and physical effort (qtd. in Gilakjani et al. 9). Motivation is an integral factor in the L2 acquisition process. Thus, this chapter presents the findings on motivation from both questionnaires and interviews. By using graphs, charts and tables, this researcher examines and compares teacher and student motivation, the ways in which it may have been affected and the methods employed by foreign language teachers and students to keep motivated.

Students were asked questions that related to their level of motivation and the methods they implement to keep motivated (see Appendix A, no. 15, 16). The responses, shown in Fig. 3, reveal that fourteen students feel less motivated learning languages on a virtual platform than they did in the physical classroom. Of the students who are less motivated, nine (9) are second year students whereas the remaining six (6) are third year students. The graph also shows that five (5) students have not experienced a change in their level of motivation and a minority of four (4) students are more motivated since the transfer. Notably, the majority of participants who have not experienced a change in their level of motivation and who are more motivated learning online are third year students. This suggests that third year students were more prepared for the transfer to a virtual system than second year students. Nevertheless, students admitted that they ultimately prefer the face-to-face setting. Unlike teachers, who said that they have grown to enjoy teaching foreign languages online.

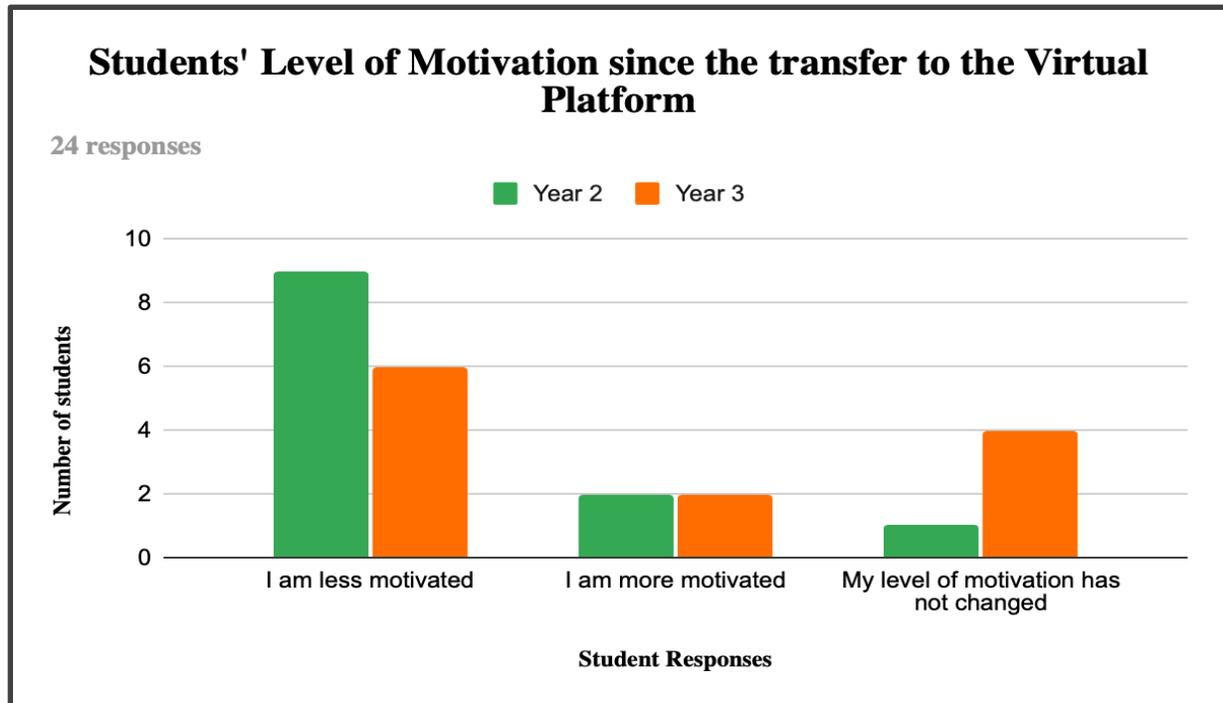


Fig. 3: Bar graph showing Students' Level of Motivation on the Virtual Platform

The teachers who were interviewed answered a similar question in regard to their motivation (see Appendix B, no. 2). Teachers in the Spanish section admit that their motivation has changed in a positive way. Coincidentally, Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and Teacher 4 referred to the transfer to the virtual setting as a challenge that has inspired them to be more innovative in their method of teaching. Teacher 1 admitted that constraints, such as time, which they encountered in the physical classroom are no longer a hindrance, and that the transfer allows for new resources and technology to be used for the delivery of the same content. Teacher 3 affirmed that his motivation evolved over time, beginning with panic which then evolved to excitement, exhaustion and eventually, “smooth sailing”. These results suggest, similarly to the study by Gilakjani et al., that students and teachers are motivated differently. Although teachers would have adapted to

teaching virtually and their motivation changed, students are not as responsive to the virtual platform.

