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The Professional Identity of Foreign Language Teachers in the Digital Age in Croatia: A Case Study

In this paper, we aim to explore the professional identity of foreign language teachers in the digital age in Croatia. In order to answer the question "What are the essential qualities of a good foreign language teacher in the digital age?", we draw on the theory of teachers' professional identity (Korthagen 2004) and the framework for classroom and curriculum transformation – a learning intervention entitled Learning by Design, proposed by Kalantzis / Cope (2010). Our data consists of four personal narratives of Croatian foreign language professionals elicited via semi-structured interviews where we focused on the concept of identity in the digital age, specifically in the era immediately prior to and during the Covid-19 crisis. The data is analysed qualitatively and presented with illustrative examples of what teachers perceive as good teaching in the digital age. According to our participants, a good foreign language teacher in the digital age is a keen lifelong learner, classroom manager and a professional collaborator having specific personal qualities, ready to critically evaluate their environment and to combine traditional and e-forms of teaching in order to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes.

1 Introduction

Language teacher and language teacher education is an area of identity research that has been gaining momentum for the past two decades. The growing interest has resulted in a rich body of work that has informed language learning, teaching, and research. This topic of research has been heavily influenced by the poststructural approaches (see Duff / Uchida 1997; Pavlenko 2003; Varghese et al. 2005; Clarke 2008; Reeves 2009; Kanno / Stuart 2011; Menard-Warwick 2013; Stranger-Johanssen / Norton 2017) where the plurality and composite nature of language teacher identities in the contexts of competing discourses and ideologies have been emphasized. Other authors, more aligned with social constructionism, described identity as "the unique set of characteristics associated with a particular individual relative to the perceptions and characteristics of others" (cf. Pennington 2014: 16). These studies proposed different teachers' identity models that emphasize teachers' roles (see Pennington 1999; Richardson 2006; Day et al. 2008; Pennington / Richards 2016).

Nowadays, this topic seems to be more intriguing than ever. It is not surprising, since digital technology has profoundly changed and shaped teachers' identity in the world, especially due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The views of the role of the teacher have rapidly shifted from a person transferring knowledge to a person guiding students. In fact, for a long time language teachers were seen "as technicians who needed merely to "apply" the right methodology in order for the learners to acquire the target language" (cf. Varghese et al. 2005: 22) and that was their unique role. Although this paradigm shift was promoted and discussed years before the pandemic, in relation to changing social, cultural, institutional, economic, and educational settings (see New London Group 1996; Unsworth 2001), recently, these roles have been highly exposed, discussed, and even criticized in society. This means that teachers are expected to adopt a different view of their role, and a different answer to the question "who am I as a teacher?". We believe that understanding foreign language teachers' identity is crucial in order to better comprehend teacher development, their interactions with peers and colleagues and their pedagogical choices or classroom practices.

In this paper, we look into experiences of foreign language teachers who have been teaching (occasionally) in the digital environment since the spring of 2020 due to the Covid-19 crisis.

Firstly, two main theoretical models will be presented and described: Korthagen's (2004) "on-ion model" and Kalantzis / Cope's (2010; 2015) Learning by Design model. Afterwards, the methodology of the research will be presented, followed by the results obtained from the interviews. Our data consists of teachers' experiences with their digital educational practices that have been synthesized for purposes of this research and related to the theoretical and practical concepts on which this research is primarily based.

2   Theoretical background

As noted earlier, this paper draws on (i) the theory of teachers' professional identity proposed by Korthagen (2004) and the (ii) framework for classroom and curriculum transformation – a learning intervention entitled Learning by Design and proposed by Kalantzis / Cope (2010) in the field of the Multimodal Pedagogy and Multiliteracies project.

