

The impact of digital technologies in Italian university teaching. The ANVUR surveys: a research in progress.¹

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Abstract

The present contribution aims to investigate the processes and the effects that digital technologies have had on Italian university teaching, also analyzing the emergency of the pandemic state.

We started with an analysis of the panorama of digital technologies in higher education, highlighting some of the salient features. We also presented some of the most recent International and Italian findings in the field of Distance Learning, through the analyzed experiences. We have emphasized the importance of an effective pedagogical reflection in order to ensure quality of teaching and an accurate preparation for a close future that will be made of Blended Learning.

Therefore, we focused on the survey launched by National Agency for the Evaluation of the University System and Research (ANVUR) about the evaluation of Distance Learning services promoted by Italian Universities, starting from the second semester of the academic year 2019/2020.

For the purposes of the ANVUR research, three questionnaires were prepared for the following stakeholders: Rectors/Directors, Professors and Students. In the present work, the questionnaires addressed to Rectors/Directors and Professors have been reviewed in order to highlight the main areas investigated and start a discussion, while waiting for the ANVUR surveys to be concluded.

Keywords

Distance Learning, Blended Learning, ANVUR

1. Introduction

The discussion about digital technologies, in the context of Italian academic education, is increasingly assuming a fundamental role. In particular, the last period, characterized by the state of emergency resulting from the pandemic caused by Covid-19, has highlighted the need to rethink about the spaces and times of academic learning. This requires the beginning of a path of reflection that examines the educational environments in which teaching and learning do not request the physical presence of teacher and student [1].

In this context, the importance of the use of e-learning in the different educational and training realities has emerged, underlining how the student, in the new learning environments, must move from "receptor" to "manipulator" of knowledge itself. This shift implies a change in teaching methodologies, as we move from a teaching model of a transmissive nature to a learning based on construction and processes.

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In order to examine the perceptions and representations that Rectors/Directors, Professors and Students - the main stakeholders of the Italian academic world - possess about the Distance Learning services promoted by Italian universities in the last period, ANVUR has therefore prepared three different questionnaires. Two of these questionnaires are already available and they aimed to investigate the evaluation of the skills of Professors and Students, the teaching methodologies in use and the University management policies implemented in the emergency period.

2. Digital technologies and learning

The higher education landscape is rethinking and redefining learning environments, in order to meet the new demands of knowledge and understanding. This is done through the integrated use of technology in teaching and training, by redrawing space-time boundaries through the adoption of flexible teaching methodologies [2].

This need arises from the crisis of the classic course models [3] and from the need to rethink about an integrated and hybrid learning environment, where the educational paths in presence and distance learning can coexist to make the principle of lifelong learning really accessible and functional.

In this context, the contribution of technology and network is fundamental as it is able to reduce the gap due to socio-economic, work, space-time and accessibility disparities. To do this, e-learning makes use of network technologies and uses the potential of Information Communication Technology (ICT). In this case, it combines the use of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) with Web-Based Learning (WBL), obtaining elements such as flexibility, personalization of courses, creation of virtual learning communities and accessibility to the courses. Therefore, we are moving more and more towards a direction in which the learning contexts are centered on the student, who becomes an active stakeholder in the process, moving from being a "receptor" to a "manipulator" of the knowledge and information to which he or she has access.

It is necessary to rethink not only about times and places, but above all about perspective, because cooperative and dialogical relationships with peers, processes of negotiation and reflection become central, in order to promote the acquisition of new specialized and transversal skills and competencies. As a matter of fact, as also highlighted by the European Community, learning in blended, hybrid environments allows students to consolidate specific skills related to digital competence. These competences, together with basic skills, have a key role in developing the metacompetence "of learning to learn" [4].

Within this framework, methodologies based on Open Learning are being widely used. Open Learning is characterized by ensuring wide accessibility to courses and by favoring a flexible organization of time and space. Moreover, it promotes autonomy in the management of one's own learning processes, allowing a real personalization through the individual redefinition of objectives and educational and training paths.

Increasingly frequent is the Blended Learning, a didactic system that combines classic teaching methodologies with the most innovative e-learning techniques. This teaching-learning process emphasizes the dichotomous presence-distance dynamic, which now is the basis of many training interventions.