To further inquire into the source of student motivation, students were asked to identify the advantages and disadvantages that motivated and demotivated them respectively. The majority of participants (83.3%), as evidenced in Table 1, agreed that not having to worry about getting home early is an advantage of virtual classes, seventeen students (70.8%) agreed that not having to worry about parking or traveling is another advantage and fifteen students (62.5%) said that working in the comfort of their home is an advantage. Only seven students (29.2%) said that time management and cost reductions are advantages of the transfer and two students (8.3%) said that the virtual platform reduces stress. In addition, three students added that not having to interact, class recordings and being able to multitask are other advantages. Noteworthy, Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 admitted that they motivate students by providing resources and materials such as class recordings and activities that allow students to work efficiently during their own time.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Better time management	7	29.2%
Comfortable to do work at home	15	62.5%
Less work	2	8.3%
Don't have to pay rent	7	29.2%
Do not have to worry about travelling to the University or getting a park	17	70.8%
Do not have to worry about getting home after work	20	83.3%
I do not have to worry about speaking in class	5	20.8%
None	0	0.0%
Other	3	
1. I can multitask (do chores, work/earn money)		4.2%
2. I do not have to see or interact with people		4.2%
3. The recorded sessions enable playback of lectures		4.2%

Table 1: Table showing Student Responses to the Advantages of Virtual Classes

All interviewees, teachers from the French, Spanish and Portuguese sections, recognized that allowing students to work on their own, in and out of the classroom, and take advantage of different materials motivates students and helps with foreign language understanding. Interestingly, Teacher 3 admitted that in the virtual classroom there has been a change in student performance which can be associated with the change in work and study environment. These findings corroborate the research by Lai (2006) which reveals that the virtual system removes the pressure of being in a physical classroom, furthermore, education is no longer determined by geographical location or financial status. Teacher 1 explained that using a hybrid approach, “Students encountered problems that prevented them from being on campus, now those things are not a problem anymore. They can still be present in class [...] I think accessibility is a major advantage.”

When students were asked to identify the disadvantages of virtual classes in comparison to a hybrid class setting (see Appendix A, no. 23), the majority of students (87.5%) agreed that at home distractions are a disadvantage. As it was previously mentioned in Chapter 2, each teacher acknowledged that although the home brings comfort, distractions exist. Teachers recognized, however, that this is a challenge that affects the student more than them. In fact, Teacher 3 said, “I am sure it was more problematic for the student than me. For me it was only a little distracting.” Teachers explained that they encounter their own at home distractions such as peripheral noises, technical difficulties and problems with the teaching platform. To overcome these challenges Teacher 3 stated that purchasing equipment like noise cancelling headphones that allows for better communication removes the issue of peripheral noises. Other teachers have changed to using Zoom which they believe is more user friendly.

While the teachers have proven to be more adaptable, students readily identified the challenges they faced in online classes (see Table 2). Seventeen students (70.8%) admitted that it is difficult to focus during virtual classes and agreed that too much work is given during virtual classes. Sixteen students (66.7%) agreed that internet problems are a disadvantage. However, other disadvantages include difficulty in managing time, the lack of a proper device, difficulty in participating in class and eyesight problems. Each of these disadvantages act as a deterrent to learning foreign languages on a virtual system.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Difficulty managing time	8	33.3%
Do not have a proper device to work online	2	8.3%
Internet problem	16	66.7%
At home distractions	21	87.5%
Lack of motivation	13	54.2%
Difficult to focus	17	70.8%
Too much work	17	70.8%
Difficult to participate in class	7	29.2%
None	0	0.0%
Other		
1. Eye aches and pains from being on an electronic device all day for school and entertainment.	2	4.2%
2. My eyesight is horrible		4.2%

Table 2: Table showing Student Responses to the Challenges of Virtual classes

Although all students recognized the advantages of virtual systems, students more readily identified the factors that demotivated them from attending online classes than the motivators that encouraged them. In fact, only 15 students shared the advantages that motivated them to be present in the virtual setting, whereas 23 respondents admitted the disadvantages that deterred them. This

suggests that while students acknowledge the advantages that are afforded by the virtual system, they are not inspired by them. Thus, it did not come as a surprise that teachers are more concerned with the challenges that students face, rather than their personal challenges. Each teacher explained the way in which they are exposed to student challenges and how they try to facilitate students during this time.

