

## How did the Covid crisis impact the work of academics?

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# HOW DID THE COVID CRISIS IMPACT THE WORK OF ACADEMICS?

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>7</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	7
THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19 CRISIS AND ITS IMPACTS ON ACADEMICS.....	7
ONLINE TEACHING.....	8
RESEARCH .....	11
COMMUNITY SERVICES .....	13
WORK-LIFE BALANCE, WORKLOAD AND OTHER ASPECTS COVERED BY LITERATURE .....	13
CONCLUSION .....	15
<b>CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: EMPIRICAL STUDY.....</b>	<b>22</b>
THEME 1: TEACHING.....	22
During the pandemic.....	22
Use of students' platforms and evaluation .....	29
Post-pandemic period .....	31
Conclusion theme one.....	35
THEME 2: RESEARCH.....	37
During the pandemic.....	37
Post-pandemic period .....	39
Conclusion theme 2 .....	40
THEME 3: COMMUNITY SERVICES .....	42
Conclusion theme three .....	42
THEME 4: WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND WELL-BEING MANAGEMENT.....	43
During the pandemic.....	43
After the pandemic.....	46
Conclusion theme four .....	46
<b>DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>47</b>
REFLECTION.....	49
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....	49
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>51</b>
1. SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE .....	51
2. ONLINE RESOURCES.....	54
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>55</b>
INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	55
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>56</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: List of interviewees .....	18
Table 2: Grid of questions for interviews .....	19

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conclusions about online teaching.....	10
Figure 2: Conclusions about research.....	12
Figure 3: Conclusions about work-life balance and other aspects.....	14
Figure 4: Elements that marked academics' adaptation to online working.....	24
Figure 5: Advantages and disadvantages of live classes .....	26
Figure 6: Main ideas about online teaching.....	29
Figure 7: Online exams.....	31
Figure 8: Consequences of the pandemic on teaching.....	35
Figure 9: Solutions for dealing with new challenges created by the crisis.....	35
Figure 10: Research during the pandemic .....	39
Figure 11: Research after the pandemic .....	40
Figure 12: Work-life balance during the pandemic .....	45

# INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, a state of pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). The Covid-19 outbreak not only changed society and its way of living and interacting, but also the way most people performed their work (García-Morales et al., 2021). Most sectors have had to shift to remote work and thus completely changed their mode of operation (Hammoud et al., 2022). Ways of working had to be suddenly reshaped or rethought (Williams, 2021).

This sudden and enormous change came with a number of challenges for companies from all sectors and their employees (Hammoud et al., 2022). Higher education institutions have also been affected by the health crisis (Hodges et al., 2020). Most universities directly switched to online education right from the beginning of the crisis, without taking any breaks for adaptation (Gamage et al., 2020). This abrupt transition has led to challenges for both students and academics (Crawford et al., 2020). Despite the fact that the Covid-19 outbreak has aroused the interest of researchers in understanding the implications and impacts of the crisis, there seem to be few studies that explore how academics experienced this period.

In this master thesis, we want to look at the impact that the health crisis has had on academics. We believe that this subject, which has received little attention so far, can contribute to the understanding of a process of change. The Covid crisis has led to a shift in the functioning of society, digitalization being a key element in this process (Guo et al., 2020). Since most institutions have had to rely on digital tools in order to continue their activity (Guo et al., 2020), we wonder how moving to online has affected universities. We are interested in them and especially academics, representing the heart of these higher institutions, in view of the fact that they play an essential role in society. They are the ones who ensure the training of highly skilled future professionals and contribute through research to major advances in all core sectors of society (Brennan et al., 2004). Besides bringing contributions to the economy of a country, they generally also play a role in societal changes (Brennan et al., 2004). It is therefore interesting to find out if and how the crisis has disrupted the work of academics and changed their profession, in order to understand whether higher education also goes through a change. As mentioned previously, we believe that our study contributes to understanding a process of change.

A report published by the European Commission (European Commission, 2021) shows that the pandemic had three types of impacts on academics: an immediate one - which refers to the immediate adaptation needed to the given situation, a short-term impact - which describes the implications the crisis had on academics' work and the long-term impact, indetermined by the study. This latter impact makes reference to the effects of the pandemic that may affect educational institutions in the years following the pandemic. In our study, we will try to cover them all by looking at scientific literature on the topic but also by conducting empirical research. This study aims not only to bring together a bundle of information found in papers but also to complement it with new findings discovered through field research.

This thesis will be therefore structured in three parts: in the first chapter, we explore scientific literature aiming to find out what impacts the pandemic had on the work and life of academics. Our literature review will be divided into different subchapters. The first one will represent a background section, presenting an overview of the crisis' impacts. Academics' work is usually structured around three pillars: teaching, research, and community services (Rathnayake et al., 2022). For this reason, we will develop the effects of

the pandemic on them in a second subchapter. A third subsection will introduce other topics covered by studies related to the work-life balance and well-being management of academics.

In a second chapter, we will prepare the foundation for a qualitative study by describing the followed methodology. Then, in chapter three, we present the empirical research. We will explore how the three essential roles of academics (teaching, research and community services) were impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. The social dimension and work-life balance will also be covered by our study. Finally, we will discuss the results of our research and provide recommendations for a further study.

# **CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **Introduction**

The outbreak of Covid-19 has brought major changes worldwide and has affected higher education institutions as well (Hodges et al., 2020). As announced in the introduction, the purpose of this thesis is to discover the impact that the sanitary crisis had on academics. Hence, in this part, we will gather as much information as possible on this topic, in order to determine what professional and social challenges were experienced by academics during the crisis and beyond it.

First, a background section, with an overview of the crisis' impacts, its waves, and the changes it provoked will be presented. Academics' work is usually structured around three pillars: teaching, research, and community services (Rathnayake et al., 2022). For this reason, we will then be looking at the impact of the crisis on them, that have been reported by existent studies. Other topics covered by literature are work-life balance, workload, well-being management and the differences in opportunities according to gender which have been aggravated by the crisis (Casacchia et al., 2021; McGaughey et al., 2021; Guy and Arthur, 2020). We will also research into these aspects, as the Covid-19 crisis seem to have impacted the pace of life of most people and affected most sectors of society (Matulevicius et al., 2021).

## **The outbreak of Covid-19 crisis and its impacts on academics**

The World Health Organization declared a pandemic state on March 2020, almost three months after the first case of Covid-19 has been detected in Wuhan, China (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). Universities around the world had to take a major decision concerning their activity and most of them of them followed governments advice to move to online education and leave campus rooms in favor of remote working (Gamage et al., 2020). The complicated circumstances and the unprecedented situation made the adaptation, which needed to be quick, not an obvious process in most cases. It was the sudden transition that mostly created disruption in academics' work (Hodges et al., 2020). While the Covid-19 outbreak seemed to be a threat for education, conducting research from home did not seem to be problematic, with few exceptions (Al-Taweel et al., 2020). Community services were mostly shut down or postponed due to the pandemic (Al-Taweel et al., 2020).

Social distancing and self-isolation have been identified as the most significant pandemic safety measures taken in order to reduce the transmission of the virus (Maddumapatabandi & Gamage, 2020). These measures were also directed to universities, which had to cut down on interpersonal contact. Hence, the well-being of academics also seemed to be a concern covered by studies (Wray & Kinman, 2022). Maintaining a correct work-life balance during lockdowns was therefore another challenge brought into academics' life by the pandemic. The academic delivery in such conditions as well as the fulfillment of their other duties will be explored in further detail in the following sections.



## Online Teaching

One topic in which scientific literature is particularly interested in represents the **shift to remote work** in higher institutions (Cameron-Standerford et al., 2020; Karalis and Raikou, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020). Most papers focus on students' perspectives on the change produced by the crisis when pursuing university studies, often quantitatively (Gopal et al., 2021; Jamalpur et al., 2021, Chaturvedi et al., 2021). However, we aim to understand qualitatively how teaching has changed for academics during this period.

A transition to online education was required from teachers around the world in the context of the Covid-19 outbreak (Cameron-Standerford et al., 2020). The sudden change to remote lectures delivery involved a prompt response from educators, who were forced to adjust their courses to the current situation. In most cases, it was not about putting in practice a distance education system backed up by a solid plan, but more something defined as an emergency remote arrangement (Karalis & Raikou, 2020). For instance, in order to adapt quickly, most universities in the world signed contracts with different online conference and communication platforms providers such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, etc. (Mishra et al., 2020). To ensure the smooth adaptation of lecturers to online teaching, training has been provided in universities from multiple countries (Crawford et al., 2020). Most universities provided video lessons and teaching guides on professors' requested needs (Crawford et al., 2020). The same study shows that the two most common methods used across the world for giving class in higher education were either recording podcasts and posting them on platforms dedicated to students or providing live lessons.

A report published by the European Commission (European Commission, 2021) shows that 74.6% of European universities used live online classes as their main form of remote learning and 31.1% used recorded lessons. Other forms of distance teaching methods adopted were audio-only recorded lessons (20.6%) but also Power Point presentations provided to students (44.5%).

The fact that academics faced **challenges** when adapting to the new situation is also highlighted by the literature. For example, working in home environment settings was not always an easy option (Dwivedi et al., 2020). University teachers needed an appropriate atmosphere to provide online education. A powerful device with good internet connection, a decent microphone and good lightning were required. Making sure that their background is suitable for online exposure was another step to take for a successful fulfillment of their mission. Besides that, disturbance from family members had to be avoided as much as possible (Dwivedi et al., 2020).

One of the biggest concerns of the teachers was the examination, for two particular reasons (Gamage et al., 2020). First, both the exams and the continuous assessments needed to be reviewed or changed in most cases. Secondly, the inability to directly supervise students during exams seemed to represent a major problem for teachers. They could not give proper instructions before the exams or respond to students' questions live and naturally. The online evaluation also raised many doubts about the conditions in which the exam is held and the students' commitment to integrity. They could, for example, when filling in their exam, use course materials although prohibited (Gamage et al., 2020).

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, when coping with a pandemic, teachers had to employ **new forms of assessments**. Face-to-face examinations were replaced by different types of online evaluation (Telles-

Langdon, 2020). They were similar to in-classroom assessment methods, but distinctly tailored for fitting the online environment (Silva et al., 2020). One exam type were take-home exams, which allow the use of course materials and online resources for solving the test. These are usually composed of open-ended questions, which require the writing of more detailed essays in a given time. An alternative to those kinds of exams were open book ones, where notes and other materials are also accepted but the time is usually slightly more limited. Multiple choice exams were a third option usually proposed (Silva et al., 2020). Regardless the type of examination chosen, the main concern of teachers during Covid-19 pandemic was safeguarding students (Bilen & Matros, 2021).

A method in which academic integrity could have been set aside by students consisted in using contract cheating services or freelancers (Silva et al., 2020). They are persons ready to take online exams in exchange of payment. A concern in the minds of teachers was therefore the inability to verify the identity of online exam takers, so academic misconduct could remain undetected. Differentiating meritorious students from students obtaining high grades by cheating was therefore a great challenge for professors in pandemic times. In Economics and Business branches, the students' inclination to cheat is usually even higher than in other studies. Management schools always seemed to be a magnet for international students, who in many cases opt for studying abroad in order to be able to put their studies on the second place. They are often seen as less disposed to take in consideration ethics or less likely to respect rigors imposed by hosting universities (Silva et al., 2020).

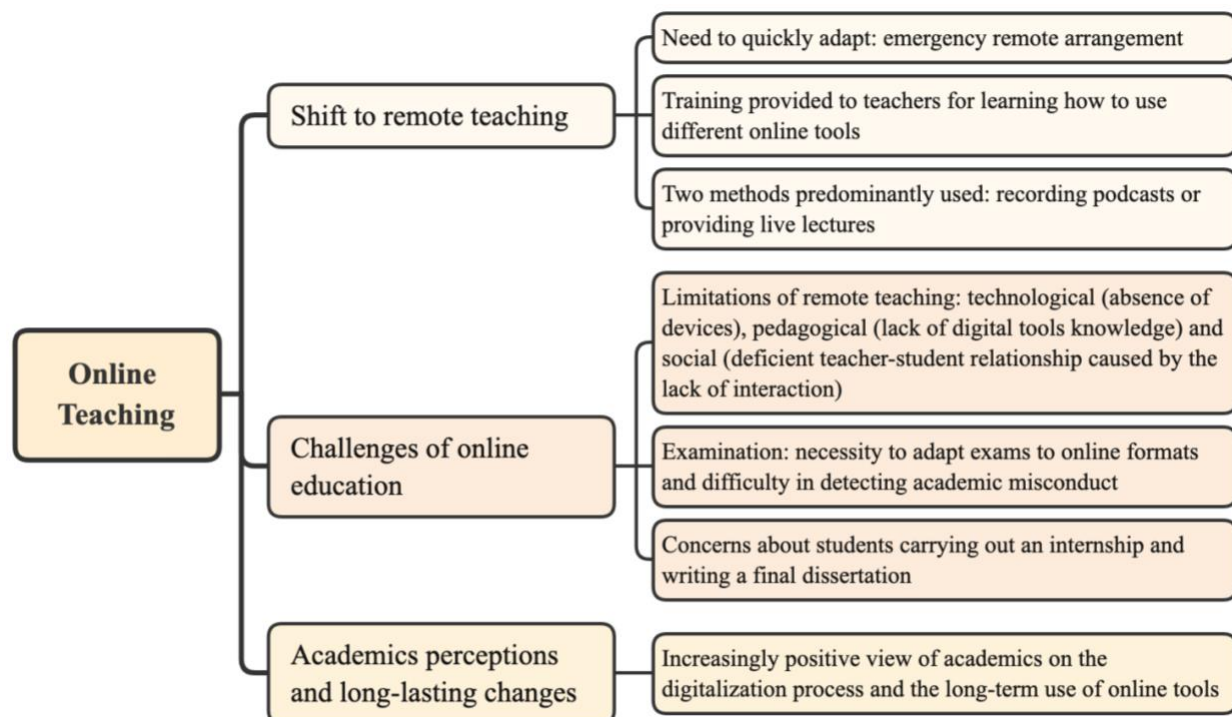
Three main limitations of remote teaching were identified when looking at professors' perspective: technological, pedagogical, and social (Kulikowski et al., 2021). The first one refers to the absence of devices needed or powerful internet, the second one to the lack of digital tools knowledge and the last one to a deficient teacher-student relationship caused by the lack of interaction. The quality of internet connection was also mentioned as an issue in another study, together with the hassle in using digital tools and platforms (Casacchia et al., 2021). Moreover, additional challenges arose due to the students' attitude during online classes, who seemed inattentive and distracted. Another factor that played an important role as an impediment to performing teaching with motivation was the social isolation, which in some cases brought additional stress during pandemic times (Casacchia et al., 2021). Most teachers felt less motivated in their work than before the pandemic (Kulikowski et al., 2021). Even if the results presented in this study predict that all these challenges generate negative consequences for the future of the teaching in higher education, there is still a limitation in accurately predicting these repercussions (Kulikowski et al., 2021).