Blended Learning is a teaching methodology that can accommodate the multiple needs of students: in fact, through this method it is possible to both participate in frontal teaching and attend remotely. As Limone pointed out, this makes it easier for working students and students with special educational needs who, for different reasons, experience difficulties in reaching the academic place, thus trying to break down space-time barriers [5].

The Blended path is made of three modes: the first part consists of frontal lessons in the classroom; the second promotes the process of self-learning through the use of digital platforms; the third identifies the "learning community", that is, a learning based on dialogical comparison between the various stakeholders involved in the learning process in progress.

Blended Learning responds to complex training needs and focuses on enhancing an increasingly intense and collaborative teacher-student communication. Among the development needs at the basis of this new type of learning, there are, however, the need for an adequate digital literacy, still very precarious

in some academic realities, and the availability of infrastructures provided with the technological tools and the network necessary to carry out a high-quality teaching.

Therefore, Blended Learning appears similar to the concept of complex learning, that is an active learning that aims at empowerment, by operating in a continuous way [6] [7]. Moreover, from an organizational point of view, in addition to integrating face-to-face and remote training activities, Blended Learning has the ability to use a plurality of communication codes and to encourage the exchange of knowledge with subjects outside the organization itself. The salient part of this didactic system, however, is the planning phase; in order for this model to be functional, in fact, it is necessary to have a high level of planning ability, capable of combining different elements in order to produce effective methodologies for the learning process.

Celentano and Colazzo [8] highlight three different approaches to design, according to the Blended Learning methodology:

- *Engineering approach*: aims to optimize pre-existing training paths and wants to finalize their efficiency;
- *Systemic approach*: it starts from the analysis of the organizational context and wants to prepare an original training process with its own potential, not re-designing what already exists;
- *Exploratory approach*: it starts from the assumption that there are still no precise reference criteria, so it tends to experiment in order to try and reach transversal criteria.

It is clear that at the base of Blended Learning there are and must continue to be reflections aimed to promote effective and efficient training programs, starting from an analysis of the need to reach the conjugation of the most appropriate learning strategies.

From this point of view, the role of the teacher is reconsidered and declined on virtuality and diffusion. In fact, the teacher in presence acts as an Empirical Author, so the physical individual and the educational intentionality coincide; however when the learning environment is online, the teacher becomes a symbolic instance that is present in the teaching materials and in the communication implemented in an asynchronous or synchronous way [9].

The methodological-didactic implications change; we move from the transmissive model, typical of frontal classroom teaching, to a learning in progress based on the principle of scaffolding support. The teacher no longer provides precise and sequential objectives but acts as a facilitator and helps the student in the construction of knowledge. Learning becomes research and the choice of the personalization path is based on the valorization of each one's peculiarities. In this way, only part of the educational objectives are identified by the teacher; the remaining part is the result of a process of negotiation between the student and the trainer, so that the objectives are individual and personalized.

It is evident that, in order to reach this optimal condition, in the Blended Learning path, both adequate methodological training and the development of a certain *forma mentis* by the teacher are necessary. Not all academic realities are prepared and ready to deal with the most recent e-learning methods: in many cases, teachers that should experiment the new didactic methodology only transfer their own content in the telematic mode, with exactly the same methods applied to frontal lessons.

3. The International and Italian experience

It has been highlighted how learning promoted by new didactic technologies aims at the development of individual empowerment: promoting the student's potential and supporting him so that his knowledge is manipulated and constructed in a "unique and unrepeatable" way.

In many cases, however, academic realities are unprepared on the most effective methods of e-learning teaching, so they end up passively transferring their teaching content through the same methods that would have been used in traditional frontal teaching.

This difficulty particularly emerged during the last academic year, when academic institutions had to interface with the phenomenon of Distance Learning some for the first time [10] [11].

Distance Learning is a macro category that refers to educational technological innovations and involves the use of methodologies aimed to carry out educational and training activities remotely. In the implementation, it uses specific digital platforms through which it is possible to have and participate in courses, seminars, conferences, profit exams and much more.