The challenges and advantages faced by foreign language teachers and students are catalysts to a student's attrition and completion of a degree online. Indeed, AIDahdouh argues that although negative emotions felt by students are a result of their inability to adapt fully to a virtual forum, these emotions actually motivate students to do better academically (2020). This research coincides with the results of this study. Students were asked two questions (see Appendix A, no. 3, 6) that describe their feelings towards the virtual teaching and learning approach in comparison to the hybrid approach. These results when compared to the students' motivational drive presented surprising results. In fact, the majority of students had negative emotions towards the virtual setting. Most students (79.2%) described the transfer from a hybrid to a virtual approach as stressful, followed by nerve wracking. They also admitted to feeling anxious and demotivated. Similar to Teacher 3 who previously described motivation as ever changing, some students, although they had negative emotions towards the transfer, felt grateful and found the transfer interesting.

Student motivation is sourced from internal (emotions) or external (teaching methods) factors (Gilakjani et al. 10). Foreign language students' and teachers' emotions are catalysts to intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivation at the language, learner, and the learning situation level. Indeed, students seek an instrumental result, that is, they are motivated by the need to achieve their long term and short-term personal goals, such as completing their degree, starting a career, or

completing an assignment. These results suggest that students, although they possess negative emotions, wish to perform well academically to achieve their goals. In order to do this however, teachers recommend that students work independently and practice autonomy. Thus, the following chapter examines how student motivation has contributed to their desire to learn autonomously and the role of the teacher in this type of learning.

## Chapter 4

### **The Impact of the Transfer on Foreign Language Students' Autonomy and the Role of the Teacher**

Autonomous learning is defined as a student's ability to engage in independent work and to use appropriate learning strategies both inside and outside of the classroom (Kessler and Dawn 42). As previously mentioned, the participants at the center of this study included 24 foreign language students and four foreign language teachers. This chapter discusses the methods employed by teachers to encourage students in autonomous learning in both the physical and virtual classroom setting, thereby examining the role of the teacher and the change since the transfer to a virtual teaching-learning approach.

Based on the results of this research, language teachers at the UWI, St. Augustine have always incorporated group activities in and out of the classroom to encourage students to take control of their learning. This is known as collaborative learning which is a method used to ensure that students remain constructive in the language learning process. Autonomous learning, however, is not a sole activity, one study indicates that technology may promote more social opportunities for autonomous language practice and interaction (Benson, 2001). In this domain of language learning, teachers are meant to guide learners in the physical classroom. They are required to provide flexible assignments so that students can take control of their learning. In fact, Teacher 3 believes that designating an appropriate amount of time to complete assignments and implementing activities that allow students to interact with others motivate them.

When students were asked about teacher involvement in autonomous learning, 50% of students admitted that teachers have shown them how to use online resources while 50% have denied teachers' involvement. Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 introduce online resources and tools

in the classroom so that students can become acquainted with them and use them on their own. This technology can be manipulated to suit student needs as it provides flexibility in different ways (Kessler and Dawn 51). Teacher 2 expanded by saying the complexity of the assignment must differ when students work independently, students should be given activities, for example on online forums, that allow them to correct and learn from their peers. This corroborates the aforementioned study that says student setting and motivation are integral to autonomous learning (Kessler and Dawn 42).

Autonomous learning within the physical and virtual classroom is highly dependent on the component. Fourteen of the twenty-four students (see Fig. 4) think that the Listening component is best suited for online delivery. However, Teacher 2 said that Reading and Writing is the component best suited for asynchronous online delivery as students are able to work independently and during their own time. Teacher 2 explained that when students were tasked with working independently in the physical classroom, they encountered time constraints which prevented them from completing their tasks during the designated class hours. It is for that reason Teacher 2 favours the online delivery and asynchronicity of this component.