The (i) "onion model" (see Fig. 1) is, in fact, an adaptation of what is known in the literature as Bateson's model (Dilts 1990). According to Korthagen (2004: 77) it is "an umbrella model of levels of change that could serve as a framework for reflection and development".
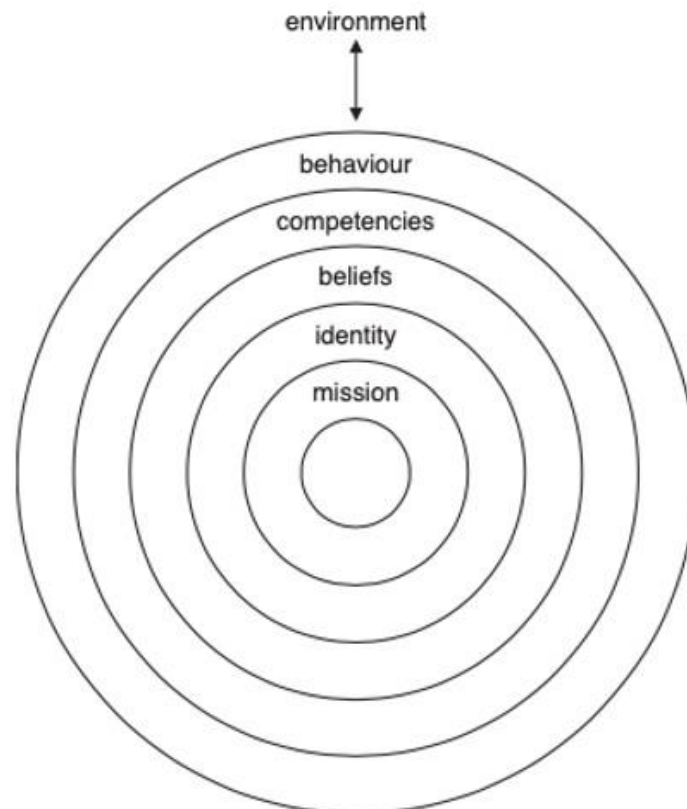

Fig. 1. The onion: a model of levels of change

The "onion model" shows that there are various levels of change that could serve as a resource to construct one's professional identity. The outermost levels, that can be directly observed by others, are the *environment* (e.g. the class, the students, the school) and teachers' *behavior*. The next level is the level of *competencies*, conceived of as an integrated body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, such as the knowledge of the subject matter, methodological competency, digital competency etc. The fourth level are teachers' *beliefs* about learning and teaching. They determine the teachers' behavior. For example, one teacher may have developed the belief that the

teacher is the dispenser of knowledge while others could develop the belief that the teacher is a facilitator and coordinator. The *identity* level is concerned with numerous questions, such as: "who am I?", 'what kind of teacher do I want to be?', "how do I see my role as a teacher?", and "what are my roles?". The last level, the level of *mission* is concerned with highly personal questions as to what end the teacher wants to do their work, or even what they see as their personal calling in the world. An important assumption behind the model is that the outer levels can influence the inner levels and vice-versa. For instance, lack of support for online teaching, such as poor school equipment or insufficient education, may trigger very different reactions from different teachers. One could, because of their beliefs and mission, through behavior, independently work harder to develop the digital competencies, while another teacher could develop an aversion towards virtual classrooms and show resistance.

The second approach followed in our research is (ii) Learning by Design – an intervention strategy and guideline for the creation of new or adapted school curricula. This intervention finds its roots in multimodal reflexive pedagogy, originally proposed and articulated by the group gathered around the Multiliteracies project (New London Group 1996; Cope / Kalantzis 2000). In the early age of researching and critically reflecting on digitalization and schooling, the group of linguists and educators gathered around this concept proposed diverse approaches to teaching and learning in the context of new media and a new and global knowledge economy.

This model is mostly concerned with "sociocultural differences between learners and the role this plays in their transformation as learners" (cf. Kalantzis / Cope 2010: 205). This means that, instead of focusing on the psychological and cognitive aspects, the native differences and capabilities of learners, this paradigm focuses primarily on the cultural and social conditions of learning which address and influence the diversity of learners and its agency in the educational processes. Kalantzis / Cope (2010) affirm that these conditions, during the process of transformation of learners, tackle, on the one side, a person's identity, and, on the other, the engagement that could facilitate and widen the competencies and knowledge. These considerations stand out specially in the highly participatory digital societies which influence and facilitate the up-building of new learning environments and new schooling.

In this approach to learning (see Kalantzis / Cope 2010), the teacher serves as a designer of activities for diverse identities which correspond to the actual social and cultural conditions. Nowadays, these conditions are undoubtedly related to the digitalization of education – rapid changes and adaptation to digital and hybrid schooling. We consider that this is the point where the principles of reflexive multimodal pedagogy (Cope / Kalantzis 2000), related to the changes in literacy and contemporary social and educational practices, meet the model of levels of change proposed by Korthagen (2004). In other words, by relating these approaches and applying them to the research of teachers' perspectives on and experiences with digital practices during the pandemic, we aim to obtain fine-grained results of a professional identity of foreign language teachers.