This is a phenomenon that has affected the entire international scene in the last year: it has emerged that the emergency situation in the world of education, resulting from the pandemic caused by Covid-19, has in fact affected more than 1.5 billion students in the world or about 91% of the student population [12] [13].

Of the countries involved, however, only 15% have implemented the only possible strategy: Distance Learning. These include countries such as France, Great Britain, Germany and Italy, who have made Distance Learning mandatory in order to contain the potential educational and training crisis [14].

The term "lockdown", in fact, also refers to the blockage of thought, comparison, growth and development that had to be faced in order to try to prevent cultural and social impoverishment. Among the most critical consequences, one was not being able to experience the university, not only as a teaching environment, but especially as a community context where people could develop critical social and cultural thinking [15].

In this condition of "didactic-training blackout", on a worldwide scale, Distance Learning turned out to be the most effective strategy: it was characterized by great potentialities for those institutions that were prepared and by some limits for the academic realities that were starting it for the first time.

Considering the large number of individuals involved and their academic institutions, it is good to highlight how, at this juncture, the responses to Distance Learning were twofold: the readiness of those institutions already prepared for blended learning was contrasted by the improvisation of those institutions where the concept of e-learning was still far from being easily applied.

In many universities, due to the emergency and rapidity required, it was not possible to undertake an effective methodological and pedagogical reflection, preparatory to the beginning of teaching activities in e-learning mode. Therefore, in many cases, we could only transfer the lesson with the same modalities with which it would have been carried out in presence, presenting obvious and various difficulties [16].

Among the issues that have emerged in the use of emergent Distance Learning, the literature highlights the inexperience of teachers, the weakness of the technological infrastructure and the experience of an invasion of privacy in the home environment [17]. In a research [18], moreover, students are concerned about the efficiency of the internet connection and teachers state that they prefer asynchronous rather than synchronous online instructional modes. Thus it is clear that these limitations do not refer to the new virtual learning environment but highlight the lack of methodological preparation of teachers and technological infrastructure.

The Institute for Educational Technology of the National Research Council (CNR) has launched a survey, still in progress, administering a questionnaire to over 19,000 Italian families. It emerged that only 5% of the families interviewed had already experimented with Distance Learning before the emergency, highlighting, therefore, the extreme novelty that it represented for most teachers and students. For more than half of those interviewed, the start-up of Distance Learning began within the first two weeks after the closure (35% within the first week; 30% within the second week). This means that preparation, both pedagogical-didactic and technological, was rapid and, probably, lacking in reflection. In addition, less than half (45%) of respondents stated that they had been contacted by institutions about their willingness to access technological tools [19]. This makes us reflect on the way in which the applicability of e-learning teaching was achieved: an improvisation and a lack of planning ability emerge. A planning ability is a key characteristic for a high-quality virtual teaching, aimed at the construction of constructed knowledge.

Until March 2020, in Italy Distance Learning has been a peculiarity of some academic realities. Since the Prime Ministerial Decree of March 4, 2020, which affected school and academic teaching activities, the importance of its transversal application in the various educational and training realities has emerged, in order to safeguard teaching, research and the principle of the right to study. This has promoted a reflection even in the most radical defenders of traditional teaching, who had to admit the potential of blended teaching.

Subsequent to the Prime Ministerial Decree of March 8, 2020, two notes were issued (Note prot. 279 of March 8, 2020; Note prot. 388 of March 17, 2020) with reference to the operational indications on how to implement distance learning. In particular, the Note prot. 388 of March 17, 2020 highlights the importance to consider Distance Learning as a "reasoned and guided construction of knowledge through interaction between teachers and students", emphasizing the need for reflection based on new teaching methods and the transmission of teaching materials.

It seems fundamental to share idea of learning on the net, that is the need to promote the construction of a real virtual learning community.

In order to achieve this, an environment must be created in which socio-cultural relationships based on dialogue and comparison are established and developed [20]. The learning community must move in a cognitive and affective place capable of constructing shared meanings, using digital technologies as a symbolic representation that is beyond the standard concepts of space and time, but can promote learning that is perpetually in progress.

