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Teacher resilience and the challenges of remote learning: An analysis of perspectives from ELT practitioners

Abstract. It seems that the ELT[3] world is mostly focused on language learner resilience: students are encouraged to build their resilience to enhance the learning process and improve their mental health. The question arises, however, of what the importance of resilience for language teachers is, especially within the context of online education necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of this article is to present the results of a research project conducted among an international group of English language teachers. The respondents were asked how they understand the concept of resilience, what challenges they had to overcome when they were teaching online, what strategies for dealing with stress they used, and how their learners' adaptation to online education affected their mental wellbeing. Based on the research results, some practical solutions are suggested that might be of use for educators teaching online.
Keywords: teacher resilience, online education, remote teaching

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1. Introduction

The Covid-19 global pandemic, also referred to as the coronavirus pandemic, originated in late 2019. Since then, it has reached almost every country in the world, resulting in devastating economic and social disruption, and causing health and socio-psychological impacts worldwide. Significantly, education has also become one of the unwilling victims of Covid-19. According to UNESCO (n.d.), more than 1.6 billion children and youth were unable to attend school for months. Despite the fact that schools and universities closed their doors to reduce transmission of the virus, teaching and learning processes continued in virtual learning environments. However, due to the lack of Internet connectivity and electronic devices, at least one third of students were excluded from pursuing remote instruction (UNESCO n.d.). Unquestionably, the shift to digital pedagogy marked the beginning of new challenges for teachers and learners, as they were expected to work and study in unfamiliar environments while having to deal with the impact of the pandemic on their daily lives and mental wellbeing (Moorhouse & Kohnke 2021).

MacIntyre et al. (2020) observe that the advent of COVID-19 multiplied the sources of stress for teachers. The rapid transition to online delivery, for which many educators had not been prepared, impacted their already substantial workloads. Teachers were suddenly expected, despite the lack of adequate preparation, to continue effective communicative teaching with the help of online resources. Moreover, with multiple online work-related activities outside their teaching time, educators found it difficult, if not even impossible, to set physical, temporal and/or psychological boundaries between professional and family lives. Petrie et al. (2020) indicate that teachers were also affected by their learners' loneliness, personal and academic anxiety, as well as parents' struggles to help their children with new educational tools and practices. Moreover, many teachers experienced difficulties maintaining positive student-teacher-parent rapport and encouraging cooperative learning and socialisation.

Covid-19 rapidly changed teachers' personal and professional lives. The challenges they confronted included the disruption of established instructional programmes, the rapid transition to virtual classrooms, the emotional toll of social isolation, and concerns about personal safety and health. Thus, they were forced to adapt to an uncertain and constantly changing work environment while also dealing with personal challenges posed by the coronavirus crisis. Nevertheless, most of them seem to have found the capacity to effectively respond to the emergency transition to virtual learning and to meet the demands associated with it. Many seem to have found solutions that allowed them to adapt to and even thrive in new challenging realities. One of those solutions was developing coping skills for resilience.

2. Teacher resilience and its dimensions

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines resilience as "the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands" (APA Dictionary of Psychology n.d.). Among the factors that contribute to how well people adapt to adversities the APA differentiates:

(1) the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world,
(2) the availability and quality of social resources,
(3) specific coping strategies, i.e., a series of actions, or a thought process used in meeting a stressful or unpleasant situation or in modifying one's reaction to such a situation (APA Dictionary of Psychology n.d.).

Mansfield et al. (2016) link resilience to quality teaching and learning, as resilient teachers maximise their professional capacities. Consequently, their learners are more likely to attain levels at or above those indicated in national testing programmes.

A review of the literature indicates that a relatively specific direction may be observed in the description of the qualities pertaining to a resilient educator. Therefore, in order to clarify the meaning of the concept of teacher resilience, it is first necessary to be explicit about the different abilities that might be subsumed under the term. The most important dimensions of teacher resilience include:

(1) the profession-related dimension, which concerns such aspects as organisation, preparation, use of effective teaching skills and reflection,
(2) the relational dimension, which recognises that both the professional and personal worlds of teachers are relational. The supportive relationships that are cultivated both in and outside educational institutions enhance teachers' wellbeing as well as their commitment to their profession. The relational dimension is also linked to collective responsibility, which is born when teachers collaborate and learn to trust and respect each other (Motteram & Dawson 2019: 4). This dimension is closely related and similar to what Mansfield et al. (2016) define as social resilience.
(3) the social dimension, which is about social interactions in the work environment, i.e., building and strengthening a support network, and asking for and giving advice,
(4) the everyday dimension, which is the agency that allows either individual teachers or groups of teachers to make choices, pursue goals, and sustain values despite potential adverse circumstances (Motteram & Dawson 2019: 4),
(5) the motivational dimension, which concerns such aspects as self-efficacy, awareness of the need and willingness to pursue professional development, persistence and perseverance,
(6) emotional resilience, a dimension which, according to Mansfield et al. (2016), is related to teachers' emotional responses to teaching experiences, as well as to emotional and stress management.