In the Learning by Design project, Kalantzis / Cope (2010) proposed several characteristics of the New Learner and the New Teacher. Talking about the societal and educational changes, the authors elaborate on a "transformation of the teaching profession", affirming that "if we are to have 'new learners', we need 'new teachers'" (Kalantzis / Cope 2010: 204). Since the learner's perspective is not the subject of this paper, we will focus on the main characteristics of a new teacher, as proposed by Kalantzis / Cope (2010). In the following figure (see Fig. 2), the essential qualities of the New Teacher will be presented, along with the outline of the salient attributes of a new educational context. This classification primarily served us for the methodology design, i.e. the elaboration and analysis of interview questions.

New educational contexts	
MULTIFACETED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ACTIVE AND ENGAGED EDUCATION HORIZONTAL RELATIONS COLLABORATION, SHARING, MULTITASKING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING DIGITAL COMPETENCIES	
The New Teacher	
• takes a greater degree of control of their professional lives, designing learning experiences for their learners based on broad learning goals and curriculum standards • is a purposeful learning designer, rather than (just) a curriculum implementer • is able to 'let go', giving learners the space to take greater responsibility in their learning • knows that to be authoritative does not mean being authoritarian • is comfortable in online learning design and delivery platforms – spaces which are not just lesson planning, or just a textbook, or just a student workbook • is comfortable working with learners in new, multimodal, online social media spaces • has a new professional identity, as teaching becomes less of a talking profession and more of an online documenting profession • is a professional collaborator, contributing productively to a culture of professional support and sharing	• puts more work into documentation of best practices whilst creating less work for themselves as they contribute to and share a reusable knowledge bank • engages their learners' identities and harnesses lateral knowledge-making energies amongst learners • manages a multifaceted learning environment in which learners may be engaged in a variety of different activities simultaneously • differentiates instruction in order to cater effectively to learner diversity • is a leader in a dynamic, knowledge-producing community • is a practitioner-researcher, building and interpreting the evidence base of pedagogical inputs in relation to learner outcomes • creates and implements ubiquitous assessment 'for learning', not just end-of-program assessment 'of learning' • creates and applies evaluation protocols to measure the effectiveness of pedagogies and programs

Fig. 2. Learning by Design: the New teacher model, retrieved and edited from Kalantzis / Cope (2010)

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

Our main research question is: What makes a good digital foreign language teacher? or What are the essential qualities of a good language teacher in the digital age? We understand it would be undesirable to formulate a definite or singular description of "a good foreign language teacher in the digital age". However, just as Korthagen (2004), our intention is to aim towards a framework for a discussion of such a norm.

The main aims of our research were to document changes in foreign language teaching in the digital era and to provide a framework for thinking about the concept of a good foreign language teacher in the digital age. Finally, our aim is also to broaden the discussion on this topic in Croatia because we found that it is rather an under-researched concept in Croatia that requires more attention.

3.2 Data Collection

In order to answer these questions, we opt for a case study and turn to the analysis of narratives elicited in semi-structured deep interviews with 4 Croatian foreign language teachers where we

focused on the concept of their identity in the digital age, specifically in the era immediately before and during the Covid-19. Firstly, we chose 9 Croatian foreign language teachers potentially interesting for our research. They were suggested by foreign language counselors – experts that monitor the work of foreign language teachers on a national level. They filled the questionnaire which we used as a tool to choose our main participants. Four participants were then chosen according to their increased professional activity in the digital spaces before the pandemic. For this purpose, we checked their activity on diverse digital educational platforms, such as YouTube, e-schools and Loomen (Croatian digital platforms), Microsoft Teams, Learning app, Wizer, etc. Prior to the main interviews, we conducted 2 pilot interviews that helped us verify the quality of our questions and the structure of the interview.

Once we developed our structure, we conducted our interviews (approx. 60 min. each) with 4 teachers listed in the table below (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1: Participants in the research.