Another study looking at universities from Australia also presents a glimpse of academics' **perceptions on online education delivery** and the impact of the pandemic into teachers' lives (McGaughey et al., 2021). Most voices see the shift to online teaching (necessary at the time) as threatening for the future of higher education. For instance, the major changes in organization and pedagogy, necessary for the adaptation to the context, seem to remain and therefore lead to a progressive change of the teaching profession (McGaughey et al., 2021). Another study, carried out in Jordan, showed that higher education professors had usually a positive attitude towards distance lectures delivery (Casacchia et al., 2021). However, they were worried about online examination and doubted the possibility to put into practice a fair system and avoid cheating. Polish academics also have an overall positive view on e-learning, even though they admit that it does not favorize students' cooperation and impedes the adaptation to their needs (Kulikowski et al., 2021).

Another aspect integrated in the teaching role, is **guiding students** when performing an internship or writing a final dissertation. The Covid-19 crisis caused a sudden cessation of the activity of many companies or increased their prioritization in finding an emergency plan and adjusting according to the situation (Hammoud et al., 2022). For these reasons, many firms have canceled collaborations with universities in terms of students' internship programs (Hammoud et al., 2022). Mentoring students had to be more intense than prior to the pandemic, especially in the first phase of it when many students had no choice but to redesign their internship-based papers (Lasater et al., 2020). Since collecting data in the field was compromised, students needed to find alternative ways and solutions. Teachers' duty to guide, reassure and assist was therefore greater than previously (Lasater et al., 2020).

Regarding the **long-lasting changes** caused by the pandemic noted when transitioning back to face-to-face education, not many scientific papers investigating this issue were found. Although there are predictions that the teaching profession is changing, there is few evidence to show how such a change is taking place (McGaughey et al., 2021). The literature is also largely silent on teachers' perspectives on students' attitudes when giving lectures back in person. Nevertheless, the increasingly positive view of academics on the digitalization process and the long-term use of online tools in higher education is one element covered by literature (Alammary et al., 2021). Professors are willing to adopt e-learning solutions when the face-to-face education is possible, in order to not waste training and time spent on learning how to use diverse online tools (Alammary et al., 2021). Working more frequently with online tools in higher education involves however a change of teaching methods (García-Morales et al., 2021).

Before drawing some brief conclusions about the literature regarding online teaching a **summative figure** is proposed below.



*Figure 1: Conclusions about online teaching*

As we can observe in the recapitulative table, the scientific literature has focused on several topics regarding the shift to remote teaching and the obstacles or limitations induced by it. However, studies mainly look at the period marked by lockdowns, offering vague perspectives on the recent return or transition to face-to-face education. For these reasons, an exploratory study that complements these findings and provides insights into a more recent period may be beneficial and interesting to contribute with.

## Research

When consulting the scientific literature, it is relatively difficult to find papers targeting researchers in the fields of Management and Economics. However, there are studies that are interested in the evolution of research during the pandemic in other sectors (Harrop et al., 2021; Levine and Rathmell, 2020; Harper et al., 2020). A study focusing on autism research shows that the pandemic had a negative impact on **early career researchers and PhD students** (Harrop et al., 2021). During lockdowns, they encountered multiple issues: difficulty in managing to keep in contact with their research teams remotely, losing in productivity and having a lower capacity to focus and stay organized due to stress. A big part of their time had to be devoted to family care and other responsibilities. Junior researchers felt therefore like missing mentorship, which made moving forward with research a challenging mission to accomplish (Harrop et al., 2021). The decreased training opportunities were therefore another element that made this category overwhelmed in pandemic contexts.

Levine and Rathmell (2020) also looked at clinical research and acknowledged that Covid-19 pandemic had a negative impact on new researchers. **Field research** in the clinical research was suspended in the first few months of the pandemic in the United States. This interruption was especially harmful for early career investigators committed to this kind of research. The impossibility to properly start their career by observing and exploring the field could lead to irreparable consequences in their future development (Levine & Rathmell, 2020).

When looking at **funding**, significant investments have been made since Covid-outbreak in fields which seemed to require prioritization (Harper et al., 2020). For instance, research in virology, which used to represent approximately 2% of biomedical research has been boosted and constitutes currently between 10 and 20 percent of it (Harper et al., 2020). Whether this phenomenon or inclination of investing more in certain branches of the medical sector has been detrimental to other fields, remains to be seen.

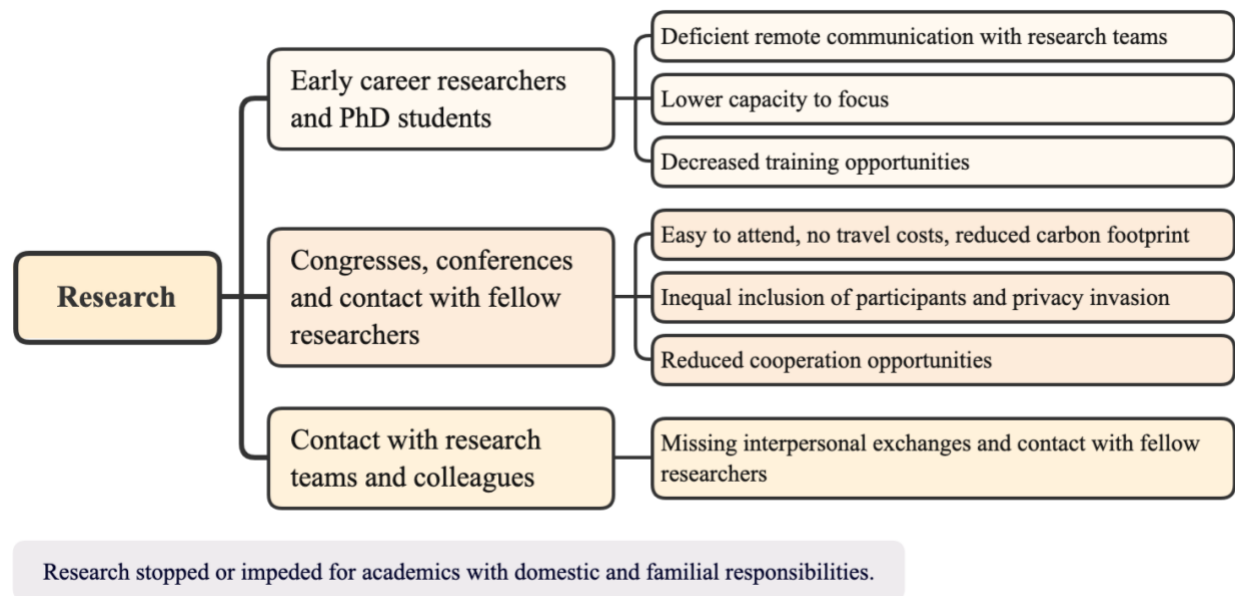
**Congresses and conferences** around the world have been scraped off academics' lists or postponed during lockdowns (Xu, 2020). A part of them were held remotely. The virtual meetings among researchers' communities had the advantage of being easy to attend, eliminating travel costs and decreasing the carbon footprint. However, online conferences led to concerns such as unequal inclusion of participants and privacy invasion (Xu, 2020). Another study also noted that collaborations between researchers have decreased during the pandemic due to mobility restrictions (Essah et al., 2022). Since commuting for scientific purposes was impeded during lockdowns, long term effects in terms of cooperation are predicted for the future.

Studies conducted before the pandemic showed that the **productivity** of researchers with children was lower than that of those without (Kasymova et al., 2021). With the increase in the number of children,

productivity is decreasing. This effect was intensified by the pandemic: since children could not have been always left in daycare centers, their care took place at home, during working hours. For this reason, research and publishing had to be neglected. This phenomenon seemed to be observed especially at women, who according to the study, seem to be more concerned by childcare and housekeeping (Kasymova et al., 2021).

Missing **interpersonal exchanges** and contact with fellow researchers was another effect associated with lockdowns experienced by researchers (Sarah et al., 2021). Additionally, working in unsuitable home environment settings and coping with stress made focusing difficult in some cases. Nevertheless, the pandemic offered researchers the possibility to spend more time with close friends and family and improve their work-life balance (Sarah et al., 2021).

Before drawing some brief conclusions about the literature regarding research, a **recapitulative figure** is proposed below.



*Figure 2: Conclusions about research*

Despite all the above, the effects of the pandemic on some research activities and practices are still lacking, especially in Management related fields. For example, the focus seemed to be on young researchers and highly impacted areas of research, but little information about dissemination work was provided. Current studies, mostly following a quantitative reasoning, are limited to pointing out contextual or interpersonal factors that might have influenced research work. However, we have little in-depth and empirically grounded insights into how academics actually exerted research in the past two years, nor into how the pandemic changed their relationship to their research.

## Community services

As seen in the introduction, community services constitute the third role of an academic (Rathnayake et al., 2022). A study that looked at academics' attitudes towards working from home concluded that they did not perceive remote work suitable when performing community services (Rathnayake et al., 2022). While community services appeared to be put on a break or disrupted during the pandemic in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, (Al-Taweel et al., 2020), service-related meetings seemed to be more numerous and longer during the pandemic in the US. The emerging need for helping fellow academics to adapt to online education was the reason given for it. (Kasymova et al., 2021). Since planning has become increasingly difficult due to the often-revised regulations, the administrative part of this kind of work has been also impacted (Al-Taweel et al., 2020).

The literature is again very limited when looking at this third role of an academic. This may be due to the fact that community services usually represent the smallest part of academics' work (Glorieux & Verbeylen, 2021). For instance, in Belgium, an academic has an average workload of 53 hours and 26 minutes. Only 8 hours are dedicated to community services and other activities such as training, working lunches and emails (Glorieux & Verbeylen, 2021). We can deduce that since this role is minor compared to teaching and research, it is expected for less attention to be given to it.

## Work-life balance, workload and other aspects covered by literature

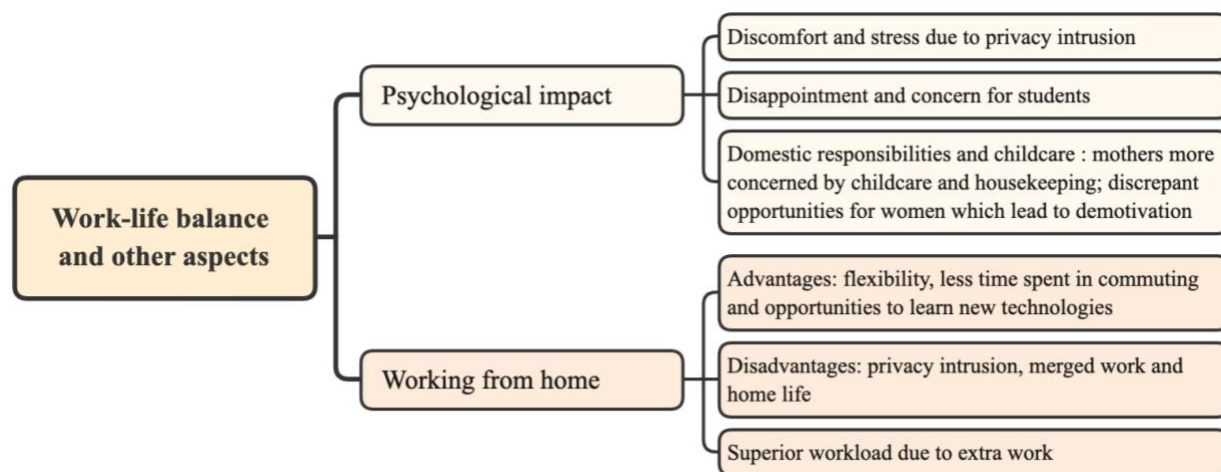
The **psychological impact** of the Covid-19 pandemic was also considered by literature (Casacchia et al., 2021; McGaughey et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2021). Even though students seemed to be more impacted in this sense than academics, online classes delivery (more than research and community services) created challenges for lecturers (Casacchia et al., 2021). Teachers mentioned discomfort caused by the intrusion into their private space when turning their camera on during online lectures. Another difficulty and feeling of disappointment were generated by the lack of interaction with students during the online courses (Casacchia et al., 2021).

The **work-life balance** of academics has been harmed as well, due to the stress created by the pandemic and the merger of their workspace with their home place (McGaughey et al., 2021). Due to the obligation to work from home, they felt like losing the privacy of their familial space (Santos et al., 2021). However, working from home had also some advantages, such as the increased flexibility in customizing schedules and choosing when to work, spending less time on commuting from home to university and offering the opportunity to learn to use digital technologies previously undiscovered (McGaughey et al., 2021). Complaints about a higher workload were also expressed by academics (Santos et al., 2021). Additionally, the extra working hours were mainly due to teaching adaptation. Understanding the use of new digital tools for online classes, recording, editing podcasts, and preparing online evaluations were among the activities that took the most extra time. Besides that, the importance of providing support and motivating students to keep following online classes became higher than before the crisis (Santos et al., 2021).

The most affected academics, on all levels, appear to be those who had children in their care at home during the pandemic (Kasymova et al., 2021). In addition to the responsibilities related to the supervision of children, those associated to their education and schooling also intervened. Parents and especially mothers experienced difficulty in teaching, focusing on research, and providing services to the community. Juggling between housekeeping and taking care of children has made the process of switching to online education difficult. Podcast recording, course adaptation, and other teaching related activities were severely affected, due to interruptions and lower focus (Kasymova et al., 2021). The time spent disseminating, publishing, and conducting research projects in general has been greatly diminished, in some cases even completely interrupted. The consequence, although not immediately apparent, seemed inevitable. Not taking advantage of research opportunities that could have led to a boost in career development may be one of the repercussions of neglecting investigation during the pandemic. Community services-related meetings, described as longer and more numerous during lockdowns, seemed to add a supplementary burden. This phenomenon seemed to be observed especially at women, who according to the study, seem to be usually more concerned by childcare and housekeeping (Kasymova et al., 2021).