Resilience is, therefore, a multi-layered concept with manifold dimensions presented in a variety of models proposed by different scholars. Throughout this chapter the term resilience will be used to mean the ability to withstand the natural stressors and setbacks in teaching online.

3. Building teacher resilience

Teacher resilience has become increasingly relevant amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. It has also emerged as an important area of research in education, thus indicating its essential role in today's teaching and teacher education. As observed by Brunetti (2006), teacher resilience allows educators to sustain professional commitment to teaching in the face of challenges and adversities that they confront in providing meaningful education. It needs to be emphasised, however, that both understanding the practices of teachers in coping with unfavourable circumstances and learning the processes that allow them to become resilient are a long-term endeavour. Thus, educators wishing to develop their resilience should bear in mind that it is an ongoing and intentional process: "Resilience is built one thought and one action at a time. It's the slow and steady strengthening of our resilience habits that makes it easier for us to manage challenges and rebound after setbacks" (Aguilar 2018).

A review of the literature suggests that there are a number of approaches that can assist language teachers to increase their capacity for resilience. The strategies they could implement to become better able to weather and exploit hardships to their advantage include:

(1) anchoring in one's way. Resilient teachers are driven by a purpose. While working with students they should ask themselves why they are teaching and what they wish their legacy to be. As Aguilar (2017) observes: "Get clear on your why and use it as an anchor".

(2) knowing oneself. Educators should take time to reflect on their values, preferences, skills, aptitudes, etc. This reflection allows them to realise whether or not they are prepared for potential difficulties. Lang (2021) emphasises that self-awareness plays a vital role in understanding one's strengths and weaknesses, and their relationship to one's personal performance and growth.

(3) asking for help. Not only does intrapersonal reflection give teachers an understanding of their thought processes, but it also makes them realise when they should ask for help. Teachers might be afraid of seeking help for fear of being perceived as incompetent. However, contrary to popular belief, it is high performing educators who are more likely to search for support from their colleagues (Spillane et al. 2018). By seeking advice, high performers are able to recognise weaknesses and transform them into strengths. Aguilar (2017) advises teachers to ask for all kinds of help they might need and to persist until their needs have been met.

(4) joining a support group. A support group is similar to a self-help group in that its members share a problem and come together to provide help, comfort and guidance (APA Dictionary of Psychology n.d.). Support groups are safe spaces where teachers can obtain practical, constructive and helpful advice on ways of approaching their problems. Talking to others facing similar hardships can make teachers feel less alone in their predicament.

(5) building a community. Apart from joining a support group, teachers can build a community of colleagues, students, parents and administrators in their institution. It should be stressed, however, that communities are not immune to adversities. They adapt and grow stronger through the cooperation of their members (Brower 2020).

(6) being patient. Being a member of a community entails being patient with one's colleagues, supervisors and other members of the educational process. Patience does not equal being complacent, as effective communities embrace conflict and diversity (Brower 2020). Communities work through differences of opinion, while appreciating multiple points of view.

(7) holding a growth mindset. Regardless of the challenges teachers confront, they should ask themselves what they could learn from the hardships they are experiencing. Educators with a growth mindset are more likely to be high achievers, as they invest more energy in learning (Dweck 2016).

(8) focusing on what is within one's sphere of influence. Changes are inevitable, and teachers who effectively embrace them devote their time and energy to the things within their control. By acting within their sphere of influence, teachers take steps to make a positive difference.

(9) doing physical activities. Regular physical activity brings positive physiological and psychological benefits, e.g., preventing many chronic diseases and contributing to improved mood and cognition (Silverman & Deuster 2014).

The list of strategies is certainly not exhaustive, and it needs to be stressed that developing resilience is an individual process, as people vary in their perceptions of potential adversities and take different actions to manage a conflict or crisis. Hence, the choice of strategies should be dictated by the personal and professional needs, circumstances and preferences of a given person.