PSEUDONYM	POSITION	WORKPLACE
Vera	French teacher	High school, Osijek
Karla	Italian teacher	Primary school, Zagreb
Marina	English teacher	Vocational school, Prelog
Tihana	German teacher	University of Applied Health Sciences, Zagreb

Our interview questions were based on two chosen theoretical models (see Appendix). The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed qualitatively, bottom-up, in order to relate our findings to the chosen theoretical models. As a result of a content analysis carried out through a very long process with in-depth attention, the results found were interpreted for each of the six levels of the onion model (see Fig. 1) and linked to the systematization of professional qualities of the New Teacher (see Fig. 2).

In this research, we adopted a poststructuralist understanding of narrative discourse and narration as "a way in which individuals enact, perform, shape and also represent identities within specific interactional contexts, while at the same time building upon, reflecting and conveying social experiences related to other practices" (Relaño Pastor 2014: 16). Since the narratives we are analyzing here are instances of spoken discourse, we opted for a transcription style that aims to capture the rhythm and prosodic features of spoken discourse. To ensure the authenticity of these instances of spoken discourse, we present them in the original language (Croatian), but also provide English translations to make them accessible to readers who are not familiar with the language. In order to protect our respondents' names and other personal information, we use pseudonyms instead of their real names.

4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Level of Environment

Firstly, we attempted to examine the environmental factors closely related to digital education that influence foreign language teachers in the digital age. According to our participants, the following factors appeared as significant:

- recommendations of the authorities, e.g. Ministry of Science and Education
- (lack of) support from the authorities
- (lack of) cooperation between schools, universities and other educational institutions
- (lack of) equipment for teaching and learning (number of computers, internet speed, teacher education, etc.)
- attitudes of other social actors related to the educational process (parents, media, etc.) towards school
- students' digital competencies
- student engagement in online and physical classroom activities.

It appeared that all the participants critically evaluated leadership and coordination provided by the authorities (Example 1):

Example 1 (Marina)
podrška Ministarstva bila je u prvoj fazi pandemije
tada je postojao community
sada, nema sustavne podrške
očekuje se da svi super plivaju u tome i da nije potrebna dodatna podrška

the Ministry supported us in the first phase of the pandemic
back then it was a community
now there is no systematic support
everyone is expected to deal with it and that no additional support is needed

Even though this comment is rather closely related to our respondents' experience with online teaching during the pandemic, support and resources from the leadership is to be expected and regularly provided regardless of social conditions.

Our respondents also often mentioned parents as another environmental factor that influences online learning and teaching (Example 2):

Example 2 (Karla)
bilo je revolta kod roditelja jer su stalno morali biti prisutni
jer su djeca bila izgubljena i trebala su potporu od roditelja
a roditelji su još inzistirali na video lekcijama
i nisu se slagali s nekim metodama rada u online okružju

some parents complained because they had to be constantly present
because the children were lost and needed support from the parents
and parents insisted on video lessons
and they did not agree with some methods of working in an online environment

Again, this opinion resulted from the exceptional circumstances related to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this excerpt indicates the level of students' digital competencies before the pandemic which is one of the factors potentially related with the teachers' lack of use of digital tools prior to the pandemic.

In the following example, Karla critically evaluates the demanding position of the teacher in the digital age regarding the relationship with her students.

Example 3 (Karla)
učenici su stalno na Teamsu i stalno očekuju da im odgovaram
a ja nisam postavila granicu kada odgovaram na pitanja
pa je došao neki nesklad između toga gdje smo mi: jesmo li online ili u školi jer smo i mi i oni svuda
i onda mi dođe ne mogu više na svim sam stranama

students are constantly on Teams and constantly expect me to answer them
and I didn't set a limit when answering questions
so there was some discrepancy between where we are: are we online or in school
because both we and they are everywhere and then I feel like I'm fed up, I'm supposed to be everywhere at once

It seems both she and her students are concerned and confused with rapidly changing professional roles. Moreover, it seems that, in the digital era, her professional identity overlaps with her personal identity more than she wished it was the case, which is the consequence of the sudden transition from a mainly physical to a mainly virtual classroom.

Furthermore, our teachers would often relate their personal life and experiences with the digital schooling they were all suddenly immersed in. Hence, they pointed out that their personal and professional life got much more connected and that this affected their personal lives (since many times they did not know where the new work schedule is ending, etc.). They also emphasized that they observed their children's behavior and their reflections regarding diverse digital teaching methods and that this would encourage reflections, make them think and change their own habits, teaching activities and methods for the benefits of their students.