In fact, many studies focus on **differences in opportunities according to gender** that have been amplified by the pandemic (Guy and Arthur, 2020; Stadnyk and Black, 2020; Deryugina et al., 2021). Guy and Arthur (2020) claim that the difference in wages, promotion and workload were even before the pandemic discrepant, in favor of men. The rate of papers published increased during the pandemic for men, but dramatically decreased for women (Guy & Arthur, 2020). According to a study looking at economists' situation, female researchers represented only 12% of the total during those times (Gabster et al., 2020). Therefore, career advancement has been in some cases paved for men but hampered for women. Regarding workload during pandemic, in families composed by two academics, women seemed to be the ones predominantly picking up on responsibilities and parenting (Stadnyk & Black, 2020). Although men concerned by taking care of children were also affected when spending lockdowns with them at home, females were the ones experiencing lower productivity (Deryugina et al., 2021).

Before concluding this section, a **recapitulative figure** is proposed below:



*Figure 3: Conclusions about work-life balance and other aspects*

As we can observe in the recapitulative table, the scientific literature covers the psychological impact that lockdowns had on academics. Studies often discuss issues related to gender inequalities in academia, leaving other perspectives in the background. We will therefore try, based on qualitative interviews, to bring complementary findings to those brought to the table by the literature. In this way, we will be able to understand a little bit better the feelings experienced by academics during the pandemic and see if eventual repercussions occur when its end approaches.

## **Conclusion**

The Covid-19 outbreak and its influence on academics has become a topic of interest to researchers in recent months. The scientific literature provides valuable insights into various topics linked to academics' situation. However, there are aspects that deserve to be explored in more detail or dimensions that have not been given much attention yet. For instance, there are multiple papers aimed to research academics struggles during the pandemic, but they often target medicine professionals and not business or management universities, as illustrated in the previous sections (Kasymova et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2021; McGaughey et al., 2021). While there might be similarities in both fields, business and management schools have their specificities.

Research in management looks at managerial actions and usually involves collaboration with public or private organizations, whereas the one in business assesses those firms' performances (Easterby-Smith, 2012). Primary data, obtained empirically in companies makes management and business research usually more applied and more depending on companies than other sciences (Easterby-Smith, 2012). During the sanitary crisis, stock markets have collapsed, trade has been disrupted and many companies have become vulnerable or had to cease their activity (Tripathi, 2020). For these reasons, we can expect consequences in terms of research projects that involve direct observation or physical presence in firms. Given that the scientific literature remains silent about this aspect, whether research collaborations between researchers and companies have also been hampered remains to be seen. Consequently, our empirical study will try to establish if research in business and management has been disrupted.

Regarding teaching, studies, quite numerous on topics such as e-learning or experiencing a switch to online work, focus mainly on the pandemic period marked by lockdowns. Additionally, they describe the impact felt by academics at that specific moment, but do not provide insights into the recent return or step by step transition to face-to-face education. This may be due to differences depending on the country or region or the novelty of returning to campuses in other cases. Literature also often tackles questions of gender inequalities in academia, leaving other perspectives in the background. For these reasons, an exploratory study that complements these findings may be beneficial and interesting to contribute with.

Even if the life of academics is usually structured around three main roles (Rathnayake et al., 2022), yet studies have not provided in-depth accounts of the long-term effects of the crisis on them. Therefore, we will explore empirically how academics from two European universities experienced the lockdowns, but also the return to presential work. Besides insights on academics' remote work experience, we gathered reflections on the long-term impact of the crisis, the changes that it has brought and what remains at the end of the pandemic.



As seen in the previous paragraphs, literature covers many facets of the impact of the Covid crisis on academics. However, it does not target business and management schools and findings about the post-lockdowns period are limited. In addition, most studies are quantitative, so in-depth and empirically grounded insights are mostly missing. In conclusion, a qualitative empirical study aimed to complement this literature review, but target business and management schools will be realized.

## CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This thesis is aimed to describe and understand how the sanitary crisis impacted the work of academics in the last few years. The study focusses on two management schools from two different countries: Belgium and Spain. The University of Liège was chosen out of curiosity to understand the views of our academics on how they experienced working during the pandemic. To confirm whether findings are particular to a case or if academics worldwide experienced similar situations, University of Granada was the second chosen institution. The given opportunity to study in the southern part of Spain for half a year facilitated the encounter with Spanish academics. Professors from a different country could also bring diversity and a different view on the same subject. In order to answer our research question and determine the impact the Covid crisis had on academics, it is essential to undertake empirical research.

The exploratory phase for this thesis started in late 2021 and lasted until April 2022. The decision to contact seventeen academics (university professors and academic researchers), nine from University of Granada and eight from HEC Liège was taken. This number seemed reasonable in the context of a qualitative study. Two aspects were taken in consideration when selecting the academics: their specialization and their level of seniority. We tried to select interviewees with distinctive profiles, because different branches of Business and Management and different levels of seniority could involve different teaching techniques or a greater inclination towards research.

An **inductive approach** was chosen because of the novelty of the topic and the opportunity to get in contact with respondents from a different country. The pandemic started in early 2020 and academics' work started to be impacted by the crisis at the same moment. Not a vast number of studies have been published so far with reference to this topic. Starting with an empirical inquiry seemed therefore to be an appropriate choice for this paper.

**Qualitative interviews** were conducted to gather in-depth perceptions and opinions about the topic. The current context of sanitary crisis and research into the role of academics allowed the creation of a grid of questions in the early stages of this work, which improved with each interview depending on the new topics raised by the respondents. Open-ended questions were decided on, aiming to orientate and help the train of thoughts to be exposed. The purpose of the questions was not to influence the respondent's answer, but only to guide the interviewee if necessary. The interviews took place face to face or through online meeting platforms such as Google Meet and Microsoft Teams. All academics were contacted via university e-mail. The message explained the subject of the thesis and the reason why they were invited to participate in the qualitative study. Their permission for audio recording was demanded and confidentiality was guaranteed.

The nine interviews conducted in Spain were all in Spanish, while almost all in Belgium were carried out in French. The interviewees were given the opportunity to choose the language of the interview. This decision was made in order to ensure the fluidity of the discussion and to facilitate the interviewees' expression in a language they feel one hundred percent comfortable speaking. These interviews were later translated into English by the writer.

Returning to the **research perimeter** that was mentioned briefly earlier, a sample of seventeen professors was selected: nine professors from the University of Granada (UGR) and eight from HEC - University of

Liege were interviewed. They were selected merely from the faculty of Management as it was considered that the choice of academics from various spheres would involve faculties with divergent directions and rules. Over thirty academics were contacted by email in Spain, and nine of them gave a favorable response to the invitation. In Belgium, around fifty emails were sent, and eight positive answers were received.

**Table 1** gives an idea about the profile of the interviewees, while keeping their identity anonymous. The specialization or department, function, institution, seniority, gender, and date of the interview will be presented.

	<b>Specialization</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Seniority</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Date of the interview</b>
1	Human Resources Management	Full professor	UGR	15 years	Female	04.11.2021
2	Supply Chain Management	Full professor	UGR	14 years	Female	05.11.2021
3	Business administration	Associate professor	UGR	15 years	Male	16.11.2021
4	Operations management	Full Professor	UGR	19 years	Male	18.11.2021
5	Marketing and market research	Substitute Professor	UGR	4 years	Male	13.01.2022
6	Environmental management	Full professor	UGR	16 years	Male	13.01.2022
7	Economics	Full professor	UGR	10 years	Female	19.01.2022
8	Quantitative methods for economics	Substitute Professor	UGR	7 years	Male	27.01.2022
9	Economics	Associate Professor	UGR	2 years	Male	28.01.2022
10	Business Languages	Assistant professor	HEC Liège	14 years	Male	21.03.2022
11	Finance and Law	Full Professor	HEC Liège	36 years	Male	24.03.2022
12	Quantitative methods and production management	Full Professor	HEC Liège	30 years	Male	28.03.2022
13	Marketing	Assistant professor	HEC Liège	28 years	Female	29.03.2022
14	Statistics and mathematics	Assistant professor, Phd	HEC Liège	3 years	Female	30.03.2022
15	Organizational management	Full professor	HEC Liège	30 years	Female	01.04.2022
16	Supply chain management	Assistant professor, Phd	HEC Liège	11 years	Female	11.04.2022
17	Mathematics	Full professor	HEC Liège	24 years	Male	12.04.2022

*Table 1: List of interviewees*

Before going further with the presentation of the methodology, we would like to explain the substitute professor rank, held by two of our Spanish interviewees. It is a non-tenured position created for substitutions and for obtaining it a PhD is not required (Paredes, 2017). Substitute professors usually teach only, but in some particular cases they also carry out research activities (Paredes, 2017).

As mentioned previously, a grid of questions was created for the interviews. The grid was structured around the roles of academics: teaching, researching, and public services, which were issued from prior research. The interviews were structured in a chronological order, aiming to facilitate the telling of a story as it happened. The first question was about specialization, focus, and role as an academic at university. Afterwards, a chronological account of the impact of the pandemic on their lives and career was suggested to be made. The emphasis was on a comparison of before, during and after the pandemic, the moment "after the pandemic" being described as the end of lockdowns and the return to presential work. A high degree of choice of direction was granted to the interviewees, but when they seemed to be at the end of the exposition of thoughts, questions selected from the ones below were asked (if the respondent had not already covered them):

How has your way of working changed? Have certain new practices been put in place to adapt? (By the university or yourself)
Could you tell me about teaching during the pandemic? What about now when its end seems to approach?
Could you tell me about research and community services? (Then and now)
What about work organization, well-being management, contact with students and colleagues during the pandemic? Is it the same now?
Did the lockdown change your usual rhythm or way of working in any way? Did the number of working hours increase or decrease for you?
What do you think about the experience of working fully remotely? Was it difficult for you to manage work within your familial space? Would you like to continue working like this?
Do you think that the communication and/or direction in your work was affected by the pandemic? How?
In general, have you felt more stressed and/or less productive doing your job since the Covid-19 pandemic began? If the answer is yes, what do you think it is due to?
Name practices that you kept from the pandemic, tell me about the change.
Do you think that the pandemic has favored the digitization in your work environment?

*Table 2: Grid of questions for interviews*

A qualitative **data analysis strategy** must be followed in data analysis. We decided to opt for the analytic method proposed by Miles and Huberman, which represents a mix of ethnographic and grounded methods (Miles and Huberman, 2018, p. 6). Some studies argue that the model proposed by Miles and Huberman is in fact extremely similar to the grounded method (Thomas, 2003, p.3). This approach is consistent with the inductive path (Thomas, 2006) and consists in several steps to follow.

The first one is *assigning themes or codes to a set of field notes, interview transcripts, documents and/or visual data* (cited in Miles and al., 2018, p.6). Then, the approach suggests going through the data collected and identifying similarities or common patterns and establishing relationships between the information collected. It is also recommended to pinpoint categories or themes that stand out. In our case, four categories were created following the main themes raised by the respondents: three corresponding to the three roles of academics and one tackling subjects such as work-life balance, well-being management and organization. The further step is separating the identified categories and using them for the upcoming round of data collection. After each interview our grid was improved in this way. The second to last step consists in elaborating a filtered set of propositions and especially generalizations that cover the essence and the new brought by the collected data. The last one is comparing those propositions to the literature review.

Part of the interviews were therefore fully transcribed and others only partially. Only important or worthwhile parts that were retained were transcribed from most of them after analyzing the voice recordings. If a new interviewee went exactly on the same path as one previously interviewed and the discussion did not bring any novelty or did not interestingly back up a previous finding, the passages were not transcribed. Once this proceeding was completed, we decided to re-read and get in depth understanding of the texts. Parts that were not initially highlighted during transcripts were this time found valuable and therefore pinpointed. A repetition of certain themes (mentioned by the interviewees or contained in the questions grid) was observed: in each transcript paragraphs were labeled according to the topic they were about. Those themes were teaching, research and work-life balance. Besides that, there were also some additions regarding the third role of an academic, namely the community services.

As we mentioned above, specific topics raised by respondents or included in the interview grid were given more attention by the interviewees. Consequently, these are the ones that can be assessed as the more salient to qualify academics' experience during the crisis and, therefore, will be discussed in more detail in this paper. For more clarity, we decided to present these themes in a well-organized manner, and to regroup the empirical study into **four chapters**. The first three of them correspond to the three traditional roles of an academic: teaching, research, and community services. The fourth one tackles subjects related to work-life balance, workload, and well-being management.

Since respondents from both Granada and Liège were interviewed, another decision had to be taken regarding the way to account for the **two contexts**. Since not striking differences of perspective were observed when analyzing the interviews' transcripts, findings from both countries will be presented together, in a more global manner. If substantial differences in views will appear in some cases, it will be indicated in the context if it is about Granada or Liège.

Another element taken into account when organizing the presentation of empirical findings is the **chronology of events**, as the pandemic lasted for over two years. In Spain and Belgium, the well-known pandemic waves did not happen at the same time, or the restrictions were not identical in both countries. However, the interviewees from both countries often made an important distinction between two moments: the period during lockdowns, when remote work was mandatory and total, and the period when the post-pandemic phase started (or when restrictions became more permissive), characterized by the progressive return to university.

For more clarity, and with the purpose to not confuse the reader, the choice to not subdivide too much the stages of the pandemic in the case of both countries that was taken. Therefore, in each chapter, findings corresponding to these two timings defined in this way and called 'during the pandemic' and the 'post-pandemic period' will be presented. A contextualization regarding the period prior to the crisis might be added at the beginning of each chapter, if necessary. If interesting information about the transition between the two periods is brought to the table, it will be included either at the end of the part '**during the pandemic**' or at the beginning of the '**post-pandemic**' period.

Before kicking off with the presentation of our findings, one last aspect has to be clarified. The interviews in Granada were organized in two rounds: part of them in November 2021 and the other part in January 2022. Although the interviews conducted in Spain show that the total return to face-to-face (hence the post-pandemic period) began in October 2021, there were few conclusions about how it was perceived or what repercussions the Covid crisis had on the return to presential activity. Due to the fact that these interviews were carried out relatively early, a long-term impact could not be determined by these academics, as the timing was too short to reach such conclusions. Since the interviews in Belgium took place a little later, in March and April 2022, much more information has been gathered about the repercussions of the pandemic. It should therefore be noted that the post-pandemic part will be built mainly on information based on interviews conducted at HEC Liège.

## CHAPTER THREE: EMPIRICAL STUDY

In this part, the empirical data collected during the qualitative study carried out in Spain and Belgium will be presented and analyzed.

### Theme 1: Teaching

#### During the pandemic

In March 2020, the teaching activity described as 100% on campus prior to the pandemic, was abruptly moved to online in both countries we carried out interviews in, Belgium, and Spain. This has led to several changes in the various aspects of teaching which will be regrouped in subchapters. This choice is made aiming to present in a clear and well-fragmented form the topics that our interviewees addressed.