4. Description of the research project

Teaching through the pandemic triggered the need to operate in new modalities, where students were forced to adapt to distance education and the lack of social interaction in person. Educators, on the other hand, had to learn to engage students remotely, to establish and maintain human connections in virtual environments, and to respond to a high level of unpredictability in unfamiliar contexts. With the ELT world being mostly

focused on language learner resilience and students being encouraged to build their resilience to enhance the learning process and improve their mental health, the question arises of what the importance of resilience for language teachers is, especially within the context of online education necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The following sections of the article will attempt to investigate the impact of the pandemic on educators' mental health and wellbeing.

4.1. Research aim

The aim of the research project was to investigate how the challenges of teaching English online affected language teachers' resilience and what coping strategies they employed to reverse the negative effects of stress that accompanied their adaptation to remote instruction. The study sought to explore the following areas:

(1) the types and severity of challenges encountered by teachers in virtual classrooms,
(2) the types and effectiveness of stress-relief strategies employed by teachers,
(3) student adaptation to online learning and its impact on teaching practices,
(4) teachers' professional hopes and expectations for the forthcoming school/academic year[4].

4.2. Questionnaire

In order to investigate the influence of online teaching challenges, an online questionnaire was designed and developed using Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised 11 items, of which five questions were open-ended and six were multiple-choice. The first 4 items were aimed at obtaining participants' sociodemographic characteristics, i.e., their age, length of professional experience, teaching background, and the country in which they teach. The remaining items concerned the challenges of online teaching and their influence on teachers' resilience, the use of stress management techniques, the influence of students' adaptation to remote learning and its influence on teachers' wellbeing. The last questionnaire item invited comments regarding respondents' professional hopes and expectations for the forthcoming school/academic year.

The questionnaire was active from November 2021 until late January 2022. The respondents were recruited based on a snowball sampling technique using several channels, i.e., posting the link to the questionnaire to Facebook groups for language teachers, to social media websites for academic professionals, sending the link to researchers' in-service students majoring in English language teaching, as well as to researchers' personal

4 The school/academic year in which the research project was conducted, i.e., 2021/2022.

contacts[5]. Participants were made aware of the purpose of the research project and their participation was voluntary.

4.3. Participants

From November 2021 to January 2022, a total of 119 teachers participated in the research project aimed at investigating the challenges of online teaching and their influence on educators' wellbeing. Respondents came from 41 countries, with the most numerous group (51 participants) representing Poland.

Table 1. Countries the respondents teach in

Country	No. of participants	Country	No. of participants	Country	No. of participants	Country	No. of participants
A[6]	1	Georgia	1	Malta	1	Romania	1
All over the world	1	Greece	1	Mexico	1	Russia	1
Argentina	1	Iraq (Kurdistan)	3	Morocco	2	Spain	3
Austria	1	India	2	Nether-lands	1	Serbia	4
Bangla-desh	1	Ireland	1	North Macedonia	1	Slovakia	3
Brazil	2	Italy	5	Oman	1	Sri Lanka	1
Colombia	1	Jamaica	1	Pakistan	1	Tunisia	1
Croatia	1	Kuwait	1	Peru	1	Turkey	5
Egypt	2	Lithuania	1	Poland	51	UAE	1
France	3	Malaysia	1	Portugal	2	USA	3
						UK	3

5 Unfortunately, the response rate from members of different social media groups and websites was very low. The majority of responses were obtained through researchers' personal contacts.

6 Instead of giving the name of the country where they work, the participant only provided a single letter.

The distribution of the data, i.e., 51 respondents from Poland and 59 respondents from other countries, seems to invite a cross-case analysis. However, the group of study participants had not been purposefully selected to represent either any specific region or a representative overview of the world, which would indeed be impossible on this scale. Thus, the sample represents too diverse a group to be meaningfully analysed as a whole, even in comparison to the more homogeneous group of Polish participants. Furthermore, since there is, on average, only one participant from each of the remaining countries, the authors would have run the risk of tokenism if conducting such an analysis.

The majority of teachers participating in the research fell into the 31–50 age bracket, with the proportions of respondents aged 31–40 and 41–50 being identical (31% each). 24% of participants declared to be 51–60 and 5% of the sample population over 60 years old. Novice teachers, i.e., participants under 30 years of age constituted only 9% of the study sample.

Table 2. Participants' age

Age	No. of participants
Under 30	11
31– 40	37
41– 50	37
51– 60	28
Over 60	6

As regards the length of professional experience, the least numerous group was the one declaring more than 30 years of teaching (6.7%). 18% of study participants had 11–15 years of professional experience, and an identical proportion of the sample between 16 and 20 years, with only a slightly smaller group (16%) 11–15 years. Less than one third of respondents (29%) had been professionally active for up to ten years (17% declaring 0–5 and 13% indicating 6–10 years of professional experience).

