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Unveiling Teacher Resilience in French Language Distance Teaching: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates teachers' experiences during the sudden shift to online teaching due to COVID-19. It explores their adaptation to the situation and their resilience in ensuring uninterrupted educational continuity. The study focuses on the resilience strategies used by teachers of French at Algerian universities during the pandemic and their teaching adaptation to distance education. The primary aim is to examine the teachers' constraints, their perception of pedagogical resilience, and the strategies they developed to overcome the challenges of transitioning from face-to-face to online education. This qualitative study, conducted through questionnaires among 50 French language teachers, with 42 responses received, concentrated on teachers' experiences with distance teaching, the digital platforms they used, and the strategies they employed to remain resilient. The analysis revealed significant challenges: a lack of familiarity with digital tools, connectivity issues, and a decline in student motivation. Despite these hurdles, teachers demonstrated resilience by embracing new social media platforms, videoconferencing, and collaborative teleworking tools to maintain student engagement and ensure pedagogical continuity. These findings underscore the urgent need for flexible support systems to address distance education challenges during a crisis. The study delved into the concept of resilience and discovered that participants perceived it as embodying a positive portrayal of distance learning amidst the health crisis.

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1. Introduction

Digital technology is often perceived as a set of devices crafted by experts to facilitate specific types of learning. From the learner's standpoint, the reality differs significantly. For students, digital technology primarily serves as a tool that complements life outside the classroom and formal learning content [1, 2]. Moreover, alongside the substantial shift to all-digital technology in the early 1990s, it is evident that the remarkable development of the Internet that ensued marks a pivotal shift that has influenced how we interact with our surroundings, both human and material. The field of education has not been immune to these profound changes. It has sometimes triggered, anticipated, or hastened its pace by swiftly integrating emerging digital educational platforms. Consequently, since the mid-1990s, distance learning and web platforms dedicated to teaching have seen a surge. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching and learning methodologies and the needs and perceptions of the two primary educational actors worldwide underwent a revolution [3, 4]. Confronted with the latest health crisis, universities were compelled to gradually veer away from traditional teaching and learning approaches, which no longer suited the requirements of contemporary educational settings. Similarly, practitioners in the field and educators commenced a quest for alternative methodologies to address evolving learning needs alongside optimal strategies to bolster student engagement, amalgamate traditional and virtual environments, and refine teaching practices.

Several research endeavours conducted in Algeria have delved into distance learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic [5–8]. These studies affirmed that teachers encountered generally unfavourable technical and environmental working conditions, marked by various challenges associated with the lack of student interaction and connectivity issues. Despite the concerted efforts of higher education stakeholders, owing to the exigency of the circumstances, the absence of direct interaction between educators and learners emerged as a prominent obstacle, with the utilisation of social media platforms emerging as the most viable solution to surmount these challenges. Notably, no study has explored the diverse resilience strategies educators or students adopt to navigate the manifold constraints imposed by confinement. With this in mind, this article scrutinises educators' experiences of mandated distance teaching during confinement. Specifically, it examines how educators within the French department adeptly acclimated to this unprecedented scenario and, notwithstanding the adversities, devised effective resilience strategies. More precisely, the study addresses the following three inquiries:

1. What constraints and challenges did the observed educators encounter during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do educators perceive pedagogical resilience amidst the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What resilience strategies have they developed to adapt to the novel distance learning model?

2. Distance Learning

Although distance learning has existed for nearly half a century through diverse programs, recent years of confinement have spurred a notable proliferation of this mode of learning and teaching, characterised by the introduction of new tools tailored for educators and students. Confronted with this scenario, educators have swiftly adapted by establishing virtual classrooms despite the challenges associated with the lack of prior research on hastily implemented distance learning setups [9]. Furthermore, the surge of digital technologies has enriched e-learning with many educational resources. Some resources offer access to informational materials, media content, and software applications, while others create digital environments that simulate virtual classrooms or user communities. Concurrently, access to informal resources beyond institutional frameworks is expanding through communication platforms and social networks, regardless of their integration into the formal learning curriculum. Heinich et al. [10] (p. 268) define distance education as a "form of education characterized by Physical separation of learners from the teacher, An organized instructional program, Technological media, and Two-way communication." In other words, it refers to the real distance between the learners and the teacher.