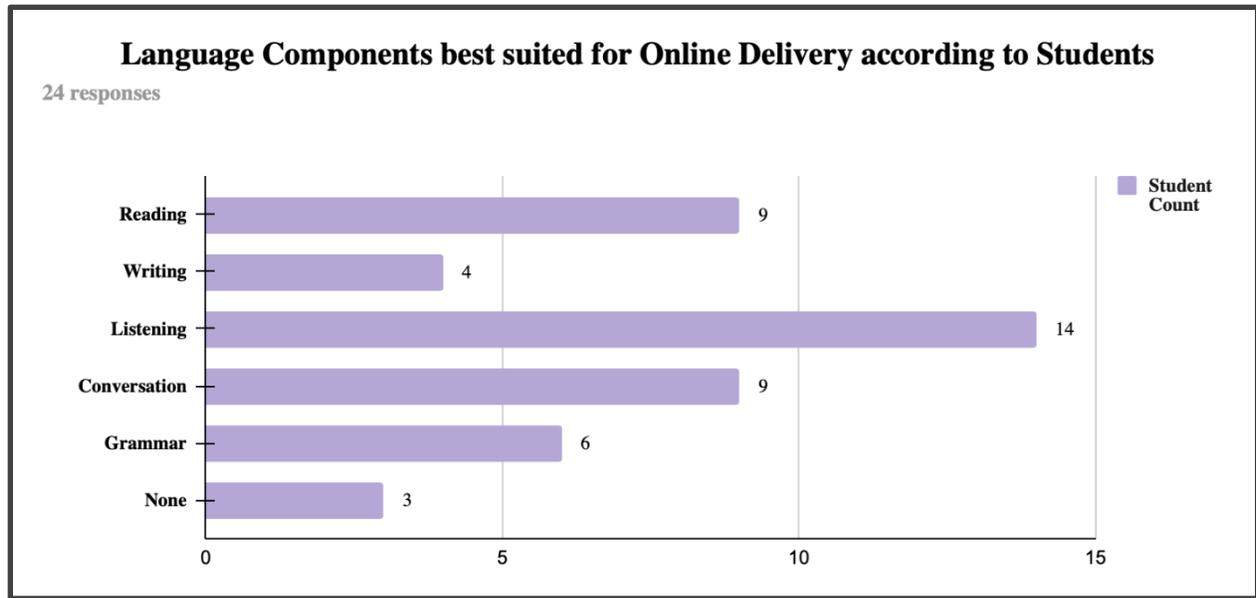


Fig. 4: Bar graph showing Language Components best suited for Online Delivery according to Students

Both Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 agreed that Listening is in fact a component that requires both technology and student and teacher communication. Therefore, it is better suited for the hybrid classroom. Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 believe that posting information and resources on Myelearning peaks students' interests and leads them to find additional information on their own. Teacher 3 postulated that by providing students with documents to prepare them for discussion or work in the classroom, students can take control of their learning. In fact, the majority of students (50%), as evidenced in Fig. 5, agreed that preparation has remained the same since the transfer. While 25% believe that preparation was easier for the physical classroom and the remaining 25% believe that more preparation is required for the virtual classroom.