A first section will present the process that academics went through in order to adapt to remote work and providing online education. Online teaching will be the core subject approached in the second subchapter, where we will be able to discover how lecturers work looked like during the pandemic. Since certain challenges were encountered by the teachers, one of them being the examination of the students, we will dedicate a new and last section to this subject. Additionally, in the same subchapter we will have a look at how online platforms have been used by teachers for assessments and other matters.

#### **Teaching in home environment settings, resources, and adaptation**

The beginning of the pandemic was described by teachers as an element that suddenly changed their way of working. They felt that the time to adapt to online classes was extremely short since they had to manage to go directly to online education:

*“The first phase of the pandemic, I would say a very fast learning process of digitization, of how to teach online, because our only problem was that we did not have a break for learning it. We were not prepared, and it was a very important leap.” (Full professor, interview n°4)*

Concerning teaching in home environment settings, this mostly represented a problem for academics with a family in their care and especially a family with small children. Interviewees with relatively young children or family to take care of during lockdowns reported difficulty in teaching from home. Combining childcare and homeschooling with domestic responsibilities has not been always evident for teachers:

*“The person who came before to help me with the house did not come anymore. I had to clean, cook, do all the work, and take care of my children. Apart from that, keep my spirit up.” (Full professor, interview n°1)*

Another concern was the fact that some teachers did not have the required resources in terms of gadgets or technology to provide high quality lectures. Without tools like whiteboards or printers, some teachers could not provide education at the same level as before:

*“I don't have a whiteboard in my house. I like to write when I give classes and I can't really write on the computer... I had a tablet but not performant and I couldn't write in such conditions, I couldn't transmit information in a decent way.” (Substitute professor, interview n°8)*

Internet connection was one more element brought into discussion by teachers. It often happened that internet issues disturbed the lectures at key moments. Knowing that wi-fi could stop working properly at any time brought additional stress to teachers:

*“There is also the internet connection, which is not always very good, it induces some degree of stress to know that your connection can become weak sometimes. The same is true for students, there were always students suddenly leaving the class and then reconnecting back.” (Assistant professor, interview n°13)*

During the interviews, teachers were asked about adapting to the new online education system. Some said that it was not challenging to adapt to the use of online technologies and others encountered some difficulties. They acknowledged that they had received institutional support which consisted in the purchase of licenses for online video conferencing platforms in both universities. At the University of Granada, a training platform with different modules for the accurate use of online technologies and the facilitation of online classes was created. Academics from Spain also reported that the members of the faculty of which they were a part mobilized and offered help without restraint. Teachers had close contact on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, where they gave each other advice on how to adapt to online teaching:

*“They launched a digital training program with lots of modules, there were many training courses. Training on how to use Google Meet, teaching methods, many things. With videos, documents, and assignments. If I had any doubt, I had a phone number where to call and ask questions. They created a computer borrowing system: if you didn't have one at home. The library put many resources in online format for access.” (Full professor, interview n°2)*

*“I believe that the University of Granada has made a great effort in this regard. They were fast with providing support and technologies.” (Full professor, interview n°7)*

Based on the elements presented in the previous paragraphs, we can conclude that the switch to remote work was steep, and the teachers had to adapt quickly. University educators from both universities were able to adapt, some because they already knew how to use online technologies and others with the help of colleagues, or the support provided by their institution. In terms of working from home, the most problematic was for teachers with multiple domestic responsibilities or with children in care. They were often interrupted in their work, which made the situation more difficult. How they felt about juggling between work and familial responsibilities will be explored in more detail in another section, especially dedicated to the well-being of academics.

Before presenting the findings concerning the teaching activity itself during pandemic, a figure reminding the main elements that marked academics' adaptation to online working is proposed below.



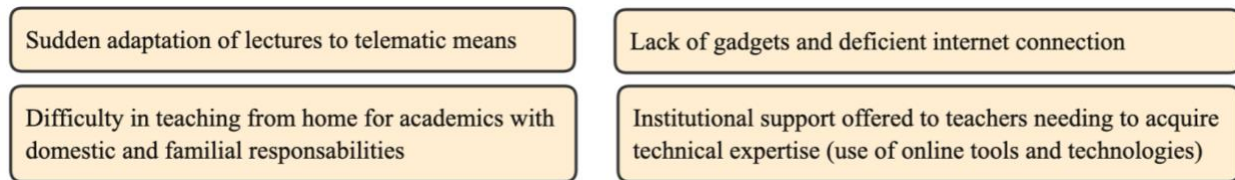


Figure 4: Elements that marked academics' adaptation to online working

## Online teaching

According to the interviewees, the biggest change came with the obligation to drop the classical way of giving lectures in front of a classroom. The online classes, mandatory during lockdowns, imposed drastic changes in teaching methods and created the need to adapt course materials. Two major methods of online teaching have been chosen primarily by professors. The chosen formulas usually depended on *“the courses, the number of students and the nature of the subject.”* (Full professor, interview n°12) The choice was also motivated by other factors such as having many international students and since *“they have all gone to their home country it was impossible to hold classes with them live.”* (Substitute professor, interview n°5)

**The first method** involved **recording videos** and posting them on the university platform. Creating videos usually involved hours of extra work, since preparing videos did not represent only filming oneself and posting a video on a platform: *“preparing, filming, editing, posting, I was spending twice as much time as in the case of classical courses.”* (Full professor, interview n°17) Often happened that teachers were not entirely happy with their first recordings, feeling like they *“could have done it more intuitively, more naturally”* so they had to *“start recording again.”* (Assistant professor, interview n°14) Restarted filming podcasts was also necessary when disturbances came from external and uncontrollable factors:

*“When a neighbor used a noisy machine, I was sometimes forced to stop recording and then had to restart all over again.”* (Full professor, interview n°17)

The higher workload was also motivated by the fact that in order to create quality podcasts, *“you need a little bit of scripting, you must rework the podcasts, do a minimum of editing, and have removed the passages that don't work”* (Full professor, interview n°12). From these sayings, we can deduce that providing recorded lessons to students required academics to have some sort of technical expertise or learn to deal with editing programs, filming settings and other similar matters. The podcast formula was often accompanied by live question and answer (Q&A) sessions: *“I did interactive sessions with the students to explain what was in the podcasts, do exercises, questions, and answers, Wooclaps<sup>1</sup>, tests to see if they understood.”* (Full professor, interview n°12) This method was mainly used for ex-cathedra or more theoretical courses, where interaction was not necessarily considered imperative. It was also preferred in the case of courses with a very large number of students.

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<sup>1</sup> An online quiz platform.

The podcasts seemed to be generally appreciated by students, but many teachers were disappointed to find out that *“the podcast viewing statistics were dropping and students were (2 weeks) late constantly.”* (Assistant professor, interview n°14) The impression was created that students had trouble keeping up with the podcasts. The problem was rather labeled as lack of self-discipline, which had to be boosted by constantly motivating them:

*“Another thing that took a lot of time was also to make sure that students don’t stop following the course ... I communicated enormously, sent emails, very enthusiastically. ‘That’s the schedule for the week!’ ... ‘This part will be harder but then comes an easier lecture and you’ll have fun watching it.’”* (Assistant professor, interview n°14).

This responsibility, as presented by our interviewees, seemed somewhat new or at least intensified by the context. Academics seemed to play a more social role, given the additional active efforts made in order to ensure that students did not drop out from their courses. Motivating students entirely remotely represented therefore a challenge for teachers, because even when making efforts it is difficult to track each student and see their rate of involvement when opting for podcasted lectures.

However, they had the advantage that once they are created they remain. A not recorded face-to-face class happen usually only one time. Students cannot re-assist it or pause. The exact opposite is available for podcasts: *“students can listen to it whenever they want and multiple times.”* (Full professor, interview n°4)

Before discussing the second method used by teachers, a recapitulative table presenting the advantages and disadvantages of podcasts will be proposed. The arguments for and against will be entirely from the perspective of teachers, leaving in the background the benefits and drawbacks for students, although they have been presented. This choice is made in order to build up the impact that the pandemic had on teachers, given that the subject of this thesis focuses on them.

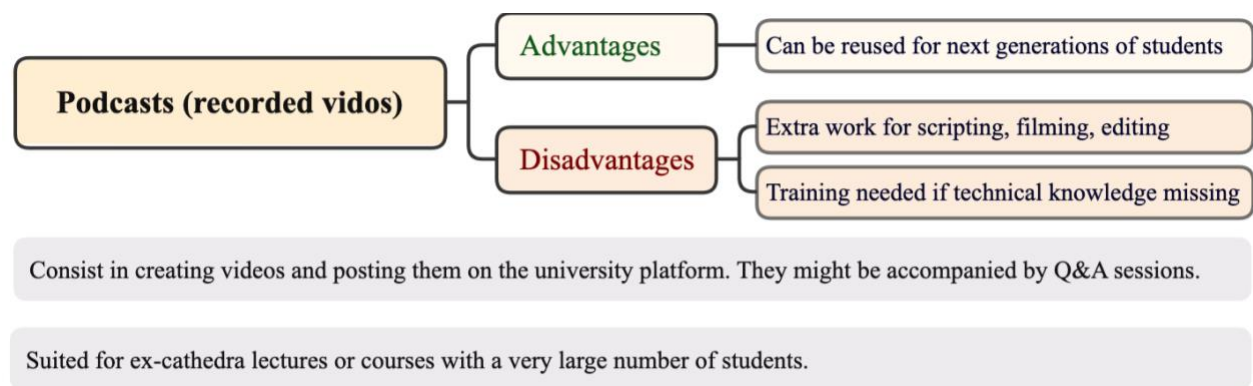


Figure 5: Advantages and disadvantages of recorded videos

**The second method** consisted in giving **live classes** through platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom in Spain and Lifesize and Microsoft Teams in Belgium. Even if this method did not involve devoting an enormous amount of time to rebuilding the lecture itself, the work of adapting the course materials was still present. Regarding the flow during online courses, complaints about the low degree of interactions were voiced. Most of the time, the students joined online courses while not turning on their cameras. This,

however, gave the impression of a lack of attention on the part of the students and created uncertainty as to their concentration: *“The feeling of black screen, not talking to anyone, all cameras off... it's not like in class.”* (Associate professor, interview n°3) This feeling was described as a new yet unpleasant experience by professors. They felt like they could not improvise anymore, pick up on interesting pieces of news to discuss about, because the *“flow that a presential class has with the student, the online format loses it a lot”* (Associate professor, interview n°3). Another problem, noticed also in the case of podcasted courses, was the degree of attendance:

*“There weren't many students connecting, it was a disaster for me.”* (Assistant professor, interview n°10).

When teaching in the classroom, *“time flies, a two-hour class feels like five minutes”* (Assistant professor, interview n°10), while in the case of online live classes, time seems to compress: *“... I was talking for ten minutes, and they felt like more than ten and I can't stop thinking - what am I going to do for the one hour and fifty minutes that are left?”* (Assistant professor, interview n°10). Only flipped classes or the more interactive ones were a little more successful in terms of student interaction. The difficulty for teachers came, however, from the fact that not all classes could be organized in this way:

*“The first-year class is very theoretical. It is not designed to be an inverted class or an interactive one.”* (Assistant professor, interview n°10).

As for podcasts, a recapitulative table presenting the advantages and disadvantages for teachers of live classes will be proposed below.

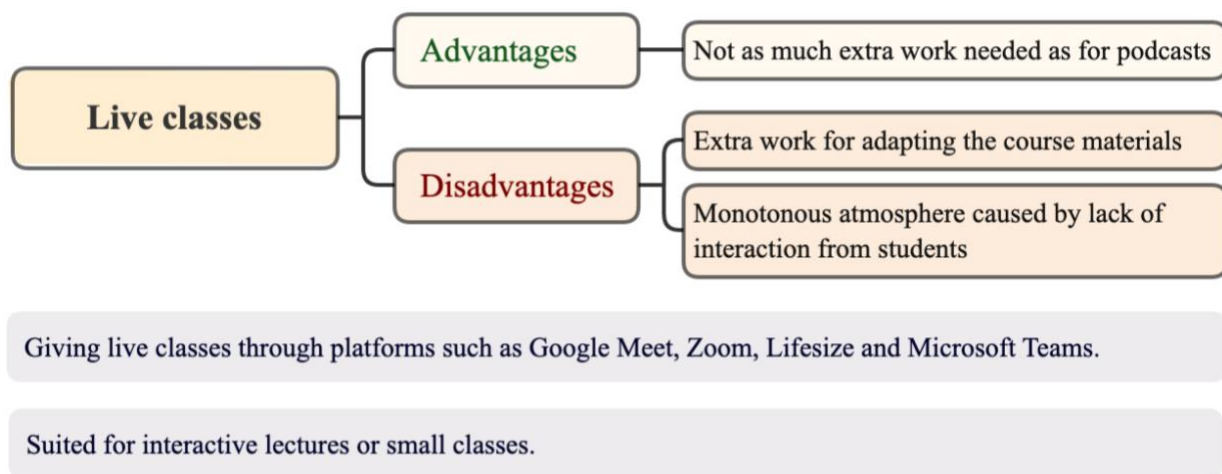


Figure 5: Advantages and disadvantages of live classes

**In both methods** there was a need for “*restructuring the lectures’ content*” (Associate professor, interview N°9). Some of our interviewees even admitted that they decided, based on student surveys or on their own initiative, to shorten the duration of podcasts by cutting back on the courses content:

*“The students told me that I gave too much material, so I adapted it.”* (Full professor, interview n°12).

This brought somehow disappointment on teachers’ side, feeling that their complete podcasts, which were the result of extra work, were not fully appreciated by students who mostly “*complained and asked for shorter podcasts.*” (Full professor, interview n°12). Live classes given through online platforms seemed to also be more successful if they were shorter and with more breaks:

*“I realized that giving an online class was very different from giving a normal class, and that everything must be briefer, shorter, and you must give more breaks.”* (Assistant professor, interview n°10)

It seemed like if not proceeding in this way, students would “*disperse and get lost.*” (Full professor, interview n°4) This was so that the students, who were already “*distracted by mobile phones during the online classes*” (Assistant professor, interview n°10), would better be able to keep their attention on the lecture.