In this milieu, social networking platforms like Facebook and Twitter, alongside mobile technologies, assume an increasingly central role in personal and educational spheres[11, 12]. As Tomé posited, these digital platforms facilitate knowledge sharing and foster learning communities, leveraging the capacity of educational community members to engage in exchanges, establish thematic connections, and draw from each other's experiences[13]. In distance learning, a clear distinction must be drawn between course design and the learning processes[14]. In this form of instruction, students often interact independently with the provided teaching materials accessible across various media platforms outside the traditional classroom environment. This interaction may occur at home or in a workplace setting. Pedagogical content, pre-developed by educators, can be accessed without their physical presence. Consequently, distance learning introduces a spatial and temporal disconnect between the act of teaching and the learning process[14].

Distance learning has become a prominent feature of strategic initiatives in universities worldwide. This mode of instruction is evolving within a context that demands the utilisation of increasingly sophisticated technical resources. Peraya underscores that all forms of distance learning rely on various technical tools and media devices, encompassing traditional and contemporary technologies[15]. These include printed materials such as books and manuals, radio broadcasts, cassette recordings, live or recorded television broadcasts, and various analogue and digital information and communication technologies[15]. Through these mediums, learners gain access to instructional materials, diverse communication and collaboration platforms, interactive learning activities and the means to engage in them.

3. Resilience Strategies

Resilience is commonly understood as an individual attribute that empowers individuals to navigate and overcome adversity. It encompasses the capacity to recover from setbacks swiftly, adapt to change, and maintain a positive outlook amidst challenges. Etymologically derived from the Latin "resilio," meaning "to bounce back," resilience describes the ability of individuals, communities, and systems to withstand and adapt to adversity or conflict. Resilience manifests across various dimensions, including psycholog-

ical, social, and ecological. The psychological dimension pertains to an individual's ability to withstand emotional and mental challenges and recover from adversity. The social dimension underscores the significance of robust social connections and community support networks. Ecological resilience refers to ecosystems' ability to absorb disturbances while preserving their fundamental functions.

According to Ionescu[16], the concept of resilience in education has spurred two primary avenues of research. Firstly, resilience education involves programs to foster resilience in a broad audience or individuals. Secondly, academic resilience focuses on learners who thrive despite persistent adversity. Resilience empowers educators to uphold their professional dedication to teaching and pedagogical practices despite challenging circumstances[17]. It involves investing energy and resources to achieve educational objectives amidst adverse or stressful conditions[18, 19]. Various factors contribute to resilience, encompassing internal and external processes and personal and external resources, which involve dynamic interactions between individuals and their environments over time. Drawing upon research by Crompton et al.[20] and Zadok-Gurman et al.[21], this article investigates the resilience strategies employed by French teachers during the COVID-19 health crisis.

4. Methodology

To address the research questions, our qualitative methodology relies on a questionnaire survey administered to 50 French language teachers affiliated with diverse Algerian universities. The participants were 42 teachers; 27 women and 15 men who teach at Algerian universities. These educators were contacted via email and social networks and invited to participate in the study. The objective was twofold: firstly, to investigate teachers' perceptions regarding optimising institutional and non-institutional platforms for distance learning amid the COVID-19 health crisis confinement. Secondly, the study aims to elucidate the array of resilience strategies employed by teachers during this period to ensure pedagogical continuity. As previously mentioned, the questionnaire was disseminated online throughout May 2021. We received 42 responses, resulting in an 84% response rate.

Table 1 shows the participants' ages categorised into different age ranges and their respective genders.

Table 1. Age and gender distribution of participants.

Age Range	Men	Women	Total
30–45 years	3	7	10
46–55 years	7	6	13
56–65 years	2	9	11
Over 65 years	3	5	8
Total	15	27	42

The table indicates a predominance of female participants, with 27 women compared to 15 men among the 42 teachers surveyed. Additionally, a significant portion of the participants fall under 55, which aligns with broader trends observed in educational settings where teaching roles are predominantly occupied by women, particularly within foreign language departments. The majority, being under 55, suggests a level of proficiency, or at least a degree of familiarity, with educational technologies, which can be advantageous for adapting to e-learning tools. However, it is essential to recognise that digital competence is not solely determined by age. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the surveyed teachers come from diverse backgrounds and specialisations, including Literature, Language Sciences, and Didactics. Additionally, most participants hold advanced academic qualifications, with 33 possessing a doctorate and nine obtaining a Magister degree in French as a Foreign Language (FLE). All participants reported having at least one year of online teaching experience, with many accrued two years of experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. This diverse pool of participants brings a breadth of expertise and perspectives to the study, enriching the research findings.