In addition, alongside the above-listed qualities (see Fig. 2), we did find out about some reflections related to education during the pandemic which are specific to the Croatian context or personal experience of the Covid-19 crisis – a situation that was not unfolding at the time the New Teacher model was created. We want to point out that our teachers participated in the project of digitalization of Croatian schools, School For Life – a project concerning curricular reform that took place several years prior to the pandemic – and they were critical towards the Ministry because they felt a lack of adequate professional and technical support, and clear teaching instructions, during the period of the lockdown.

Overall, it seems that a good foreign language teacher in the digital age critically evaluates the entire body of external factors that influence their work. Moreover, as it will be clearly demonstrated in the following chapters, they are willing and able to take action and make changes. In other words, they make informed classroom and professional development decisions based on classroom needs, reflections, and considerations.

4.2　Level of Behavior

According to our respondents, a comprehensive list of a good foreign language teacher's behavior in the digital age comprises:

- combining physical and online teaching with regard to their best features
- adapting teaching contents
- adapting digital education to the characteristics of the school subject they teach
- combining traditional communication channels and task types with contemporary ones

In the following excerpt, Marina expresses her willingness to introduce good online teaching practices into offline classes.

Example 4 (Marina)
čak smo i ravnatelju predložili da i u normalnim uvjetima imamo jedan digitalni tjedan
projektni tjedan u kojem bi nastava bila u digitalnom obliku
online nastava za projekte, suradnje...

we even suggested to the principal that we have one digital week even under normal conditions
a project week in which classes would be in digital form
online teaching for projects, collaborations...

This example indicates that a good foreign language teacher in the digital age is, neither more nor less, a school leader for digital technology. They possess the self-awareness, communication skills and the ability to influence school leadership to introduce the best features of digital education in offline classes.

Examples 5 and 6 illustrate how digital teachers take informed and reasoned decisions related to the use of digital tools.

Example 5 (Karla)
radila sam s digitalnim alatima zato što sam ja to voljela raditi
i što je učenicima tako bilo zanimljivo i zabavno učiti

I worked with digital tools because I loved doing it
and the students find it interesting and fun to learn that way

Example 6 (Marina)
Ja sam inzistirala na sinkronoj nastavi
procijenila sam da bez komunikacije, usmene, nema smisla u nastavi stranog jezika

I insisted on synchronous teaching
I estimated that, without communication, oral communication, there is no sense in teaching a foreign language

In other words, they use digital tools to enhance the students' productivity: while Karla (Example 5) estimated that digital tools increase her students' motivation, Marina (Example 6) concluded that online teaching and learning that happens in real time with more responsive exchanges between students and teacher may both prevent miscommunication or misunderstanding and allow students to achieve learning outcomes.

This led us to the conclusion that one of the essential qualities of a good foreign language teacher in the digital age is the skill to make deliberate decisions regarding forms of teaching which will provide those learning conditions that will allow students to achieve the learning outcomes.

4.3 Level of Competencies

Regarding the level of competencies, it appeared that our participant frequently made references to their and other teachers' digital competences. The following fragments from Tihana's interviews indicate different aspects of digital competencies (Example 7).

Example 7 (Tihana)
danas se nudi puno toga
izdavači su počeli izrađivati digitalne zadatke
udžbenici su postali digitalni
more svega u čemu se nastavnik treba snaći i odlučiti što mu treba

...
neki ne razumiju osnovno djelovanje
tamna podloga tamna slova
…
moram znati kako ću dozirati koji alat

a lot is being offered today
publishers began to create digital activities
textbooks have become digital
a bunch of everything a teacher needs to do and decide what they need
…
some teachers do not understand the basics
dark background dark letters
…
I need to know how much I should use each tool

In other words, as it was expected, the digital competencies seem to be one of the essential qualities of foreign language teachers in the digital age. However, we expected that teachers would mention their current methodological competencies. More precisely, we wondered if teachers were reflecting whether it is possible to simply adapt traditional offline content to the digital context. Yet only Karla (Example 8) and Vera (Example 9) made references to that point. Other respondents insisted on the reciprocity of the teaching and learning contexts regarding the methodological approach.