Monitoring students’ well-being and especially learning process was therefore hard and preoccupied the professors, no matter the method chosen for teaching. As seen previously, interaction was low from the students’ side, who did not express themselves enough or did not seek help. This translated merely into uncertainty that students understood or were following lectures with interest:

*“In a face-to-face class, you stop more because a student can interrupt you and say, ‘I don’t understand this part’, when you are virtually at home with a computer, you don’t interact with students as much.”* (Full professor, interview n°2)

*“I feel like the attention and interest is more difficult to capture when we are all dispersed in different places...it is also more complicated to start a discussion, especially since the students don’t interact easily.”* (Assistant professor, interview n°13)

*“I didn’t have much feedback from students, and it felt frustrating.”* (Full professor, interview n°17)

Learning through practice was also seen by teachers as a weak point of online teaching. Online meeting platforms have either not been highly adapted to such a thing or simply learning through practice has no place in the online environment:

*“I do a lot of class dynamics, I ask questions a lot, I do participatory classes and learning in general, teamwork, coordination. Those things were much more complicated to do online.”* (Full professor, interview n°1)

In general, online classes were not quite suitable for practical or based-on projects classes. The interviewees encountered problems or obstacles in coordinating or guiding project teams. Both the problem of discomfort and the difficulty of finding the students who are really involved in projects and those who are not present or actively working have been raised. Supervising or guiding students carrying out group projects, a rather important part in continuous evaluation, was therefore deficient:

*“It's complicated not to see the students or all the group projects. In class, all groups are there and when I pass to discuss with each and I see that the same problem comes back, I can stop the whole class to explain the same to everyone. Remotely, you can't do that.” (Assistant professor, interview n°16).*

*“I was visiting (online) different groups to see how I can help them. Usually not all students were there, you couldn't know if there is a connection issue, or they just were not there. I felt like they also had troubles working together because of the distance. It was not nice for me to be in front of my computer and not be able to spontaneously interact with them. (Assistant professor, interview n°13)*

Not having “students' feedback” (Full professor, interview n°4), also represented a problem for most teachers. As seen in the previous paragraphs, students were a little more embarrassed to interact in online classes than in face-to-face ones. Besides not necessarily interacting when needed during the lectures, students' perceptions on online classes or adapted to online environment teaching methods were mostly unknown:

*“It is not enjoyable to give a course in front of a computer without having the feedback of the students. For them it's certainly not nice either, they are more distracted, they are not really in class.” (Assistant professor, interview n°13)*

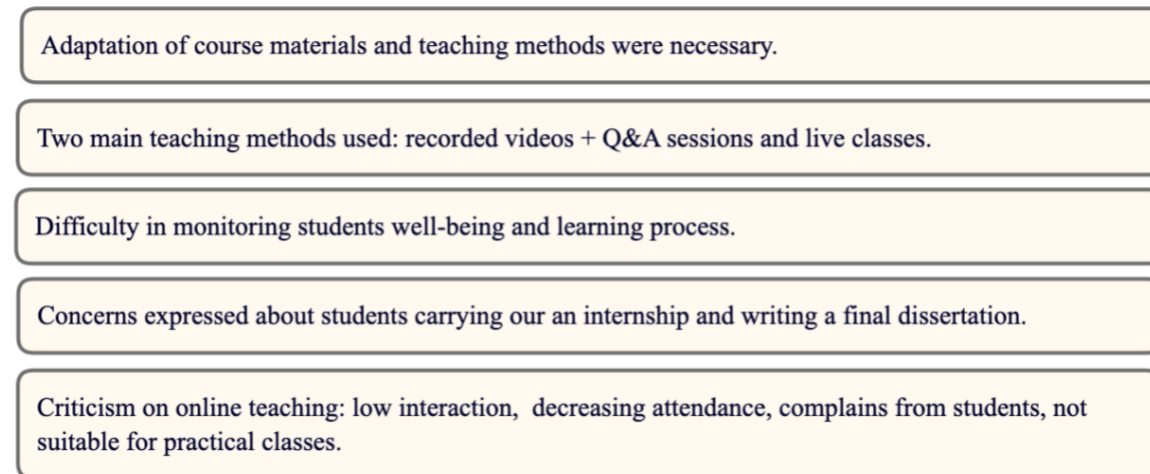
The general demotivation observed in students during online classes was another point raised by our respondents. This aspect seemed to be a result of the atmosphere that was not the same anymore and the fact that they “couldn't be with their colleagues.” (Full professor, interview, n°1) An interesting parallel was made by one of our respondents, namely that just as new PhD candidates needed to make contacts in order to integrate into the new academical context, so did students needed their colleagues and time spent in the corridors to succeed in their university journey.

Even though usually criticized, online teaching had the advantage that it could be recorded, and that “students can listen to it whenever they want and multiple times.” (Full professor, interview n°4)

Another facet of teaching that does not strictly refer to giving lectures, but rather to guiding students, was internships and thesis supervision. This situation has been described as difficult for students since they could not physically go to companies and learn through practice. This was considered not beneficial in a student's journey because “they didn't have the same experience: interaction disappeared, they didn't see customers, employees, machines, they did not see chiefs, secretaries, they saw nothing.” (Full professor, interview N°12). Because final dissertations are usually based on data collected in firms, students' progress relies on it. In pandemic times, students had to find alternatives in order to carry out their papers

successfully. Consequently, mentoring involved more support and implication than before, when a positive evolution of the students was more likely to occur with their physical presence in companies. Although the contact with final years' students doing their internship could have been maintained online and they could have been successfully supervised, a bittersweet taste was experienced by teachers for knowing that an important empirical experience was not fully lived by their students.

Before drawing a brief conclusion about online teaching, a summarizing figure regrouping the main ideas presented in this section is suggested below.



*Figure 6: Main ideas about online teaching*

Based on the previously presented elements, we can conclude that online teaching involved longer working hours for teachers than preparing or giving classical courses in university halls. Even though more time has been put into adapting course materials and preparing lectures, online teaching seemed to be quite criticized. The main reasons that made it unpreferable for teachers are the low interaction of students and the difficulty of reaching and understanding what is going on with them. Teachers are generally not bothered to invest a little more time in teaching if needed, but the fact that this time does not translate into professional satisfaction is problematic. In addition, a somewhat negative development and evolution of students during those times was pointed out by teachers, which made them feel dissatisfied or disappointed. Whether online classes involve long-term consequences, will be determined in one of the later sections, where the re-transition to face-to-face classes will be presented. Before that, another important facet of teaching will be proposed, namely evaluation.

### **Use of students' platforms and evaluation**

More functionalities of the university platforms dedicated to students, Lol@ in HEC Liège and Prado in University of Granada were used by the professors during the pandemic:

*“Before, the Prado platform was used more as a place to post notes, receive work from the students ... it was not used for evaluation or exams or questions. This platform has become increasingly important and has been improved a lot in recent years.” (Full Professor, interview n°6)*

A major change during the pandemic also occurred in terms of student assessment. Some teachers acknowledged that they had given students more independent work such as additional projects and exercises to prepare than before. They chose to give more homework to make sure the students followed through. Continuous assessment has also become more important, with many teachers not knowing what kind of exams they can hold at the end of the 2020 academic year. Giving more assignments than before also involved a higher workload for teachers, who had more papers to correct than in a non-pandemic scenario.

*“It was a lot of work to do, prepare online exams, we knew that all the students were going to cheat, so what we did was to send a lot of work, but still, I didn't have time to correct that much, I had around 200 students. That year I corrected around 2,000 papers. Too much workload. It was an overload.” (Full professor, interview n°1)*

In June 2020, exams needed to be done online and were mostly created on platforms proposed by the universities (Prado exams in Granada and iCampus in Liège). Holding exams online translated to a new freedom granted to students when it came to evaluation. This aspect was perceived differently among teachers, who tried avoiding that students cheat at online exams by implementing different methods and systems. In the case of multiple-choice, students could not be observed or asked to turn their cameras on. One of the control systems put in practice by our interviewees was asking students with questionably high grades *“to do an oral exam on Lifesize.”* (Assistant professor, interview n°10). One method used for detecting academic misconduct and false high grades was checking the students' progress and previous grades obtained in other projects or assessments. Those grades were therefore compared to the result obtained by the students in their final exam. When those two were totally discrepant, the teachers reserved their right to doubt and therefore contact the student in question for a short re-evaluation.

Online exams were also usually unfavorably seen because it was hard *“to know who passes the exam, what the students have in front of them at that moment, whether they pass it as a group or not.”* (Full professor, interview n°12) For this reason, oral exams were organized when possible. Other techniques such as creating a larger basis of possible questions to make sure students got different ones at the same time or reducing the time allocated for solving the exam were implemented. However, these new methods of evaluation were often seen as being inferior to their pre-pandemic counterparts. Having to learn how to create online exams and adapt questions to this format took a significant amount of teachers' time. The question remains whether this time investment will prove a long-term one as the pandemic draws to its conclusion and the possibilities for traditional methods return.

Before finding out whether online assessment and distance teaching have been also implemented when the possibility to return to university buildings was given back, a recapitulative figure regrouping the key remarks made about online examination is presented below.

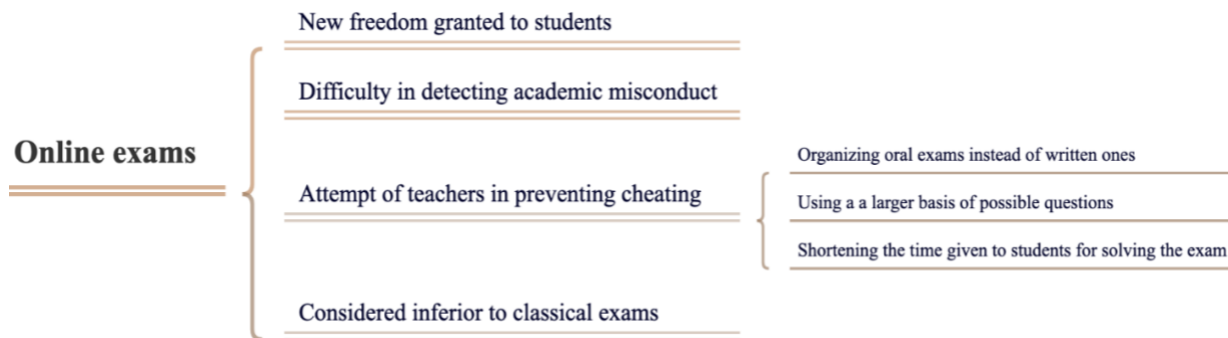


Figure 7: Online exams

### Post-pandemic period

If for “during the pandemic” period there was a necessity for dividing content into subchapters, the segmentation does not seem necessary for this part, which will consist mainly of conclusions about the return to presential teaching. As mentioned in the methodological section, this part will be based mainly on data collected in Belgium, as the interviews were conducted in Spain in the fall of 2021, when the transition to face-to-face education was at its beginnings.

With the passage of time, experience in online teaching and relaxation of measures, teachers reported an improvement in online teaching. Some of those who mentioned that they did not have the right materials for online teaching discovered new techniques to improve its quality and others bought the right gadgets:

*“Now I’m using an iPad for this videoconference, when the pandemic started, I don’t even know how I managed to teach without it. I bought it for the academic year of 2021.” (Associate professor, interview n°9).*

Today, students can seek counseling from their teachers online or in person, by visiting their office. Professors are more and more opened to meeting their students through videoconference platforms. An option that was not possible in the past now is something very common and considered normal: online meetings:

*“Mentoring students always happened face-to-face, now we are doing it online, exams review is also done online now. If the student has a specific question, now I have the right PDF and we’ll discuss it.” (Substitute professor, interview n°8)*

Cameras were installed in the classrooms so that teachers could adapt to a hybrid education system in case it is required to:

*“The pandemic has accelerated digitization. Suddenly, the university has installed cameras to teach online from the university. This year, classes started with half of the students’ following classes from university and half from home. UGR has invested in Zoom rooms, Google Meet, and created emails for everyone in Google.” (Full professor, interview n°6)*



Even in these conditions, teachers would opt for a return to the traditional teaching system after the pandemic is considered over, according to the interviews. However, they are open to few adjustments, namely meeting with students online or giving classes through online platforms in case of external problems occurring. They recognize that digitization is also welcomed, manifested by the more frequent use of previously unused functionalities of the university's platform. Teachers are also opened to keep using some online tools found in the pandemic and recommend more online sources of information to students:

*"I found the online tool 'Genially', during the pandemic and I continue using it now too. But differently. For example, I created an escape game with this tool which is used by the students for the revision of the material."* (Assistant professor, interview n°13)

*"Before the pandemic I was writing exercises on a paper while filming it and projecting on the whiteboard. Now I use a tablet, as I did during the pandemic."* (Assistant professor, interview n°17)

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, globally, a prevalence to returning to the campuses and to teach in front of students was noticed:

*"I am happy to be able to return to the classroom without a mask, because teaching is like transmitting and receiving human energy."* (Assistant professor, n°10)

However, a new phenomenon is observed only in Belgium, while in Spain an almost complete return to the old teaching methods is preferred. Considered probably the biggest change brought by the pandemic, it is the **creation of an enormous demand** for something described as the **"double education"** (Full professor, n°11). Students are more and more demanding for podcasts or lectures' recordings to be posted and be left at their disposal on university platforms, even though classes are not anymore given remotely: "...if we follow the demand of the students, we will have to go towards it, something very hybrid, very digital, but suddenly I don't know if I would like my profession so much in ten years." (Assistant professor, n°14) This usually does not represent an issue for professors, which are willing to provide already created podcasts or to record their live classes given at university. Their openness to make available previously recorded podcasts is motivated by the fact that it saves them from **"repeating the same thing all the time"** and that **"they are available at any time and students can revisit an explanation they didn't understand."** (Assistant professor n°13) Nevertheless, this system, although potentially promising, due to an incorrect attitude on the part of the students, seems to be doomed to fail.

This first phenomenon leads to the creation of a second one, often expressed as the biggest consequence of the pandemic, namely **the low rate of attendance in lecture halls**: **"...a very clear repercussion of the crisis: the students prefer following the courses remotely, sometimes with delay. It is a substantial change."** (Full professor, interview n°12) Even though this **"hybrid formula comes with benefits, the biggest difficulty is not at the level of teachers, but at the level of students"** (Full professor, n°12) that lose their interest gradually when following classes fully online. The low presence in the classrooms is also much lower than before the pandemic in Spain, even if the possibility of distance learning is not offered. This change also comes with **increasingly discrepant results in evaluations**:

*“There is a group of students that comes to class and uses online podcasts cleverly, those are the ones that have really good results, there are more high grades than before...but there is a bigger group of students which are passive and don’t come to class and their grades are lower than ever before.” (Full professor, n°11)*

The expressed issue is that there seem to be fewer and fewer average students. They are either aiming very high, or struggling, getting lost and hardly managing to pass the course. The real problem which is underlined by most academics is the pool of students with more unsatisfactory results than in the past, who are in much greater numbers. Even if on one hand the teachers post recordings or podcasts sincerely believing that they can be helpful, on the other hand they somehow regret their decision after seeing that **this changes the basic definition of teaching**: *“being a teacher seems to not be the same career anymore.”* (Assistant professor, n°14) Having a very tiny number of students attending in classrooms subconsciously brings frustration to a certain level. It equates with lack of interest in the course and produces the feeling that teachers *“don’t provide added value in face-to-face compared to what”* they *“can offer on video”* (Assistant professor, n°14).