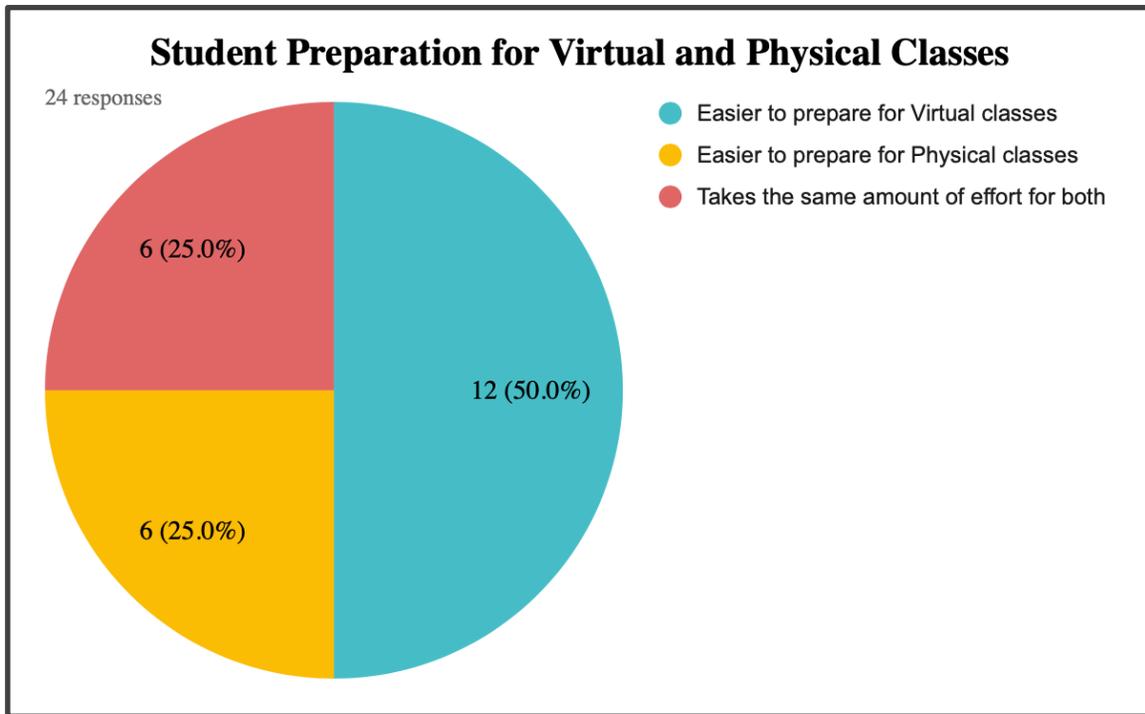


Fig. 5: Pie chart showing Student Thoughts on preparing for the Virtual and Physical Classes

Teachers agreed that since the transfer to a virtual setting students need to practice autonomy more than ever. Teacher 4 elaborated:

One of the theories of language acquisition is that we are all born with the same facilities for language so that is why a child who is born to Indian parents but is born in China will grow up speaking Mandarin or Cantonese and not Hindi. It is because we all have the 0 platform and whatever sounds you hear are the sounds you will repeat.

Therefore, constant exposure to a language determines the language spoken. It is important that students use different materials to listen to languages during their free time. This allows students to become acquainted with foreign sounds and eventually imitate these sounds. In fact, one student admitted that he does not work independently, thus this lack of autonomy prompts

poor performance and proficiency in the target language. Other students shared that when they do learn autonomously, they use resources such as Youtube, Duolingo, Netflix and Linguee. However, since the transfer to an online setting the majority of students (87.5%) admit to having more assignments to complete but less time to complete them. As a result, most students said that they have less time to study independently.

As the Constructivist Theory indicates although teachers are resources, they are to refrain from imposing their personal values on students seeing as they are not the only source of information (Aljohani 106). This study showed unexpected results when it came to the teachers' role in student autonomy. As seen in Fig. 6, there was not a major difference between students whose teachers guide them to work autonomously and those whose teachers do not. Although teachers may not actively encourage student autonomy, they admitted that by giving students intriguing assignments they were inspired to search for information independently. In this way, students are able to interpret and discuss themes that interest them. These methods have been used in the hybrid setting and have been transferred to the virtual setting.