Example 8 (Karla)
treba imati puno više aktivnosti u onlineu
mora se malo promijeniti jer nije lako cijelo vrijeme gledati u ekran niti biti aktivan na jedan način

there needs to be a lot more activities online
it has to change a bit because it's not easy to look at the screen all the time or be active in a single way

Example 9 (Vera)
nastavnik mora dobro promišljati sat, to se nije promijenilo,
sada mora promišljati o puno drugih stvari, tehničkih
koliko učenici mogu upiti, koliko je primjereno

the teacher must think the lesson through well, that hasn't changed,
now they have to think about a lot of other things
technical issues, how much content is appropriate

We believe this is a question that needs further exploration with regard to all the school subjects.

4.4   Level of Beliefs

In order to understand our participants' beliefs regarding their profession in the digital era, we have decided to proceed with the analysis of their behavior because we believe that their beliefs direct their behavior. The following fragments from Tihana's interview (Example 10) identify the following beliefs as the ones that reflect a good foreign language teaching in the digital age:

- to be aware of the positive features of technology in teaching
- to consider a hybrid form of teaching to be a useful and good solution
- to be aware of changes and ready to adapt to new ways of living and working

Example 10 (Tihana)
pokazalo je da treba osuvremeniti nastavu i da trebamo digitalne alate
digitalne kompetencije isplivale na vrh
prije smo pokretali CD player, sad smo mi ti koji izrađujemo, veliki se skok dogodio
…
ključno je da nastavnici vide da se svijet oko nas toliko promijenio da se moramo prilagoditi
a tehnologiju trebamo iskoristiti da se održi naš obrazovni sustav
…
nesrazmjer tehničke potkovanosti i upućenosti naših nastavnika
naraslo je u zadnjih godina, ali ovisi koliko osoba želi učiti
neki nisu napredovali ništa, i dalje stavljaju pisane zadatke, bez usmene interakcije
nema spontanosti i interakcije
ne žele se promijeniti
trebali su više napredovati jer je to nužno

it turned out that we need to modernize teaching and that we need digital tools
digital competencies came to the surface
in previous times, we had to turn on the CD player, now we are the ones making the tools, a big leap has happened
…
it's crucial that teachers understand that the world around us has changed so much that we need to adapt
and we need to use technology to sustain our education system
…
the discrepancy between the digital skills and knowledge of our teachers
it has grown in recent years, but it depends on how much a person wants to learn
some have not progressed at all, still putting on written assignments, without any verbal interaction
there is no spontaneity and interaction
they do not want to change
they needed to make progress because it was necessary

Furthermore, Vera (Example 11) indicates that teachers and pedagogy students need to understand the need to master new, digital skills and to be ready and open to acquire new competencies, knowledge and skills.

Example 11 (Vera)
nastavnicima stvara nelagodu digitalni rad i ide na ono najosnovnije
rijetki su oni koji izrađuju dodatne materijale
…
steći minimalnu razinu digitalnih kompetencija
idealno bi bilo na jednom ili više kolegija na kojima bi se obrađivali digitalni alati
da studenti budu sposobni izrađivati online materijale
da budu spremni npr. u Loomenu izraditi kompletan predmet
barem osnove pa da mogu koristiti dalje, kad izađu da mogu dalje razvijati kompetencije

digital work makes teachers feel uncomfortable so they to do the basics
only a few prepare additional materials
…
to acquire a minimum level of digital competencies
ideally it would be to cover digital tools by one or more courses
for students to be able to create online materials
to be ready, for example, to make a complete course on Loomen
at least the basics so that they can use it further on, so that, when they graduate, they can continue to develop competencies

All these examples indicated our respondents' digital competencies, their critical stance towards other teachers' digital competencies and their beliefs related to digital education. In other words, they showed the understanding of the importance of the digital competencies in the 21st

century regardless of social conditions. In addition, they frequently made references to the colleagues that were not willing to adapt their teaching, their behavior and attitudes to the use of new digital tools, while also pointing out that some of them did not want to recognize the positive aspects of e-schooling or hybrid education.

4.5   Level of Identity

Our interviews revealed two main activities of the teachers that reflect the particularities of their professional identity in the digital age. In the following excerpt, Marina explains that a good foreign language teacher in the digital age has to be a facilitator instead of a knowledge dispenser (Example 12).

> Example 12 (Marina)
> više nisam...
> ono kao predajem ex katedra
> već facilitator u kojem sam sve veću odgovornost prebacivala na njih
>
> *I no longer ...*
> *teach like it's ex cathedra*
> *but like a facilitator in which I am increasingly shifting the responsibility to them*

In the same vein, Tihana clearly indicated the managerial role of teachers (Example 13).