By looking at these findings and the words of our interviewees, we can conclude that teaching no longer seems to be the same as prior to the pandemic. A feeling of uncertainty about these changes was expressed:

*“What interests me for the future and for my future classes is not to make videos on my own, it’s to meet the students.” (Assistant professor, n°14)*

Apart from this idea, the question of the difference between a supposedly face-to-face education and one designed to be at a distance arises. The difference between the two is starting to get smaller and smaller, although in theory, face-to-face education is designed to happen in university buildings. Additionally, students, even if they come to class, seem to have a **lower capacity of concentration**:

*“I noticed that the ability of students to concentrate in a face-to-face course was significantly reduced, it was already not excellent compared to a few years ago, because we are in a world where we are used to multitasking, being on your phone while listening to a conversation.”* (Assistant professor, n°14)

According to some interviewees, attending classes remotely intensified student’s distractions. As mentioned in a previous paragraph, students are becoming more and more accustomed to keeping their device close to them during class, talking to classmates, and doing more things at the same time and therefore losing their focus.

**The lack of students in classrooms and the results at evaluations** that seem to take an undesirable trajectory bring sometimes a silent uncertainty about the future of higher education. Many voices could not answer the question about the solution to this problem, and others came up with suggestions worthwhile to be mentioned. A first suggestion, quite simple and straight forward was the suppression of podcasts and the return to a 100% face-to-face education:

*“In any case, from next year on I won’t post recordings of my lectures anymore. Teaching can’t happen with such a low rate of students attending, it’s also a waste of resources, you can’t book a hall for 350 people and have only 20 people present.” (Full professor, interview n°17)*

Another proposal is getting inspiration from the neighboring country’s system, namely the Netherlands, and implementing a more experiential learning, close to the concept of flipped classes:

*“Perhaps adopt a little more of a philosophy like in Maastricht, for example, where the students know that they must prepare or read something before the course. They have to get ready to come and live an experience in class.” (Assistant professor, n°14)*

However, this philosophy can be a feasible and achievable proposal only with the involvement of students and their openness to change. The same interviewee acknowledges that, at a first attempt to put such a system into practice, the students did not understand the rules of the game:

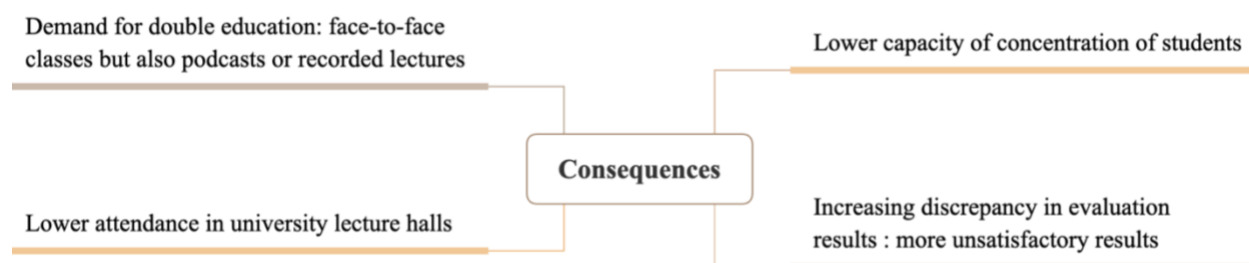
*“I tried a project of this style, but most students are in the perspective of studying towards the end of the course and are not used to adopting this methodology, despite me telling them that they must read this and that before coming to the session.” (Assistant professor, n°14)*

Other similar methods, such as “blended learning” (Full professor, interview n°11), again used in “*The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Germany and ...Flanders*” (Full professor, interview n°11) could be the right choice in order to arouse student’s interest and make them come back to the lecture halls. The interviewee that came with this strategy has been using it for many years successfully. This technique consists of traducing any learning activity into a project with a goal and using three tools to achieve this goal: documentary teaching, which includes theoretical lessons but also readings, interactive teaching or couching and practical projects given to the student. However, our interviews from Granada did not allow us to conclude whether blended learning methods could or could not be a solution to the aforementioned problems. These last presented methods seem to have the interactivity as key concept, but if wheatear students and teachers are ready or wish for adopting these kinds of methods remains to be seen.

At the end of a previous section, which described online education during the pandemic, some conclusions were drawn about teachers’ perspectives on remote teaching. A slightly negative evolution of higher education was predicted. Online education did not seem attractive enough for students, who were not attending live lessons in high numbers nor watching podcasts week by week. Many students seemed to get lost along the way. The direct consequence observed even during the lockdowns, when the classes took place online, was the loss of a connection or student-teacher relationship. Teachers seemed somewhat unfulfilled professionally or disappointed, seeing that students did not interact in online courses or that they got lost along the way.

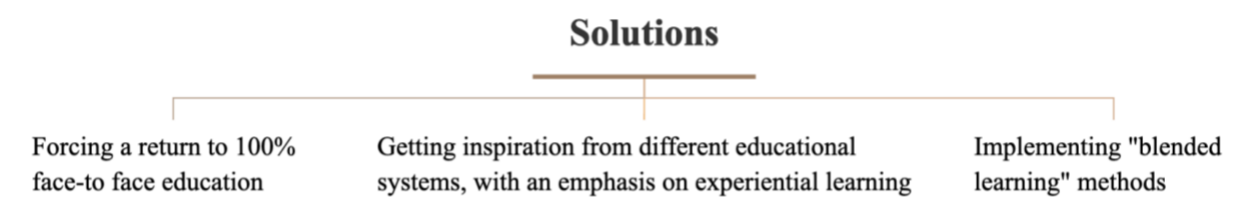
As it can be observed, teachers talked a lot about students, although they were asked in interviews how they felt and perceived different situations themselves. From the interviews, we can surmise that students’ satisfaction and results usually reflect teachers’ work. However, this did not seem to be the case in recent years. Teachers worked harder to provide online education, but their long hours of work did not translate into better results of students. On the contrary, a negative trajectory seemed to be taken by them. As a result,

immediate and long-term repercussions of online teaching appeared. While the immediate ones were discussed in detail in “During the pandemic” section, four main long-term ones were presented in this one. These four main consequences of the pandemic reflected on teaching will be reminded in Figure 8.



*Figure 8: Consequences of the pandemic on teaching*

These four elements, brought together in the figure above, seem to bring professional dissatisfaction to teachers. Based on their statements, the teaching profession in higher education seems to be changing. In order to prevent the intensification of these consequences or to stop them, the academics came up with some solutions. These will be briefly presented in the following figure.



*Figure 9: Solutions for dealing with new challenges created by the crisis*

From the teachers' words we can understand that some of these methods are already implemented, and others are being tested or planned for the future. What is certain is that teachers want to bring back the spirit of live classes where the teacher-student relationship exists and feels gratifying.

### **Conclusion theme one**

Before looking at the next chapter, centered around research, we will go through the key elements discussed in this one. In the first part of it, when we looked at the period marked by lockdowns, we discovered that academics were forced to work remotely and deal with a sudden adaptation of teaching to online settings. Online teaching usually required technical expertise, so educators have had to learn how to use online technologies and adapt course materials. This extra time spent on ensuring quality education was not rewarded by students, who did not interact too much in online classes. A major issue during the pandemic

was evaluation and online final exams. In addition to the fact that exams had to be customized, detecting academic misconduct was also difficult for teachers.

The time invested in adapting the exams' content and format for the online environment has not proven to be long-term. When restrictions were eliminated and face-to-face education was allowed again, teachers preferred to come back to the classical methods of providing lectures and preparing exams. However, the high demand coming from students to get provided with recordings of courses, paved the way for a concept called by teachers "the double education". This concept refers to offering students both face-to-face lectures and recorded ones, so they could attend both or choose one of them. Even though it initially appeared to be a promising idea, in the end it did not seem to be beneficial for students. Giving them the opportunity to follow classes from home, made them stop coming to university. While some still succeeded even when only following online podcasts, most of them just got lost due to the lack of discipline.

Another element brought to the table by teachers was the reduced attention of students who kept attending face-to-face classes. This was interpreted by teachers as due to the created habit of attending a course in front of a computer, where any other activity could be done simultaneously. The students' disinterest in participating in lectures after the return to presential was also reflected in a discrepancy in the exam results. Students either had great results because they actively followed face-to-face classes and watched podcasts for better understanding certain contents, **or** chose only podcasts, got lost and failed. The problem was not represented by the fact that average grades are lesser, and the tendency shows and that more and more grades were extremes (either too low or too high), but by the fact that the proportion of students who fail seemed to be much higher than before.

The demand for double education, the lower attendance in university lecture halls, the inferior capacity of concentration of students and the increasing number of unsatisfactory results represent consequences of the pandemic that preoccupy teachers. Even though their work is no longer hugely affected by the pandemic since the return to campuses (no more adaptation required or training for using digital tools for instance), their professional satisfaction is impacted instead. The medium to long term impact of the Covid crisis seems to be the change of their teaching profession. Before drawing some more conclusions, we will take a look at another major component of academics' life, namely research.

## Theme 2: Research

### During the pandemic

Another key role fulfilled by academics is research, which has also appeared to be affected in one way or another by the pandemic. Before starting a research project, scholars usually explore the scientific literature written by fellow researchers. Finding and reading written sources has not been particularly impacted by the crisis since *“there is no need to go to the library to look for articles, they are available via VPN and can be downloaded”* (Full professor, interview n°6). The analysis and the interpretation of the data collected were also not particularly impacted by the sanitary crisis. Research based on interviews was even *“facilitated, because people had time”* (Full professor, interview n°11). On the other hand, the one based on observation became difficult to carry out during the pandemic. This kind of research is ordinarily completed on the field, where observers must look at elements such as *“production lines, spend time in the factory and see things unfold”* (Full professor, interview n°11). These kinds of activities were no longer possible during lockdowns, and researchers had to switch to other data collection methods that could not be verified by field observation.

A glimpse of what is actually happening in companies could have been obtained, for example, by conducting qualitative interviews. However, in the case of some research topics, *“terrible gaps between what people say and what people experience in the field”* (Full professor, interview N°11) were expected. Due to the pressure coming from the hierarchical line, some workers would not be completely honest in interviews or would avoid the description of the genuine truth, for fear of sanctions. Statements made by interviewees can therefore no longer be verified by observation, as before the pandemic. The impossibility to perform fieldwork has in consequence an impact on academics interested in research based on observation. In some cases, the reality must be proven by facts, and when it is unlikely to happen, work outputs become incomplete.

The Covid crisis disrupted the organization of projects, particularly in terms of their management. Due to frequent changes in restrictions and protocols, projects coordinators had to adapt a bit too often the organization of research projects, which certainly added an extra workload:

*“The organization of the project needed to be reviewed a little too regularly. What was problematic was the project management rather than the project itself”* (Full professor, interview n°11).

Research was usually not fully interrupted because of the pandemic, but in the case of academics with a family in charge and children, significant changes were reported. Due to many responsibilities, time devoted to research became more limited. Taking care of children and adapting classes to online teaching took a considerable amount of time and therefore research was neglected:

*“I had to put teaching first and there was no time to do serious research in those conditions, with young children, I simply couldn't. There was a lot of work to adapt the subject to telematic means, to create exams... For research you need to think a lot, search a lot, make a lot of mistakes, mess around a lot, find the fault, start again, and that, in a context with two small children, it was impossible.”* (Associate professor, interview n°9)

On the other hand, academics without added familial responsibilities and more research-oriented felt like they had more time to spare during the sanitary crisis. Consequently, they had more time to reflect on interesting topics and conduct research.

Staying connected with fellow researchers and learning about others' work had to be organized fully online. Respondents acknowledged that, in general, switching to online encouraged the loss of human contact and connection. Even if it was about professional relationships, generally not being able to shake hands with colleagues or share a coffee between discussions on scientific topics created a lack which marked a change:

*“In terms of interpersonal relationships and contact with colleagues, as you work more virtual and less in contact, which seems a trend, ... is the fact that it could lead to loss of human quality.” (Full professor, interview n°6)*

The part that seemed to be missing the most to researchers was therefore the human contact created with their fellow colleagues. Although not often expressed in precise words, the bitter-sweet tone of interviewees suggested that the absence of informal interaction did not bring them joy. Meeting virtually with fellow researchers made collaboration less effective and body language and eyes contact were missing. New projects research ideas seem to come much easier when the community works together, informally, than when spending time alone in an office:

*“It is true that in Economics the work is very individualistic, but you always need your colleagues to exchange ideas, research is made for sharing it.” (Full professor, interview n°7)*

The conferences and congresses got initially canceled, and then organized online. While some suffered from not being able to create social contact during research conferences and congresses, others saw the bright side of online events because it *“was possible to participate much more easily and more actively in international congresses.” (Full professor, interview n°11)* It was possible to chain several international congresses taking place in all corners of the world, which would have been impossible before the pandemic, when a choice had to be made during *“the congresses season” (Full professor, interview n°11)*. However, most researchers seemed to miss the contact with their fellow colleagues, doctorands and other researchers, given that *“the networking aspect is super important” (Full professor, interview n°12)*. Besides that, there is apparently a lot that goes through interpersonal interactions which could consist in *“eating together at a restaurant, discussing on the corridors and sharing plans for the future ... The congresses take place half in the congress halls and half in the corridors.” (Full professor, interview n°12)*

Even if research seemed to move forward in those turbulent times, PhD candidates and early career researchers seemed to have a slightly unmotivated start. New beginnings come with a little shyness, which can be much harder to overcome through online communication than through a knock on the door for a simple question or a discussion deviated during lunch. Besides that, little experience traduces in need for training, mentoring and a push in order to move forward. Academics guiding or supervising new researchers have noted a difficulty in reaching out to them, since they directly started their career while working from home.

*“We felt a certain demotivation of young researchers. We have a lot of young people who are finishing their masters and who are continuing with a doctorate, who want to pursue a career in research. They have had somewhat the same problem as the first-year students who arrived here, they registered at the University of Liège to do a doctorate and they were at home all day because of the lockdown. No colleagues, no friends, no contact. Some have had two difficult years.” (Full professor, interview n°12)*

Before looking at research in post-pandemic period, a summarizing figure regrouping the main ideas presented in this section is suggested below.