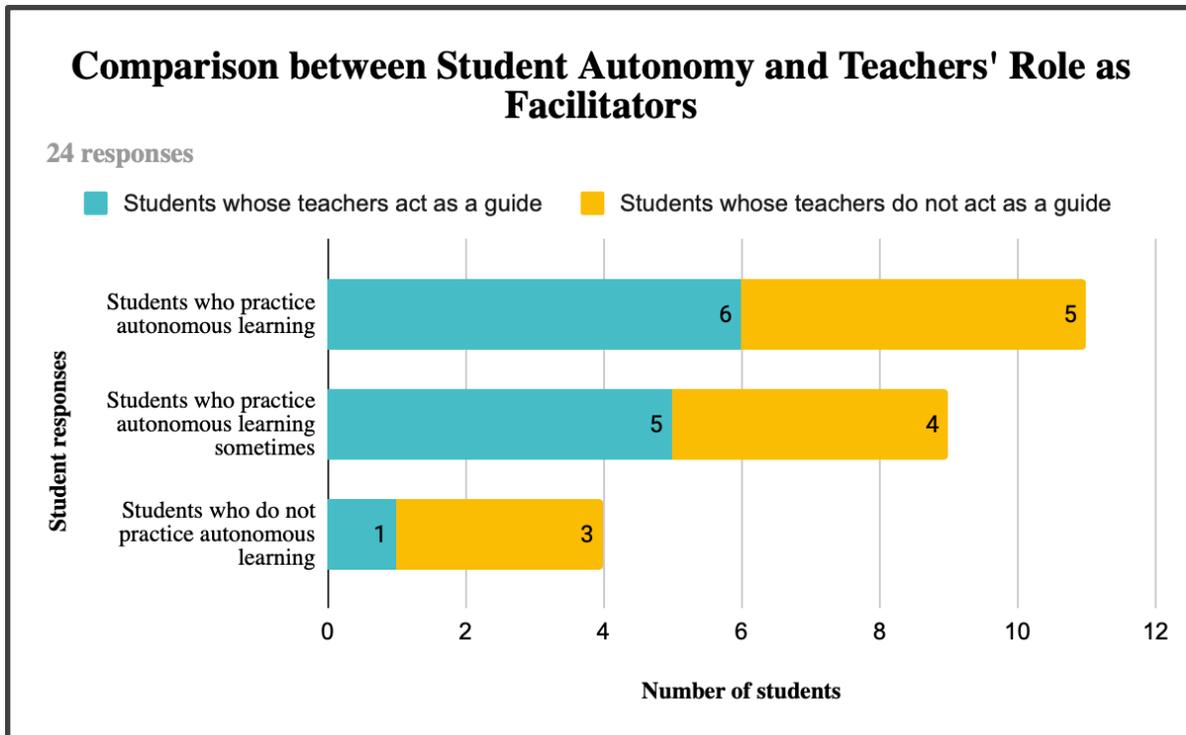


Fig. 6: Bar graph showing Relationship between Student Autonomy and Teachers' Role

It is evident therefore that there is a need to encourage greater student autonomy for foreign language students at the UWI.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings, in order to achieve effective communication between foreign language teachers and students it is necessary for a learning relationship, which allows teachers to understand student personalities, to be created in the physical space. Although technology allows faster communication, technological and homely interference challenges both teachers and students. Consequently, this has hindered student progression and participation. Thus, virtual communication and participation are highly dependent on the physical setting.

Students' levels of motivation have decreased significantly since the transfer to a virtual setting. Although students acknowledge the benefits of virtual learning, like being in the comfort of their home, they feel less eager to learn foreign languages in this environment. Their demotivation is not necessarily linked to the learning content but rather to their inability to focus in class. Nevertheless, foreign language students in their final year seem to be more prepared for virtual classes than their year 2 counterparts, this may be as a result of their first two years of preparation using a hybrid teaching-learning approach. Furthermore, negative emotions felt by foreign language students motivate them to complete their assignments and ultimately their degree.

On the other hand, teachers, although their level of motivation is not static, are motivated by this new teaching environment as it provides them with an opportunity to utilize new technology that was not afforded by the hybrid classroom. Nevertheless, similarly to students, they recognize limitations that exist in the virtual classroom, particularly those that discourage students from attending classes. However, although the role of the teacher has changed, teachers continue to act as a guide in the classroom. They take advantage of technology to motivate students and encourage autonomous learning. Since the transfer they have maintained a student-centred class that allows students to take control of their learning.

Thus, motivation and setting are linked to students' desire to learn autonomously. Teachers encourage autonomous learning by introducing new technology in the class, thereby signifying that in addition to the student environment and motivation teachers are needed as a guide to autonomous learning. It is likely that the resources introduced in the hybrid and virtual class setting are the materials that students will use on their own. However, since the transfer to the virtual setting students have less time to learn independently as a result of the increased workload. Therefore, it is important that content is manipulated to facilitate student autonomy and motivation in order to ensure student progress and performance.

Nevertheless, it is evident that teaching and learning foreign languages online can be effective. Given that the virtual approach corrects the flaws encountered in the physical classroom and vice versa, it is recommended that, in the future, teachers find a balance between both types of classes. It is imperative, however, that the curriculum is altered to suit online delivery. This means a change in the examination format, assignments that encourage student motivation, autonomy and participation and adequate time to complete these assignments. This would reduce the frustration felt among students and allow students to produce greater work. This may encourage student participation and communication which in extension will reduce the frustration felt among teachers during virtual classes.

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## Appendix A

### Sample Questionnaire

#### Student Information

1.) Which foreign language(s) are you currently studying at the University of the West Indies, St.