> Example 13 (Tihana)
> nastavnik je stalno menadžer
> jednog dana ćemo možda trebati raditi reklamu za svoje predmete
> bit vješt i sposoban da bi održao pažnju... da bi zainteresirao
> da imam i tehničke sposobnosti
> to će tvoriti boljeg... kompleksnijeg nastavnika od onog koji je samo fakultet završio i nije se dalje interesirao ili usavršavao
> to se već danas vidi na susretima kada netko ne zna podijeliti ekran u Zoomu i slično
> idemo prema menadžerskoj poziciji
>
> *teachers are constantly being managers*
> *one day we may need to do the advertising for our courses*
> *to be skilled and able to maintain attention ... to create interest*
> *to have technical skills*
> *that will create a better ... more complex teacher than the one who just graduated and was no longer interested or educated*
> *this is already evident nowadays at meetings when someone does not know how to share a screen in Zoom and things like that*
> *we are moving towards a managerial position*

All the respondent indicated that during the era of pandemic they were regularly providing professional and peer support to their colleagues (Example 14).

> Example 14 (Marina)
> kolegama je bilo dosta izazovno i teško, posebno starijim kolegama
> no prednost je što su bili u eksperimentalnom programu škole za život
> mi smo stvarno upali u ovu online nastavu u potpunosti pripremljeni
> čak i oni koji nisu bili uključeni u eksperimentalne programe oni su se nekako uz nas pokrenuli
> mi smo ih educirali
> u školi držali predavanja i radionice i onako jedan na jedan pomagali kad bi nekom nešto trebalo...

it was quite challenging and difficult for my colleagues, especially for older ones
but the advantage is that they participated in the School For Life experimental programme
we really got into this online class fully prepared
even those who were not involved in the experimental programmes somehow became active with us
we educated them
we held lectures and workshops at school and helped one-on-one when someone needed something...

Apparently, there are two main professional roles that arise from the interview:

- a manager: manages a multifaceted learning environment in which learners may be engaged in a variety of different activities simultaneously; differentiates instruction in order to cater effectively to learner diversity
- a professional collaborator, contributing productively to a culture of professional support and sharing; a leader in a dynamic, knowledge-producing community; takes a greater degree of control over their professional lives

However, there is another group of qualities that arose from the interview that could be described as personal qualities, i.e. someone's identity. According to our participants, a good foreign language teacher in the digital age must have certain qualities, namely: adaptability, resourcefulness, imagination, creativity, openness to change and the desire for lifelong learning (Example 15).

Example 15 (Marina)
treba puno mašte i kreativnosti
a za to se ne priprema
i ne samo to...
to je osobna karakteristika
neki se mogu, a neki ne mogu brzo prilagođavati

it takes a lot of imagination and creativity
and you can't be prepared for that
and not only that...
it is a personal characteristic
some can adapt quickly, while others can't

4.6 Level of Mission

The teachers' interviews point to the conclusion that the good foreign language teacher in the digital age is continuously dedicating themselves to learning for the sake of the student and for their own. This mission has been clearly pointed out by Marina (Example 16).

Example 16 (Marina)
ne smiješ biti pesimističan već vidjeti kao izazov
vidjeti kao nešto što će pomoći u tvom profesionalnom razvoju
treba biti otvoren i treba biti spreman učiti do mirovine
jer ako staneš klinci će te pregaziti za mjesec dana
treba se znati nositi

you must not be pessimistic but see it as a challenge
see it as something that will help in your professional development
one should be open-minded and ready to study until retirement
because, if you stop, the kids will run you over in a month
you need to know how to handle it

In other words, the main professional mission that arises from the interview is lifelong learning, to keep the standard of a teacher's competencies in this rapidly changing world because it is the only way of providing students with the best learning environment.

4.7 Framework of a Good Foreign Language Teacher in the Digital Age

Lastly, in this section of the paper, we will present a framework with a description of a good foreign language teacher in the digital age that could help researchers interested in this topic to reflect upon and potentially redesign their work. Figure 3 represents the systematization or overview of the qualities of a good foreign language teacher in the digital age based on the reflections of our participants.