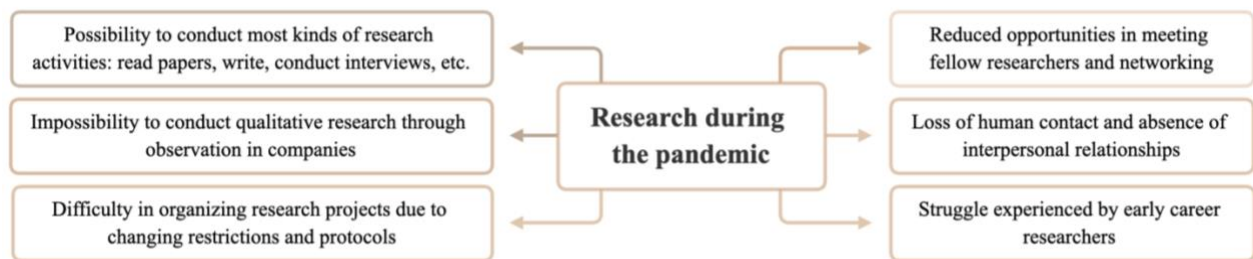


Figure 10: Research during the pandemic

### **Post-pandemic period**

Even though research was less impacted by the pandemic than teaching, according to the interviews, there were few important changes that must be mentioned. Although a gradually return to normal is observed, the problem of data collection through observation remains. Companies, the site in which observation is supposed to take place, seem to be engrossed in their work and very focused on their main businesses. The Covid crisis has also strengthened and *“perhaps exaggerated this feeling of being too careful about everything, reinforced that feeling of inviolability.”* (Full professor, interview n°11) This element, together with other problems that affect the entire world during these periods (the crisis in Ukraine for instance), lead to a secretive and reticent attitude of the companies, according to our interviews, since *“quite a few sectors return to secrecy, caution, it’s harder to go on the field.”* (Full professor, interview n°11)

Another problem seen as a consequence of the pandemic are the shrinking budgets for research in certain branches of Business and Management. This repercussion probably occurs because of the *“climate of uncertainty about the future and the priority which is given to other branches.”* (Full professor, interview n°11) An example brought by one of our interviewees was that a project on risk management would be easily financed because it fits the current context and the needs created by the crisis. On the other hand, for researching on a topic considered not trendy anymore, sufficient budgets would be quite difficult to find.

Remote conferences and congresses came to an end in both countries, Spain, and Belgium. Divergent opinions arise about the return to in-person events: some are content because they have the opportunity to recreate social contact, or in the case of early career researchers, to create a network, and others, believe that *“the current context is not conducive to travel because travel costs are becoming large and a choice between congresses must be made.”* (Full professor, interview n°11) Compared to the period during the



pandemic, when any researcher could attend most conferences and congresses without any travel costs, now they must make choices based on their budget and time availability. However, the return to normal and the possibility to re-create interpersonal relationships, to communicate freely and to socialize with teams or colleagues are enjoyed by any researcher. In addition, the early career researchers can be mentored or helped in a more direct and informal way.

In terms of research project management, organization is starting to be less and less problematic because *“it is especially the periods of change that complicate things.”* (Full professor, interview n°11) The return to normal came with the tendency of reduction of restrictions of any kind, which involved fewer changes necessary in the organization of projects.

Before concluding about research, a summarizing figure regrouping the main ideas presented in this section is suggested below.

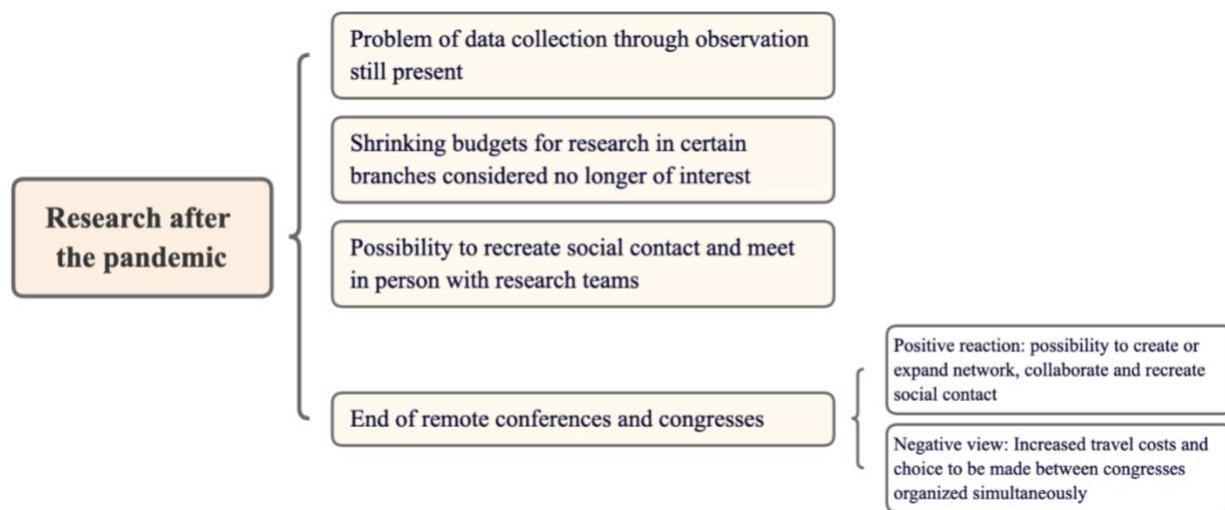


Figure 11: Research after the pandemic

## **Conclusion theme 2**

As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, the sanitary crisis and the lockdowns did not particularly affect the consultation of scientific documents, the analysis and the interpretation of the data collected. Most data collection methods (documents' review, interviews, surveys) were not significantly impacted either. Interviews could be conducted online, and books, studies and other papers could be consulted via VPN. In fact, many researchers conducted part of their research from home even before the pandemic.

However, a very important method of data collection, especially in Management, namely observation, was completely stopped during the pandemic. As mentioned by the interviewees, the research by observation involves collaborating with companies and going on the field in order to obtain empirically grounded data. Observing people's behavior at work, allows to obtain accurate information about the employees, their tasks, their struggles and needs. It was suggested by our interviewees that often non-verbal communication conveys much more information than the verbal one. For instance, in an interview, the respondent can omit important information or hide the reality for convenience.

While more research-oriented academics had plenty of time to reflect on new ideas and write papers during lockdowns, academics who needed to give many courses had to focus on teaching. In addition, academics with domestic and familial responsibilities had to put research in second place, and in some cases even stop it.

Another subject brought into discussion by researchers was the lack of face-to-face contact between them and their colleagues or research teams. Meeting only virtually seemed somewhat different: collaboration seemed less effective, not everyone was naturally involved in the discussion and body language and eye contact were lacking. The category most affected by the lack of interpersonal relationships were however early career researchers, who had a more turbulent start to their new career.

The problem of social contact and meeting other researchers through congresses or conferences has been eliminated since the restrictions on working from home were removed. Researchers were content because they had the opportunity to expand their network and seize collaboration possibilities. On the other hand, travelling involved higher costs than before the pandemic and a choice between simultaneously research events had to be made.

At the so-called end of the pandemic, two issues remain: the problem of shrinking funds for research projects that do not seem to be trendy anymore and the problem of collecting data through observation. Incentives and financial resources seem to be more and more allocated towards research areas related to solving Covid-19 crisis repercussions or preventing a new potential economic disaster (risk management for instance). Companies seem to return to a more secretive attitude, to become more closed in terms of visitors who observe how their business is carried out. The Covid crisis seemed to strengthen the feeling of being very careful about everything and reinforce the feeling of inviolability. Besides that, most companies are engrossed in work, trying hard to recover after the crisis.

### Theme 3: Community services

Although it usually comes third and occupies a smaller amount of academics' time, this last role does not lose its importance. As we set out to look at all facets of the academic profession, we will also include interviewees' comments on the impact of the crisis on community services. Due to the fact that this chapter is a short one, we will not segment it according to the timeline.

Community services, such as career days, open days and training in companies have also become more difficult to organize due to the health crisis. Some administrative duties related to community services have also been hampered, especially by online communication, which has not been as effective as the face-to-face one.

Regarding ongoing support to managers in companies given by some academics, *“there has been a strengthening of the activities in counseling and coaching.”* (Full professor, interview n°11). During the Covid crisis, consulting and auditing firms seemed to be overwhelmed and taken by surprise, so firms have increasingly turned to universities for expertise missions. This was because, according to our interviews, consulting firms have a difficult role; *“they work with young people and it's harder to get organized and adapt their procedures and processes to the Covid context.”* (Full professor, interview n°11)

As for open days and career days, it seemed that it had lost its essence during the pandemic. These events were still kept and hosted online, but fewer and fewer students joined the online events in order to find out about the university's offerings. The online open day did not appear to be a real success. The number of academics participating in this event has become smaller, so the ones that had a role in this event were lesser than before the crisis.

*“There were fewer teachers participating, they didn't ask me for participating like in other years. They didn't need us because the students weren't connecting either.”* (Assistant professor, interview n°10)

Since the removal of most Covid restrictions, community service-related activities appeared to be returning to normal, with new projects and collaborations between academics and the social, cultural and economical world looming on the horizon.

### Conclusion theme three

Although this section does not necessarily bring new elements in our analysis, it reinforces the direct repercussions of the crisis on the professional life of academics. The sanitary crisis has forced the cessation of physical contacts and therefore impeded social and cultural events to be organized. Since economy and social life have been put on hold, collaborations with the educational, economical, cultural, and social world have also stopped for academics. However, some companies have sought the help of universities to survive the crisis.

## Theme 4: Work-life balance and well-being management

The first three themes we looked at in this empirical section were about the professional side of academics' life. The way in which their three roles, teaching, research, and community services were impacted by the pandemic was presented. Factors that created professional dissatisfaction were often mentioned by interviewees and therefore discussed in our analysis. They were sometimes linked to personal and not professional reasons. For instance, academics who had children in care were going through a more delicate period, struggling between work, children's homeschooling and other domestic responsibilities.

Considering the close link between personal well-being and professional performance (Bayhan Karapinar et al., 2020), in this fourth and final thematical chapter we will take a look at how academics mixed professional and personal life during the sanitary crisis. The work-life balance could be influenced by elements such as: the responsibilities at work and at home, stress, workload and productivity (Guest, 2002). We will therefore inspect all these elements and find out whether the crisis has disturbed this balance in academics' case.

### During the pandemic

By looking at the interviews' transcripts, we were able to distinguish two categories of academics: those who did not suffer from stress or severe anxiety, and those who were overwhelmed by worries, often due to numerous domestic or familial responsibilities. Academics who fall into the first category did not generally confront themselves with mental health consequences or depression, mostly due to the lack of time to worry too much:

*“Work has been a way to alleviate anxiety, because if I wouldn't have had anything to do, I would have suffered more.” (Assistant professor, interview n°10)*

For other interviewees, the lockdowns were rather pleasant, given the opportunities to reconnect and share moments with their family:

*“I was going for walks with my daughter, we were all eating together... We said one day ‘let's make a picnic’. There were joyful moments, we took the bright side of things.” (Assistant professor, interview n°13)*

The second group of academics' well-being has been affected by the pandemic. Getting used to the new reality and working online has not been obvious to everyone. The longer working hours, the struggle to engage students remotely and the fear of contracting the disease were aspects that intensified the stress and made the academics anxious. In addition, domestic and familial responsibilities were other factors of stress and pressure:

*“It's stressful despite everything to have to stay focused in front of your device.” (Full professor, interview n°17)*

*“I was working with my one-and-a-half-year-old girl on my feet, it was an ordeal.” (Assistant professor, interview n°16)*

Academic parents had to gravitate around their children, take care of them, and make sure they follow school. They reported difficulty in finding a work-life balance and struggled the most to work from home, due to constant interruptions:

*“I converted myself into a professor for my kids and students at the same time.” (Full professor, interview n°4)*

*“In my case with two children so small ... it was like an earthquake, I needed to be with them, do things with them, I had to put them to work a little, I had to clean the house, you are not going to manage to do everything.” (Associate professor, interview n°9)*

Although the psychological impact of the pandemic had in most cases no impact on the work of academics, the extra efforts made, and the long period of isolation created long-term psychological wounds.

*“I felt anxiety over uncertainty for not understanding what it is happening. I worked harder and, in the end, I am satisfied with my work, but I had to pay a very high personal cost.” (Substitute professor, interview n°5)*

These feelings were mostly aroused by the artificial tension and pressure transmitted through the official communications and environment: *“...we often tended to highlight the difficulties before the benefits... A speech a little too anxious, a little too fear oriented.” (Full professor, interview n°11)*

Even for those who did not feel distress or anguish, the necessity to establish social contact was strongly present:

*“It was hard for me to get away from my work, not to have social contact, it's not the same to talk to my friends over the phone. Being locked in between four walls all the time is difficult.” (Full professor, interview n°7)*

*“There were three months without going out, I wanted to differentiate the week from the weekend, so I created my own rituals, I was wearing a shirt during the working hours for example.” (Substitute professor, interview n°5)*

Another problem that was mentioned was the lack of separation between the familial space and the workplace. Working remotely did not affect academics who had set up an office at home. However, it impacted more intensely those who had to repurpose a room in their home for work related activities or to share the space with other family members:

*“My husband and I worked in two rooms, but they weren't really separated by a wall, sometimes concentrating wasn't easy either. I was giving lectures, he was talking not far away in meetings, it was not always obvious how we should've managed these situations.” (Assistant professor, interview n°13)*

As for the idea of productivity, it did not seem to be missing in most cases. Academics seemed to have regained a crucial resource for them: time. Avoiding getting ready, travelling to university, looking for a parking lot and other habitual tasks represented time won back:

*“I really liked being confined, not having to go out, not having to fix myself and get ready. I didn't have to waste my time on this anymore.” (Full professor, interview n°1)*

*“I live quite far from Liège, and I have to come by car. I usually need one hour to come and one hour to get back home. Not having to commute was an advantage, I would even say a small compensation.” (Full professor, interview n°17)*

Nevertheless, this time had to be reinvested in the extra workload generated by the adaptation of teaching to telematic means. The necessity to adapt quickly to a new way of working with no transition period was critical. Something that came as an unpleasant surprise during the pandemic was the superior workload and the need to make decisions about the tasks that prevailed. Many academics have chosen to focus on adapting courses for online education and have neglected research or community services:

*“My working hours increased, if before the pandemic I worked 8 hours a day, during the pandemic I worked 10.” (Full professor, interview n°7)*

*“It was a higher workload - for courses adaptation, to reassure students, to find solutions, to get trained.” (Assistant professor, interview n°13)*

All the elements discussed so far influence the work-life balance of academics. The main ones are summarized in the diagram below. A conclusion will be formulated after looking at the post-pandemic situation.