5. Results

5.1. Distance Learning before and during Confinement

The results indicate that no teacher had experience with distance learning before the confinement. Typically, in Algeria, teaching across all cycles has been conducted face-to-face. However, in response to the health crisis, it became apparent that most of the observed teachers transitioned their courses to distance learning per the institution's recommendations. One teacher expressed, "In Algeria, we have always prioritised direct contact with students. However, due to the

Covid-19 health crisis, we had no alternative. Initially, the transition was challenging: understanding the functionality of Moodle, organising distance learning courses, addressing connectivity issues, and maintaining student engagement. Most importantly, it introduced a new approach to my profession." Despite the challenges associated with adapting to and integrating information and communication technologies (ICTs), teachers remained motivated to utilise distance learning platforms to ensure the continuity of courses, tutorials, and practical work. Consequently, teachers uploaded course materials, tutorials, and other relevant content onto dedicated platforms. They also evaluated students' work, including presentations, across different levels. Another teacher added, "I conducted ZOOM sessions with my students and explored various online assessment techniques via Moodle. While it was not without flaws, the primary objective was to sustain engagement with the students."

5.2. Distance Teaching Training

The distance teaching training plays a vital role in this study. When asked about their training in using distance learning and teaching, the participating teachers indicated that they had received some training through short courses and workshops.

The data presented in **Table 2** indicate that most surveyed teachers have not undergone any training in distance learning. Notably, out of the ten teachers who received such training, all are newly recruited and possess less than three years of experience in higher education. These trainee teachers must continue their training during their initial year of teaching, during which they are expected to develop an online course for publication on the school's digital platform. Moreover, it is crucial to establish support programs for veteran teachers who have not received prior training. These educators require tools not only for organising their online courses but also for fully understanding the functionalities of these platforms. These training programs should encompass pedagogical and ethical aspects of distance learning, including course design, online assessment, and establishing and managing virtual learning communities. Therefore, ongoing support and training initiatives should be maintained, emphasising helping teachers become acquainted with the Moodle platform.

Table 2. Experience with distance teaching training.

Experience with Distance Teaching Training	Number of Surveyed Teachers	Percentage
Participating teachers who have received DT training	10	24%
participating teachers who have not received DT training	32	76%

5.3. Digital Applications and Platforms for Distance Learning

The participants were also asked about the applications and platforms they use to deliver their courses using distance learning. They indicated using various tools, as shown in **Table 3** below.

Table 3. Platforms used.

Tools	Points
Social Networking	5.02
Moodle	4.96
Zoom	3.75
Google Meet	2.65
Electronic Messaging	1.44
YouTube	0.19

The teachers indicated that they use digital platforms and applications remotely for professional purposes without delineating between the private and professional domains. Social networking platforms rank the highest with 5.02 points, closely followed by the utilisation of the Moodle platform. Zoom occupies the third position, representing nearly half of all usage, and Google Meet and electronic mail have succeeded. Notably, most respondents infrequently utilise YouTube. One of the interviewed teachers remarked, "I have been employing Google Meet for the past month, in conjunction with other Google features such as Google Docs and Google Classroom, to deliver my lessons and engage in real-time interaction with my students, and the experience has been gratifying." Another teacher elaborated, "I rely on email, a straightforward tool for maintaining communication and facilitating formal correspondence with my students. They submit their assignments and tutorials via email, and I provide corrections and feedback along with supplementary digital materials."

5.4. Difficulties Encountered in Distance Learning

There are many challenges and barriers in the process of distance learning that may affect the effectiveness the learning process. As for the challenges and difficulties that the teachers encountered in using distance learning and teaching, the participants referred to a number of challenges, as indicated in **Table 4** below.

Table 4. Main challenges for distance learning.

Difficulties	Points
Not mastering digital tools	7.02
Problems connecting and accessing the platform	6.89
Difficulty for students to access online courses	5.02
Students' lack of motivation and interest in DT	4.32
Difficulty in setting up activities and tutorials	3.65
Organisation of remote assessments	2.14
Lack of training	1.26
Lack of hardware	0.37

The challenges outlined by respondents underscore the hurdles that must be addressed to ensure effective and inclusive teaching within distance learning. As depicted in the table above, these difficulties range from the inability to master digital tools, which garnered the highest score of 7.02 points, to issues concerning connectivity and platform access, hindering pedagogical continuity, teacher-student interactions, and access to educational resources. Furthermore, the third most cited difficulty of students' access to online courses exposes disparities in computer equipment and connectivity. In contrast, the challenges of student demotivation and disinterest underscore the limitations of distance learning in fostering human interaction and engagement. According to teachers' responses, additional struggles include organising appropriate activities and tutorials, remote assessment implementation, a lack of specific distance learning training, and noticeable deficiencies in computer equipment. These challenges necessitate thoroughly examining efficient and cost-effective strategies and solutions to enhance future distance teaching and learning conditions and methodologies. There are many aspects and factors that play a vital role in the occurrence of these challenges. Al-Qeyam and Alnajjar[22] shed light on the importance of using computer assisted language learning which can provide both the students and the teacher with new insights for better learning.