In order to cope with the widespread confusion of the various academic realities, an important contribution has been provided by SIREM (Italian Society for Research on Media Education) [21] which has rapidly produced a compendium aimed to provide guidelines and useful tools for Distance Learning.

The SIREM started its evaluations, with great awareness, about the critical issues that the sudden recourse to e-learning has produced in the academic realities. It has stressed that sometimes e-learning is perceived as an extreme desire to completely replace face-to-face teaching. On the contrary, it is essential to combine face-to-face teaching with e-learning (Blended Learning), in order to develop more effective learning processes. It was also highlighted how the difficulties that have emerged in the last period can be a starting point for strengthening e-learning strategies beyond the pandemic period.

Reflection on the principle of educational continuity is also fundamental, especially in the current time of crisis, which can be dealt with by focusing on the relationship between teacher and student through listening, dialogue and feedback.

Therefore, the Italian Society for Research on Media Education has drawn up teaching guidelines, categorized into phases, which provide useful information for teaching organization in order to support teachers at the beginning of the use of e-learning methodologies.

The following are highlighted:

- *The educational relationship* must be maintained and sustained, with a principle of continuity, in order to ensure the university community. This is possible by promoting effective communication between teachers, students and colleagues in order to share fears, doubts and concerns. It is interesting to provide phases of study in which students can interact both with peers and with faculty. To do this, the tools highlighted are different: from chats and forums, typical of virtual learning environments, to external channels such as email or instant messaging programs (WhatsApp, Telegram).
- *Welcome*, a fundamental phase because, at this moment, the student has a strong need to be oriented in the experience of digital learning. It is therefore useful to prepare a welcome page in each lesson in order to clarify objectives, work directions, time scanning of activities and ways in which the student can ask questions and provide feedback. At this stage, a possible operational strategy is to use introductory launch videos.
- *Exposure/presentation of content*: in this phase, it is possible to distinguish two different modes, namely asynchronous and synchronous.

The asynchronous mode refers to the production of content through recordings of short video lessons (an average duration of about 15 minutes is suggested). Among the SIPED suggestions is the definition of a clear title for the work, the presence of an index of topics and a final summary that covers the proposed content. As for the tools available, there are videos, slides, and computer screen recordings.

The synchronous mode identifies the presentation of content through video conferencing. Among the expedients highlighted there are making sure that the student has the elements of knowledge necessary for what will be covered during the lesson, keeping the time contained, using the video conference to listen and dialogue with students.

A useful way, in fact, could be the conjugation of asynchronous and synchronous modes: using video recordings to propose the content, thus allowing each student to follow the lesson at the most appropriate pace, and using the video conference to start a debate and create together a shared construction of meanings.

- *Discussion/interaction*: it is therefore fundamental to create ad hoc spaces to promote direct exchange. This interaction can take place in different ways: forums, chats, direct interventions

during video conferences, in order to make a dialogue that promotes the educational relationship possible.

- *Activities*: it is useful to propose individual or group work that promotes exchange within the learning space and allows the teacher to provide feedback during the process. This mode ensures that there is not a mere passive reception of educational content, but that a continuous construction of learning.
- *Self-assessment and feedback tools*: Using these tools is essential to allow students to self-assess their understanding of the topics, and for teachers to initiate assessment of learning. To do this, it is useful to use tools that allow dialogue and exchange.

These guidelines are very important in a national and international panorama, in which academic realities have to respond to a challenge: promoting effective virtual learning and the foundations for a future characterized by blended teaching.

In order to do this, however, it is essential to continue to carry out an analysis and evaluation of the effects that Distance Learning has produced and the methods that universities have used.

4. The ANVUR research

At the base of an idea of efficient Distance Learning, there is the need to create a learning community in the making, based on the assumption of values and meanings to the new educational technologies. It has been pointed out that Distance Learning, implemented as an "emergency measure" in the current pandemic period, has highlighted several critical issues: among them, the unpreparedness of teachers, the difficulties in the use of tools, in students' internet connection and the lack of a sense of community in higher education [16]. It should be pointed out, however, that all these critical issues are not due to the new learning environments but rather to the lack of preparation of universities in innovative teaching technologies. Italian academics have faced the challenge to reinvent themselves in didactic methodology and educational action.