Framework of a Good Foreign Language Teacher in the Digital Age
Level of environment
• critically evaluates leadership and coordination by the national government • evaluates the role of other external factors that influence online learning and teaching • evaluates the impact of students' digital competencies and motivation for online learning
Level of behavior
• combines physical and online teaching with regard to their best features • adapts the teaching content (reflects on the lesson and looks for best solutions in teaching) • adapts digital education / e-learning to the characteristics of the school subject they teach (for instance, foreign language teacher organizes synchronous teaching more frequently) • combines traditional communication channels and task types with contemporary ones
Level of competencies
• reflects whether their current methodological and digital competencies are suitable for teaching in the digital age • acquires new digital competencies
Level of beliefs
• believes that it is necessary to introduce some form of "digital training" for future foreign language teachers • understands the need to master new (digital) skills • understands the need to adapt their teaching in the digital age • ready and open to acquire new competencies, knowledge and skills • aware of the positive features of technology in teaching • considers a hybrid form of teaching to be a useful and good solution • aware of changes and ready to adapt to new ways of living and working
Level of identity
• works as a team member (ready to learn from others because there are no manuals) • provides professional/peer support to colleagues

Level of mission
• acts as a lifelong learner (maintaining the standard of their competencies in this rapidly changing world; the only way to create the best learning environment for their students)

Fig. 3: Framework of a Good Foreign Language Teacher in the Digital Age

When it comes to relating our findings to the qualities of the New Teacher (see Kalantzis / Cope 2010; see Fig. 2), at this point we also noticed compatibility and similarities between the proposed model and the reflections and conclusions made by our teachers. It can be observed that almost all the aspects attributed to the new teacher role in 2010 by the group of authors gathered around the Multiliteracies Project actually appeared in the interviews with our teachers 11 years later. Nowadays, and as a global practice, these characteristics arise as a consequence of digital schooling during the pandemic period.

5 Final Remarks

Korthagen (2004) has provided researchers with a solid theoretical framework for qualitative and possibly quantitative studies of the identity of teachers. His well-defined descriptions of levels, coupled with an in-depth analysis of narrative discourse, allow researchers to provide reliable explanations of complex notions, such as identity. However, we have to admit that all the levels are closely interconnected, especially inner levels, i.e. behavior, beliefs, identity and mission. This makes it almost impossible for researchers to draw any definite conclusions on causes and consequences regarding different factors that influence a teacher's identity. However, the analysis of personal narratives based on this model allowed us to draw some conclusions regarding our question that is relevant to any form of teaching. Even though our aim was to provide a framework for thinking about the concept of a good foreign language teacher in the digital age, we dare to describe a good foreign language teacher in the digital age, according to our participants, as a keen lifelong learner, classroom manager and a professional collaborator possessing personal qualities, such as adaptability, imagination and creativity, always ready to critically evaluate their environment ready to combine traditional and e-forms of teaching in order to enable students to achieve the learning outcomes.

It should be noted that new teacher roles proposed back in 2010 by Kalantzis / Cope, just as the main teacher competencies proposed by the Croatian project School For Life, announced the need for digitalization of education that requires changes regarding both the teachers' and learners' roles.

We consider that our study documented important changes in foreign language teaching in the digital era in Croatia. However, we believe these personal and professional qualities could be seen as teacher qualities for any teaching space, both online and offline, and for any school subject. Therefore, we want to believe that this research will broaden the discussion on this and similar topics in Croatia and elsewhere.

Lastly, our approach has some limitations. It would be interesting to include more respondents, and to apply methods of participative observation or ethnography to observe semiosis in the workplace, rather than inferring it from interviews or questionnaires. Furthermore, there are some other questions that would be interesting to explore, especially the one regarding teaching methodologies in the digital age. Therefore, the questions that would need further exploration are: What constitutes a good foreign language learner in the digital age?; What are the methodological approaches appropriate for teaching in the digital age and, are there some approaches

that are more effective than others in terms of foreign language teaching?; How does ICT in foreign language teaching and learning affect learners with special educational needs?

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APPENDIX

Interview questions

- What is your teaching experience in the digital space?
- Have the roles of teachers changed with the increased presence of digital technology in education?
- In the questionnaire, you said that working in a digital environment changes you as a teacher. Can you elaborate on that in more detail?
- Can you compare your use of digital technology before and during a pandemic?
- What activities describe you as a teacher working in a digital teaching environment?
- How do digital literacy and the students' willingness to actively participate in the digital learning environment affect you?
- What does society expect of you as a teacher teaching in the digital environment?

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