5.5. Teachers' Perception of Resilience

When questioned about their perceptions of resilience, most teachers acknowledged that conducting distance courses during the COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges and a novel experience. The occurrence of COVID-19 pandemic formed a great challenge for the learning process as all the traditional ways of teaching have been changed suddenly. According to their views, resilience entails being patient, cautious, astute, and adaptable to the new conditions imposed by the health crisis and confinement. One teacher reflects, "Before the pandemic, my use of ICT in classes was limited. I struggled with mastering new digital tools when we shifted to online teaching. However, with the support of colleagues and tutorials, I gradually learned to adapt. This experience taught me the importance of learning how to learn and being resilient in the face of challenges." Another teacher shares, "The announcement of confinement was shocking. Initially, I was anxious about quickly mastering new digital tools. Faced with difficulties, I had to resort to more familiar tools like Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate with my students." The concept of resilience, as perceived by teachers, is closely associated with patience and denotes an emotional state characterised by resilience to difficulties and obstacles.

The use of ICTs is seen as a complex process, encompassing adoption, appropriation, and use. For another teacher, resilience involves being cautious, strategic, and adaptable to the needs of confined learners. They emphasize the importance of profoundly understanding students' needs and adapting teaching methods accordingly. The testimonies gathered reveal that teachers' experiences with digital technology, pivotal for pedagogical continuity, exhibit a certain complexity concerning resilience. On the one hand, ICTs serve as resilience catalysts, aiding teachers in overcoming obstacles posed by physical distance, facilitating the discovery and adoption of new tools and teaching methods, encouraging self-training, ensuring learning continuity, and maintaining contact with students. However, these same tools present challenges that contribute to this resilience, occasionally leading to stressful or problematic situations.

5.6. Resilience Strategies to Stimulate Interactions

When asked about the resilience strategies they used to overcome the challenges of distance learning, the respondents alluded to a variety of strategies that are indicated in **Table 5** below.

Table 5. Activities and strategies to stimulate student interaction.

Activities and Strategies	Number of Responses
Creation of teacher/student Facebook groups	9
Offering videoconferencing via Zoom	5
Use of video clips (lectures and tutorials)	8
Collaborative teleworking between teachers	4
Offering group work via WhatsApp and Telegram	16

An analysis of resilience strategies adopted by observed teachers to stimulate and maintain contact with their distance-learning students reveals a notable preference for group-oriented technologies. The most prominent response, with 16 answers, is the proposal of group work via WhatsApp and Telegram as instant messaging tools conducive to facilitating small group interactions. WhatsApp, renowned for its user-friendly interface, has emerged as a practical tool for sending course notifications, sharing teaching resources (documents, images, or links), and creating class groups where students can interact with one another and the teacher. The creation of Facebook groups, garnering 13 responses, represents one of the initial social networks pivotal in establishing community spaces for information exchange and sharing. Additionally, the utilisation of video capsules for lectures and tutorials was favoured by eight responses, showcasing a multimodal approach to enhancing content accessibility and interactivity. Although less preferred, videoconferencing via Zoom received five responses, indicating its significance for direct contact and real-time discussion.

Some teachers also found resilience strategies in fostering relationships with colleagues. Collaborative teleworking between teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies adaptation to the unprecedented context imposed by the health crisis. Various forms of collaboration, such as regular virtual meetings and online communities of practice, en-

abled teaching teams to discuss lesson plans, share distance teaching strategies, and provide support for managing the psychological aspects of the situation. One teacher shares, "We established workgroups to express our feelings and seek assistance, given the challenges of using a completely unfamiliar teaching platform. These groups served as emotional outlets, fostering mutual understanding, support, and solidarity through exchanging personal experiences." AlGhazo and Ta'amneh[23] highlighted the importance of activities and strategies to stimulate students interaction by stating that "In the context of teaching and learning a language, the more often activities are done, the more automatic they become."