This innovation has more extensive roots in the current historical period, but it is very likely that in the future it will continue to elevate the skills acquired, in order to ensure a new form of "blended" mixed didactics, useful to ensure the right to study and to promote new skills in both the teaching class and the student. In this context, the National Agency for the Evaluation of the University System and Research (ANVUR) has assumed a key role in monitoring and analyzing the objectives achieved and the processes used in the very first macro phase of Distance Learning applied throughout Italy. In this case, ANVUR is a body established by Law 24 November 2006, n. 286 - Art. 2, c. 138, 139, 140, 141 that monitors the external quality assessment of Universities and Research Institutions, to which public funding has been entrusted, and guides the activities of the Evaluation Units.

Among its main tasks, one can identify the evaluation of the "quality of processes, results and products of management, training, research, technology transfer activities of Universities and Research Institutions". ANVUR is also accredited by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the international body created on the basis of the "Recommendation of the Council on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education" and which can accredit the evaluation and quality assurance agencies operating in the States adhering to the Bologna process. In this panorama of didactic innovation, ANVUR has started a reflection regarding Distance Teaching services promoted by Italian Universities starting from the second semester of the academic year 2019/2020. This requirement comes from the desire to facilitate the adjustment of teaching methods and delivery of services to students, in order to extract useful elements for the promotion of strategies used by the same universities. In addition, the working group prepared will also respond to a need presented at the European level by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher (ENQA). ANVUR has set up an ad hoc working group aimed at the construction and administration of three different questionnaires as part of the "Distance Learning" project. The identified recipients are: Rectors/Directors of the University, Teachers and Students. Therefore, starting from December 2020, a survey of the stakeholders' opinions about Distance Learning since the last academic year began.

The questionnaires, aimed to investigate the opinion of Rectors/Directors and Professors, can be done starting from December 14, 2020 and will remain open until January 18, 2021. The questionnaire about

students' opinions will be available from 2021. The participation is voluntary, and the compilation can be done by accessing the website "Progetti Anvur", entering the personal access credentials. In the following, it will be possible to present only the structure of the questionnaires directed to the Rectors/Directors and the Teachers; for the description of the questionnaire addressed to the Students and the commentary of the data emerged it will be necessary to proceed at a later time.

The questionnaire is defined as a structured set of questions, possibly accompanied by the possible answers, recorded on a support suitable for administration. In this case, the two questionnaires currently available, prepared within the "Distance Learning" project, have a similar structure but explore different areas. The questionnaire for teachers, in fact, has as its main focus of investigation the evaluation of their own and the students' skills and teaching methodologies. The questionnaire administered to Rectors/Directors aims to carry out an in-depth analysis of the University's governance and the related decision-making processes implemented in the pandemic phase. From the point of view of structure, both are self-completed online questionnaires, able to reduce the probability of error in the scoring phase and to reduce the costs of detection. The answers provided are in closed mode, i.e. they include several response modes defined a priori by the researcher. Some questions have a single response mode while others are multi-response. The questionnaires do not include filter questions, but there are scale questions aimed at investigating attitudes and opinions. In general, the two questionnaires identify questions related to personal data to classify the sample, behaviors and opinions/intentions. In this case, the Distance Learning Questionnaire for Teachers is composed of 26 closed questions with a variable number of possible answers (from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 14 responses). In addition to personal/anagraphical information, it investigates various areas such as evaluation of the teacher's skills, teaching methods and activities, timing, evaluation of learning outcomes and interaction with students, technological tools available, feasibility of scientific research and limitations encountered. Taking into consideration these areas, it is possible to try and summarize the variables investigated as follows:

- *Evaluation of the Teacher's competences*: self-perceived level of their digital competences at the beginning of the Distance Learning activity (question n.4); degree of autonomy perceived in the organization of the activities (question n.10); degree of satisfaction with the Distance Learning provided (question n.19);
- *Didactic methods and activities*: differences in didactic methodology carried out in presence and in Distance Learning (question n.7); type of didactic methodologies used (question n.8); type of additional material made available (question n.13); perception of the degree of commitment related to the preparation and delivery of online lessons (question n.18); activities carried out in Distance Learning (question n.23);
- *Timing*: total timing of Distance Learning (question n.11); comparison between the duration of in-person and online lessons (question n.12);
- *Assessment of learning outcomes and interaction with students*: method of periodic assessment (question n.14); method of interaction with students (question n.15); level of student attention (question n.16); quality of interaction with students (question n.17); method of conducting examinations at a distance (question n.20); comparison of the method of conducting examinations at a distance with those held in person (question n.21); assessment of student preparation (question n.22);
- *Available technological tools*: quality of connection (question n.6); degree of adequacy of the technological tools made available by the University (question n.9);
- *Feasibility of scientific research*: analysis of whether the research carried out needs to be done in the field (question n.25); any difficulties encountered in terms of research during the pandemic (question n.26);
- *Limitations encountered*: limitations of Distance Learning encountered (question n. 24);
- *Personal information*: reference age range (question n.1); CUN area to which the teacher belongs (question n.2); academic role (question n.3); any courses held by the teacher during the emergency period (question n.5).

It is evident that the most investigated areas, through a greater number of questions, are those related to teaching methods and activities and to the evaluation of learning outcomes and interaction with

students. Both fields of investigation are the core of e-learning research and the fundamental components to ensure functional teaching and individualized learning.

The questionnaire intended for Rectors/Directors has a survey focus on the governance of the University emergency and services. It is composed of 31 closed-ended questions, characterized by variable response items (from a minimum of 2 to a maximum of 9 responses), among which 14 multi-response questions and 17 with the possibility of a single response are identified.

The variables investigated refer to distance learning technologies and learning environments, strategies and support in changing teaching methods, specific guidelines, postgraduate training offer, internationalization, disability and Specific Learning Disorders, orientation and placement, involvement of student representatives, teaching activities carried out in distance learning, Distance Learning 2020/2021.

In particular, it is possible to underline the following themes about the aforementioned areas of investigation:

- *Distance: Learning Technologies and Learning Environments:* the University's endowment of digital teaching technologies before the emergency (question n.1); type of digital technologies the University had before the emergency (question n.2); type of digital teaching technologies the University had during the emergency (question n.3); mode of selection of technologies adopted in Distance Learning (question n.6); type of platforms/environments chosen for Distance Learning (question n.21); systems used for Distance Learning before the identification of the University Platform (question n.22);
- *Strategies and support in the change of teaching mode:* strategies adopted to facilitate the transition to Distance Learning (question n.4); any training and support activities for teachers in the transition to Distance Learning (question n.5); any information or tutoring activities for students in the transition to Distance Learning (question n.7); types of information or tutoring activities for students in the transition to Distance Learning (question n.8);
- *Specific guidelines:* possible preparation of Guidelines to ensure the quality of Distance Learning (question n.9); possible preparation of Guidelines for internships/workshops in Distance Learning (question n.10);
- *Post-graduate training offer:* specific methods of teaching and support for PhD students, School of Specialization, Master in Distance Learning (question n.11); type of specific methods of teaching and support for PhD students, School of Specialization, Master in Distance Learning (question n.12);
- *Internationalization:* specific modes of support for international students (question n.13); type of specific modes of support for international students (question n.14);
- *Disabilities and Specific Learning Disorders:* specific support services for distance learning attendance for students with disabilities and Specific Learning Disorders (question n.15); type of specific support services for distance learning attendance for students with disabilities and Specific Learning Disorders (question n.16);
- *Orientation and placement:* mode of orientation activities during the emergency (question n.17); mode of placement activities during the emergency (question n.18)
- *Involvement of student representatives:* involvement of student representatives in decisions during the emergency phase (question n.19); involvement of student representatives in decisions during the recovery phase of the a.y. 2020/2021 (question n.20);
- *Teaching activities carried out in Distance Learning:* percentage of scheduled courses transferred to Distance Learning (question n.23); comparison between teaching activities carried out in Distance Learning and those scheduled in the in-presence calendar (question n.24); any laboratory activities and supplementary practices carried out online during the emergency (question n.25);
- *Distance Learning 2020/2021:* possibility of in-person and online classes (question n.26); estimated percentage of students who will be able to choose Distance Learning (question n.27); ways of conducting internships/workshops (question n.28); specific strategies and/or actions for international students (question n.29); possible pedagogical training activities for faculty for Distance Learning (question n.30); possible aspects/services of Distance Learning to be maintained (question n.31).