Augustine? *Tick all that apply*

Spanish

French

Portuguese

English

2.) What year are you in?\*

Year 1

Year 2

3.) How do you feel about the current semester? *Tick all that apply.*

Confident

Relaxed

Grateful

Normal

Angry

Anxious

Demotivated

4.) Which is your preferred mode of study?

Online

Face-to-face

5.) Which forum do you use in your classes ?

- Zoom                       Blackboard Collaborate                       Webex  
 Microsoft Teams     Google Meetings                       Schoology

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6.) How would you describe the transfer from the hybrid system (face-to-face classes & online work) to the virtual system (only online).

- Great                               Interesting                               Normal  
 Nerve Wracking                       Stressful                               Terrible

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7.) Has any of your lecturers, tutors and/or UWI representatives shown you how to use the virtual platforms?

- Yes     No

8.) What do you miss most about face to face classes?

- Class activities                               Student interactions                               Environment  
 Interactions with lecturers/tutors     Nothing

Other: \_\_\_\_\_



13.) In your opinion which components are best suited for virtual delivery? *Tick all that apply.*

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Conversation
- Grammar
- None

## Motivation

14.) Do you think it is easier to prepare for virtual classes or face-to-face classes?

- Easier to prepare for virtual classes
- Easier to prepare for face-to-face classes
- Takes the same amount of effort

15.) Since the transfer to virtual classes, describe your motivation level.

- I am more motivated
- I am less motivated
- My level of motivation has not changed.

16.) How do you keep yourself motivated (prior to the transfer online vs now)?

---

**Autonomy**

17.) (a) Apart from your online classes, do you use other applications to improve your competence in the language of your choice?

Yes

No

Sometimes

(b) Please explain how you improve your skills in the foreign language that you are studying.

---

18.) Since the transfer to virtual classes, do you think you have more free time to study independently?

Yes

No

I have the same amount of time

19.) Since the transfer to virtual classes, has there been an increase in the amount of work received?

Yes

No

20.) Since the transfer to virtual classes, have you been able to complete assignments faster?

- Yes
- No
- It takes the same amount of time

## Challenges/Advantages

21.) Based on your experience, do you think that virtual teaching and learning is an effective way to learn a foreign language?

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

22.) (a) In your opinion, what are some of the advantages of virtual classes?

- Better time management
  - Comfortable to do work at home
  - Less stress
  - Don't have to pay rent
  - Do not have to worry about travelling to the University or getting a park
  - Don't have to worry about getting home after late classes
  - I don't have to worry about speaking in class
  - None
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Which of the advantages, if any, motivate you to attend your online classes?

23.) (a) What are the challenges you face in your virtual classes?

Difficulty managing time

Don't have a proper device to work online

Internet problems

At home distractions

Lack of motivation

Difficult to focus

Too much work

Difficult to participate in classes

None

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Which of the disadvantages, if any, demotivate or deter you from attending your online classes?

\_\_\_\_\_

24.) (a) If during your application process at the University of the West Indies, you had the choice between virtual classes and face-to-face classes which of the two would you have chosen?

Virtual classes

Face-to-Face classes

(b) Please give a reason for your response.

25.) In your opinion, what can be done to improve virtual classes?

---

26.) Do you think that virtual classes should be a permanent option for future students at the University?

Yes

No

(b) Please give a reason for your response.

---

## Appendix B

### Sample Interview Questions

1. Which language and which component(s) do you teach at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine?
2. Has this change from a hybrid teaching approach to a virtual teaching approach impacted your level of motivation in teaching foreign languages?
3. Do you believe that your level of motivation has a direct impact on student motivation? Please explain (how).
4. How do you motivate students to learn languages online?
5. How did you promote autonomous learning in the *physical* classroom?
6. How do you promote autonomous learning in the *virtual* classroom?
7. How has communication changed between you and students since the transfer to a virtual setting?
8. How has student participation changed since the transfer to a virtual setting?
9. How did you promote student participation in the *physical* classroom?
10. How do you promote student participation in the *virtual* setting?
11. In the perspective of a foreign language teacher, why is student participation important in learning foreign languages?
12. Why is student-teacher communication important in teaching foreign languages?
13. Did you change your teaching style when you moved to an online setting?
14. What was a major challenge that you faced when teaching in the *physical* classroom?
15. What is a major challenge that you face teaching *online*?
16. Have you found a solution to these challenges? What are they?

17. In your opinion, what is a major advantage of teaching foreign languages online?
18. In your opinion, do you believe that teaching foreign languages online is effective? (Why)