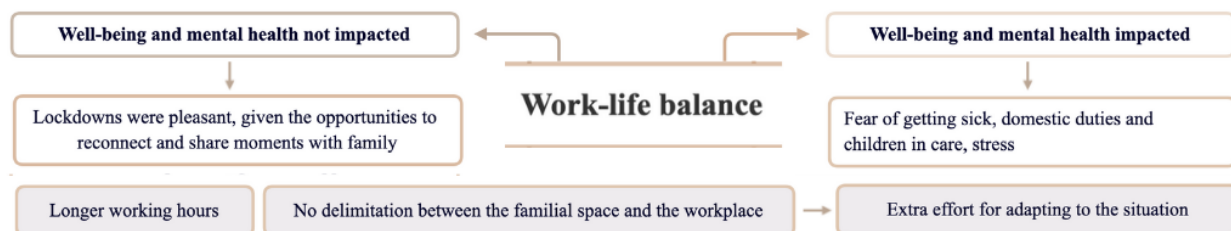


Figure 12: Work-life balance during the pandemic

## **After the pandemic**

With the removal of restrictions on compulsory remote work, the potential inconvenience linked to using oneself residence for work-related purposes faded. Working from home (although partially) is now a choice and not an obligation. Nevertheless, more and more academics take advantage of this new freedom, perceiving remote work as a long-lasting change. They embrace it and enjoy it for most academic duties, except teaching. However, some others, marked by unpleasant experiences from the past few years, reject teleworking with no hesitation:

*“I can’t work from home anymore, even if before the pandemic I was doing it sometimes. I just remember all the time how bad it felt to work with my baby on my lap.” (Assistant professor, interview n°16)*

Although the trend shows that the pandemic did not create deep traces in the mental health of academics, who proved resilient, consequences still appeared for the ones that had multiple challenges to overcome during this period. The time that was spent on adapting courses to online teaching has been regained but reinvested in commuting to and from the workplace. The rebuilding of social relationships has also begun slowly, but surely.

When discussing about the period of isolation and their work-life balance, academics seemed to be trying to find the needle in the haystack when talking about the positive effects of the pandemic on it. However, when they expressed their views on returning to face-to-face work and opportunities to re-establish social contact, a positive attitude was immediately noticed.

## **Conclusion theme four**

In closing, depending on certain factors, academics experienced better or worse the pandemic. Those who had many responsibilities felt overwhelmed, had to put their family first and therefore neglected some of their professional duties. Most academics, whether they feared the disease or felt no stress, were able to work with the same performance and productivity as before the pandemic. Moreover, they coped with a higher workload and challenges, such as setting up an office in their own home and keeping their spirit up while not interacting with friends or colleagues. After the return to campuses, these short-term effects of the pandemic on their well-being have faded. A gradual return to normal was observed and a feeling of joy was felt by academics.

One of the big changes the pandemic brought, for instance, was the concept of working from home. Although prior to the crisis applied on a small scale for research activities, it has now become a part of academics’ life. Positive perceptions on long-term adoption of partial remote work seemed to pop up after the pandemic. More and more academics seemed to opt for it for a few days a week, as regulations allow it. Remote work, when mandatory and accompanied by isolation and extra tasks, was not embraced or preferred. However, when the factors of stress disappeared (isolation, children at home, higher workload for adaptation) it was perceived as rather convenient, pleasant and a real time saver. Working from home, adopted for appropriate tasks, therefore has a positive impact on the work-life balance of academics.

## Discussion

Throughout this thesis, we brought together scientific literature and empirically grounded insights in order to understand how the Covid-19 crisis impacted academics. The results indicated that higher education and especially the academic profession is undergoing a change. This shift will be decomposed in **two points**, each separately developed in this discussion. First, we will look at the changing role of academics and the aftermath of the pandemic on teaching. Secondly, the implications the crisis had on data collection through observation will be pointed out.

The first point we want to raise is **the changing role of academics** in the context of the pandemic and at the end of it. Although even before the Covid-19 outbreak, online technologies were increasingly introduced in higher education institutions to smooth out the sharing of information, digitalization reached a completely different level during the pandemic. The crisis has forced universities to find a quick alternative to face-to-face instruction and as a result, online teaching has been implemented. In order to provide quality online education, academics had to acquire technical expertise, but also help students to adapt to distance learning. While studies provide mostly quantitatively based insights on teachers' adaptation and their role as facilitators for students' progress (Alammery et al., 2021; Cameron-Standerford et al., 2020; Chaturvedi et al., 2021), our findings describe in more detail the implications of these responsibilities and the changes they brought to the teaching profession.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, in an extremely short amount of time, teachers had to enhance their knowledge and acquire **technical expertise**. To provide online education, they needed to learn to use different online conferencing platforms and to create scripts for podcasts - in a face-to-face lecture, everything goes more naturally, while in front of a camera the speech has to be prepared. Academics also needed to learn to use a camera, film and edit videos. These activities required a considerable amount of time and in case something went wrong in terms of content or rendering, the whole process had to be restarted from scratch. While before the pandemic teachers could only come in front of a class and speak - with or without digital pedagogical support - during the pandemic they also had to master the technique. In addition to the fact that they had to become skilled in handling online technologies, academics played another new role, namely that of **facilitators**. Whereas before the pandemic students were naturally coming to the lecture halls, during the pandemic motivating them to follow through became extremely important. Academics had to therefore play a somewhat more social role by initiating interaction and providing additional support to students.

The students, in turn, got used to following online lectures after a while and as a result, **did not** find the motivation to come **back to lecture halls** when the pandemic started to draw its conclusions. As a result of the crisis, a demand for a hybrid mode of education was born. The concept of "**double education**" refers to providing students both face-to-face lectures and recorded ones, so they could attend both or choose one of them. Although teachers initially looked at this concept with confidence and welcomed the idea, after a while they realized its drawbacks. The method itself, consisting in offering both face-to-face lectures and recordings of them at the disposal of students, is still great in theory, but in practice relies on students' commitment and self-discipline. Considering that students seem to have **a lower capacity of concentration** even when attending a class in person, managing to succeed only by following lectures on their own in front of a computer seems difficult from the point of view of teachers. This was also reflected in the results in



evaluations, which show a larger gap between students. They are either aiming very high (usually attending face-to-face lectures and using podcasts as an additional tool) or opting for following podcasts on their own and therefore struggling, getting lost and failing to pass the course. The issue is represented by the greater number of students with **unsatisfactory results in the evaluation**, observed a semester later after the implementation of this hybrid education system.

All these elements seem to be about students and their evolution, while we look at the aftermath of the pandemic from academics' perspectives. In fact, they did mainly talk about students, whose evolution is closely related to their role, and which should reflect their efforts. On the contrary, the trajectory taken by students does not seem to mirror the efforts of teachers and therefore, make them feel professional dissatisfaction. Scholars seem to be increasingly concerned and wondering what added value they should bring to the courses in order to be chosen to the detriment of podcasts. They provided recorded courses as a complementary tool to the course itself, which is held at the university, not to replace classroom instruction. When finding a very low rate of students in classrooms, they feel like their job is no longer the same and wonder how they can arouse students' interest and make them return to university.

In order to prevent the intensification of the previously presented repercussions of the crisis, the academics proposed solutions such as eliminating recorded lectures, keeping students more engaged with blended learning methods, or trying out experiential learning through flipped classrooms. Whether these methods prove efficacy and guarantee a change for the better, remains to be determined in future studies.

Taking into account all the elements presented so far about this first point of the discussion, we can conclude that the teacher's career undergoes major changes, which are not to their liking. Having a small number of students attending lectures brings disappointment to teachers.

A second aspect that we want to bring in this discussion is the **problem of data collection by observation**, which impacted the research in Management during Covid crisis and beyond it. As pointed out by Easterby-Smith (2012), research in Business and Management is more applied than in other sciences and relies on data collected in companies. According to Tripathi (2020), companies have become vulnerable during the sanitary crisis, undergoing difficult moments of disruption. The literature touched on the subject of the field-based research, mentioning that it was hampered (Levine and Rathmell, 2020). However, it did not analyze the implications of the issues with obtaining empirically grounded data. By interviewing academics, we were able to gain more insights on this topic.

Our results show that data collection through observation, a sometimes-key method in research in Management, was completely stopped during the pandemic due to the impossibility to go in companies. Observing people at work, allows researchers to understand managerial behaviors, ways of working, drivers of motivation at work, needs and struggles of employees and much more. All these aspects are part of the object of study in Management according to our findings, and without observing the non-verbal in the heart of companies the way firms work cannot really be understood. Surprisingly, the problem of collecting data through observation remains even when restrictions on social contacts are removed and a gradually return to normal is observed. Firms seem to be more closed than prior to the pandemic: they are either focusing on their main business in their trial to recover from pandemic losses or simply showing a more reticent attitude. The Covid crisis appeared to have strengthened the idea of being too cautious about everything

and reinforced a feeling of inviolability. This reticent attitude leads to the loss of a basic data collection method, on which research in Management partly relies on.

## **Reflection**

In order to build up the empirical part of this thesis, we interviewed seventeen academics from two Management schools located in Belgium and Spain. While interviews conducted in two countries could result in a comparative perspective, the differences between both contexts were not striking. Given that academics seemingly endured the crisis in a similar way and shared a same set of challenges and impressions, we presented findings together, in a global manner. Consequently, we won't compare the two cases.

As a limitation, we can point out the limited number of interviewees. The seventeen academics provided us with valuable insights about their perspectives on the Covid crisis and their profession. However, a larger group of respondents would have given us more information to work with.

## **Suggestions for further research**

In this thesis, we looked at two moments of the pandemic: a first one, the period during lockdowns, when remote work was mandatory and total and a second one, characterized by a progressive return to university. Since our results show that the academic profession is undergoing changes as a result of the Covid crisis, we consider it important that some more research on this topic to be conducted in the following months or years. These changes may last or disappear.

Another aspect not covered in this thesis is the institutional engagement of academics. We did not ask nor receive enough information about meetings with peers on research and teaching policies, committees that organize seminars, recruitment commissions and so. For this reason, further research could complement Covid-19 impacts on this new facet of academics' roles.

When asked about how they perceived teaching during the pandemic, academics usually talked about students. We came to the conclusion that this happened because students' satisfaction and results usually reflect teachers' work. However, the students' opinion was not compared to that of the teachers in this paper, due to the focus on academics. However, bringing these two perspectives together in a further study could lead to new results.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the impact that the Covid-19 crisis had on academics. By looking at literature covering this topic and interviewing academics from two different countries, we understood that the academic profession is undergoing a change. Our qualitative study complements existing literature by exploring challenges encountered by academics in-depth.

The biggest shift concerns teaching, which does not seem to be the same profession anymore. The pandemic and the need to build distance learning brought short- and long-term repercussions. During the pandemic, a forced adaptation was needed. Teachers had to develop technical expertise and learn to use different tools suitable for digital education. Besides that, they also needed to fulfill a somewhat more social role, support and motivate students more than before. Online education was perceived negatively by academics for two main reasons: lectures missed interactivity and examination became questionable due to the difficulty in detecting students' misconduct. However, a positive attitude on integrating online resources or technologies in face-to-face teaching was observed. When courses could be re-organized in lecture halls, teachers continued to implement certain techniques learned during the pandemic (the use of tablets for solving exercises and projecting them on whiteboards, the more intense use of student platforms for forums and quizzes). Moreover, they listened to the students' demand and continued to provide them with lectures' recordings. This led to the creation of a hybrid system, usually named by teachers the "double education". The students' demand for face-to-face lectures and recorded ones, the lower attendance in classrooms, the inferior capacity of concentration of students and the increasing number of unsatisfactory results represented the main medium to long term repercussions of the Covid-19 crisis. Currently, teachers are looking for solutions to solve these problems caused by the pandemic.

Their profession was also impacted on the research side. As we have seen in the discussion, a primary method of data collection, observation, was hampered during the pandemic and remains difficult at the end of the crisis. The impossibility of creating social contacts also brought disruption into academics' professional and personal life. During the pandemic, researchers could not participate at international conferences or congresses and therefore were not able to create or expand their networks. Interpersonal exchanges with colleagues and research teams were also profoundly missed.

The academic profession went through a process of change during and after the pandemic. While some changes have faded, others have lasted. For instance, social contact could be easily recreated when the pandemics' regulations were eliminated. On the other hand, the repercussions on teaching seem to bring professional dissatisfaction to academics. In addition, research through observation also seem to be medium to long term impacted. By evaluating the post-pandemic situation and medium- to long-term effects of the crisis on academics, this paper adds to the literature on the topic.

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## **Appendices**

### **Interview Guide**

How has your way of working changed? Have certain new practices been put in place to adapt? (By the university or yourself)

Could you tell me about teaching during the pandemic? What about now when its end seems to approach?

Could you tell me about research and community services? (Then and now)

What about work organization, well-being management, contact with students and colleagues during the pandemic? Is it the same now?

Did the lockdown change your usual rhythm or way of working in any way? Did the number of working hours increase or decrease for you?

What do you think about the experience of working fully remotely? Was it difficult for you to manage work within your familial space? Would you like to continue working like this?

Do you think that the communication and/or direction in your work was affected by the pandemic? How? In general, have you felt more stressed and/or less productive doing your job since the Covid-19 pandemic began? If the answer is yes, what do you think it is due to?

Name practices that you kept from the pandemic, tell me about the change.

Do you think that the pandemic has favored the digitization in your work environment?



## **Executive summary**

The Covid-19 outbreak has forced universities to suspend traditional face-to-face lectures and abruptly move to online education delivery. Academics had to continue their work and fulfill their missions even though facing difficult circumstances. The perspectives of seventeen academics belonging to two Management schools from different countries on the aftermath of the pandemic were collected.

By combining scientific literature with empirically grounded data based on qualitative interviews, we discovered that the academic profession is undergoing an important change. Our results show that during the pandemic, when remote teaching used to be mandatory, new responsibilities were added to the traditional roles of teachers. They had to gain technical expertise and facilitate the adaptation of students to online lessons. After the pandemic, academics had to face an enormous demand of students for maintaining a hybrid system of education consisting of providing both face-to-face courses and recordings. Research activities have also been impacted during the pandemic and beyond it. Furthermore, researchers were faced with a lack of interpersonal contact and the problem of data collection through observation. While the problem of interpersonal communication faded when the pandemic drew its conclusions, research through observation remained problematic.

Previous scientific literature on the topic approaches this topic from a quantitative perspective. Our qualitative study complements existing literature by exploring challenges encountered by academics in-depth. Additionally, we evaluate the post-pandemic situation and medium- to long-term effects of the crisis on academics.

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