In the questionnaire, addressed to Rectors/Directors of the University and aimed at investigating governance and decision-making processes implemented in the emergency phase, it emerges that the most investigated variables refer to the areas related to Distance Learning technologies and learning environments and the prospects for Distance Learning 2020/2021. In fact, ANVUR aims to record any changes in the perception and use of innovative teaching technologies. Through the administered questionnaires, in fact, it will be possible to record the change starting from the comparison between the state of the art at the beginning of the emergency state, the current situation and the academic perspective of the academic year 2020/2021.

It is interesting to highlight how, in its monitoring survey, ANVUR has taken into analysis almost all the facets of e-learning about the effects and methods of Distance Learning.

This could be an indication that this evaluation will probably lead to a series of policies to strengthen Blended Learning. It is difficult to think that, after this experience, Italian universities could take a step backwards, going back to proposing only face-to-face teaching. Both students and faculty have acquired skills, overcome limitations and perplexities, and begun to take their first steps in discovering the potential of educational technologies. So it is difficult to think that we can go back to operating without them, depriving ourselves of an incredible potential for development in the field of learning.

5. Conclusions

It was pointed out that Blended Learning is now increasingly common in educational systems, promoting an integration between classic teaching methodologies and the most innovative e-learning techniques. However, not all academic institutions are up-to-date, trained and ready to make the leap towards what will certainly be the future potential of learning/teaching processes. So far, Italy exhibited an important gap between those universities that promote the potential of e-learning and those academic institutions that defend more traditional teaching methodologies. With the state of emergency, however, it became evident, even to the most skeptical, that it was necessary to update university policies and begin to experiment with new teaching approaches. In most cases, however, this emergency situation has not allowed an effective and necessary pedagogical reflection, leading to the simple transposition of content with the same methods typical of traditional frontal teaching. Fundamental is the role of the teacher, a stimulator of a learning in progress who must be able not only to be a transmitter of knowledge and content, but also to support and motivate the student who lives in a new and dynamic virtual learning environment. The positive prerequisites for this process are quite evident: it has emerged that in this phase the students' attendance has increased thanks to the use of e-learning platforms. The new technologies, in which the students, by now "digital natives", are immersed, have made it possible to shorten distances, halve time and encourage effective and concrete exchanges.

In order to do this, however, it is necessary for the universities to be prepared, not only in terms of teaching technologies and platforms, but also and above all in terms of training the teaching staff.

In this regard, the National Agency for the Evaluation of the University System and Research (ANVUR) has put together three different questionnaires aimed to monitor and analyze the achieved learning outcomes and the processes implemented during the period of Distance Learning.

From the first analysis of the structure of the ANVUR questionnaires, addressed to Teachers and Rectors/Directors of the University, it emerges that the main focus of intervention is to investigate the changes in used teaching methods, the systems to evaluate learning and the available technologies, declining all areas through the study of decision-making models activated during the emergency phase. The research is still open, so it is not possible to draw up a discussion on the basis of the analysis of the data at the moment. Anyway, what emerges is a particular attention to the processes of change and to the future policies of the University which will probably tend to perennially guarantee a mixed-kind teaching. Among the limitations foreseen in the ANVUR research, we would like to emphasize the lack of involvement of another active part of the universities among the stakeholders targeted by the research: the category of Technical-Administrative Staff, the beating heart of the application of the processes and the protagonist of the provision of services to students. In addition, voluntary participation in the study could lead to the adherence of those stakeholders that have a greater sense of academic belonging and, therefore, are more sensitive to getting involved in the new proposed dynamics. However, the hope is to be able to continue the discussion and expand the work at the end

of the ANVUR research, currently in progress, in order to make this work more complete and to be able to answer the questions that have emerged about the future of blended learning in higher education in Italy.

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