6. Discussion

The teaching profession has witnessed a profound transformation from traditional face-to-face teaching into online teaching, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. The present study was designed to investigate the experience of teachers at Algerian universities in shifting from traditional teaching to online teaching during the coronavirus pandemic. In other words, it examines the resilience strategies used by French language teachers and their adaptation methods during the coronavirus pandemic. It also sheds light on the constraints and challenges faced by teachers in applying these strategies. Accordingly, a qualitative methodology was used to address the research questions. The qualitative analysis of the questionnaire revealed that the challenges in shifting toward online teaching can be summed up into two main issues: technical and psychological. The technical issues refer to the lack of familiarity with digital tools and connectivity issues, and the psychological problems refer to the decline in students' motivation. This finding about the challenges in dealing with digital devices is consistent with Tao and Gao[24], who state that the lack of knowledge in using teaching platforms and digital devices can be a prevalent phenomenon.

The lack of interaction between the teacher and student is one of the challenges that can affect the process of language teaching during the coronavirus pandemic. This result is in line with the findings of Nordin et al.[25], who stated, "Another challenge of online teaching is the interactions between instructors and students, as well as among the students themselves. All the instructors felt that in a language classroom, interactions online could be very limited." Pace also stated that one of the most significant challenges language teachers face is finding ways to motivate their students to complete language courses[26]. Kim et al.[27] noted that the virtual surrounding environment could play a vital role in increasing the feeling of autonomy, ignorance, and relatedness among the students and the teachers. Alnajjar et al.[28] stated that one of the most crucial aspect in students' negative perceptions of online Learning refers to absence of social distance between the students and the lecturers which causes a worrying feeling.

Keeping teaching continuity during the pandemic was one of the greatest obstacles and challenges teachers faced; French language teachers at Algerian universities have overcome this obstacle by following several resilience strategies such as different ways of collaboration: Regular virtual meetings, online workgroups, online communities and sharing distance learning experiences. Rayyan et al.[29] indicated that online platforms provide a high degree of flexibility for teachers and students during the educational process. Our study's results are consistent with Albert Einstein's saying, who stated, "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity"[30]. Rayyan et al.[31] stated that "the transition from one learning environment or system to a new and completely different one is one of the major difficulties".

Zorba[32] indicated that there are many factors that may hinder the process of teaching during difficult and hard circumstances such as: lack of proper induction programs, and de-contextualized training seminar. Even with these challenges, the teachers of the French language have activated resilience by using new social media platforms, videoconferencing, and collaborative teleworking tools to maintain student engagement and ensure pedagogical continuity. Erdem Coşgun and Savas[32] stated that "student teachers could engage in micro-teachings under different teaching circumstances to better prepare themselves for varying teaching environments".

7. Conclusion

The research aims to shed light on how teachers at Algerian universities utilise distance learning platforms during confinement and the resilience strategies they employ to address the challenges and constraints posed by the pan-

demic. Coronavirus was recognized as the cause of a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, a city in China at the end of 2019. It quickly spread, resulting in an epidemic throughout China, followed by an increasing number of cases in other countries throughout the world. Through our questionnaire, we have corroborated that virtually all interviewed teachers reported difficulties, with the most common being access to technology for both teachers and students, as well as an augmented workload and digital proficiency issues. The majority of surveyed teachers affirmed that teaching has become increasingly challenging overall. A staggering 80% indicated experiencing a surge in workload, consequently necessitating a disproportionate amount of time for lesson preparation and input. Many also highlighted initial obstacles such as a lack of equipment (internet connection, printer, or graphics tablet) and the necessity to utilise specific digital media. Moreover, our study delved into the concept of resilience and discovered that participants perceived it as embodying a positive portrayal of distance learning amidst the health crisis. This optimistic outlook prompted teachers to adapt their teaching and learning environments to meet the specific demands generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The experience of teaching during this crisis underscores the importance of teachers being pedagogically, emotionally, physically, and mentally prepared to persist and remain dedicated to their profession. However, while our research sheds light on teachers' perceptions of pedagogical resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, it possesses certain limitations. Primarily, it focuses on departmental teachers; exploring themes similar to those of students may unveil additional dimensions of resilience. It is worth mentioning that there are many challenges and barriers in the process of distance learning that may affect the effectiveness the learning process.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, S.B. and A.A.; methodology, S.A.; software, validation, N.E., S.A. and A.A.; formal analysis, S.A.; investigation, N.E.; resources, S.B; data curation, S.B.; writing—original draft preparation, A.A.; writing—review and editing, S.A.; supervision, S.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the universities of the authors.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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