Table 3. Length of professional experience

Years	No. of participants
0–5	20
6–10	15
11–15	19

Years	No. of participants
16–20	21
21–25	21
26–30	15
More than 30 years	8

Study participants worked in a range of educational institutions, including state and private primary schools, state and private secondary schools, state and private institutions of higher education, private language schools, and other private establishments, e.g., a film school and a private pre-school. Participants also included freelancers and private business owners. The majority of teachers worked in private language schools—46 individuals indicated those as either one of their places, or their primary place, of employment.

Table 4. Participants' teaching background

Institution	No. of participants
State primary school	20
Private primary school	11
State secondary school	21
Private secondary school	8
State institution of higher education	38
Private institution of higher education	15
Private language school	42
Other	freelancer (4 respondents), non-profit organisation, own companies, teaching academic writing to faculty in state and private institutes, autonomous online, my own business – I teach individuals, film school, Private Teacher Training Centre, freelance trainer, STO Primary and High School, private preschool

In the study, the investigators did not include questions concerning participants' sex, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation, as this was an introductory project devoted to broad and general perceptions of diverse challenges related to teaching English in virtual classrooms. The authors are fully aware of the fact that teaching and learning processes can be impacted by gender in multiple ways, and that gender adds a layer of specificity to data interpretation.

Current research recognizes that women and men have been impacted differently by the Covid-19 pandemic (Aldossari & Chaudhry 2021). The plight of content teachers, including those who work in institutions of higher education, has been no different (Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya 2020). However, there seems to be a paucity of research into how differently female and male teachers of English have been affected by the unexpected emergence of SARS-CoV-2 and the resultant Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, it seems that some investigators, instead of explicitly asking for information about the gender identities of their respondents, assume their cisgender identities. Hence, further research into the resilience of English language teachers by the authors of the current article will include inclusive gender[7] questions and the data will be profiled accordingly.

4.4. Results

4.4.1. Types and severity of challenges encountered by teachers in virtual classrooms

In item 5, which was a multiple-answer question concerning the challenges of teaching English in virtual classrooms, respondents were presented with a list of 22 potential difficulties related to online teaching and were asked to indicate the ones which applied to their teaching situation. The analysis of responses showed that the 10 most frequent challenges[8] were as follows:

7 In the new project gender will be defined as the socially constructed roles, behaviours and identities of prospective respondents.

8 The data concerning less frequent challenges are available from the authors upon request.

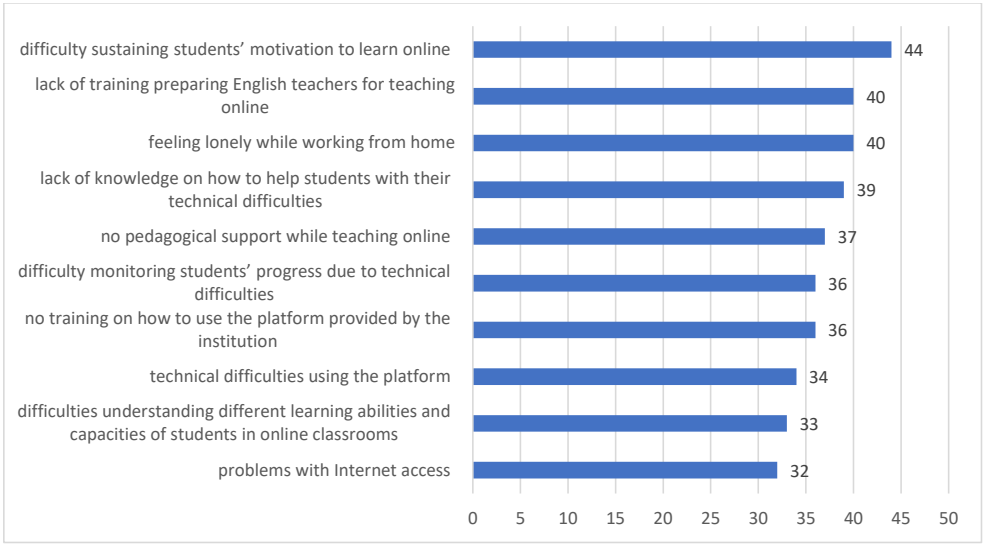

Figure 1. Ten most frequent challenges encountered by teachers in virtual classrooms

In item 6, which was an open-ended question, participants were invited to elaborate on the challenges presented in question 5. 116 participants of the study provided comments regarding the difficulties which they considered the most serious ones from their personal perspectives. The following ten challenges surfaced from the data, ranked from most to least impactful[9]:

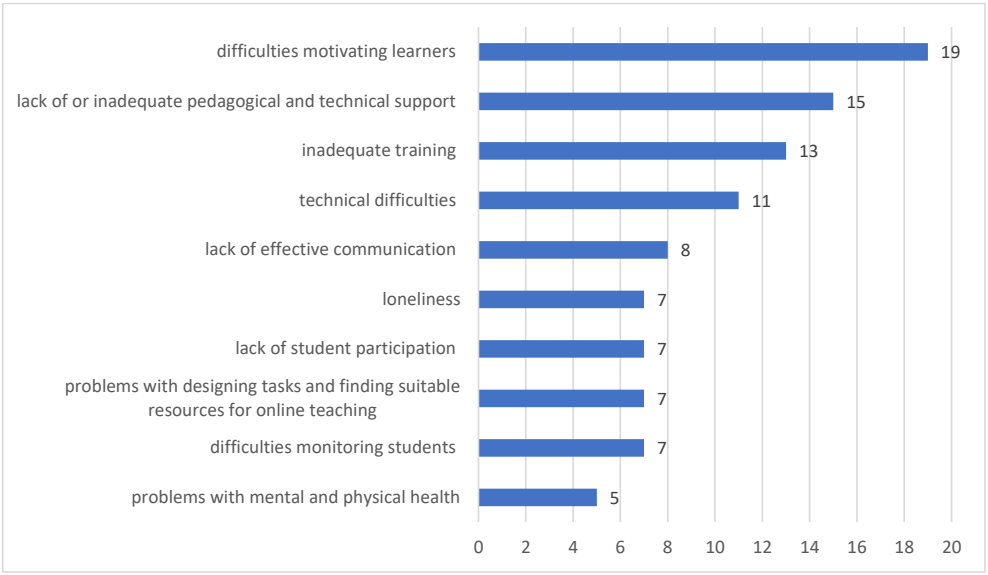

Figure 2. The severity of challenges encountered by teachers in virtual classrooms

9 The impact of the challenges was determined on the basis of the frequency for each of the listed problems.

4.4.2. Types and effectiveness of stress-relief strategies employed by teachers

Question 7, which was another multiple-answer item, offered a list of 15 stress-relief strategies from which respondents indicated the ones that they used to manage their stress levels. The data gathered in this part of the questionnaire show that the 10 most frequently indicated stress relievers were:

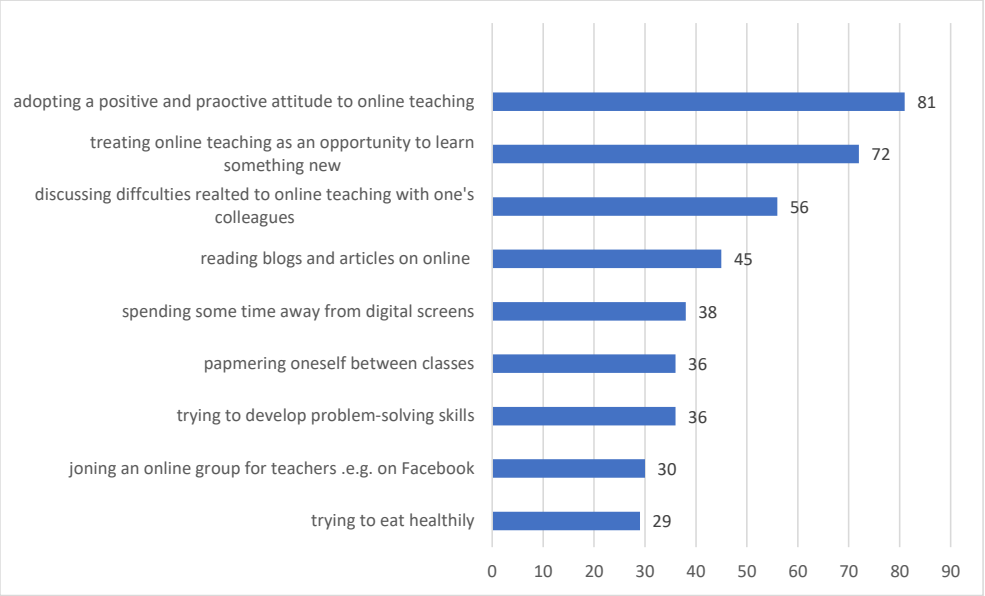

Figure 3. Ten most frequent stress-relief strategies employed by teachers

In item 9, which was an open-ended question, respondents were asked to elaborate on which of the stress management techniques were the most effective. According to study participants, the stress relievers that worked best were:

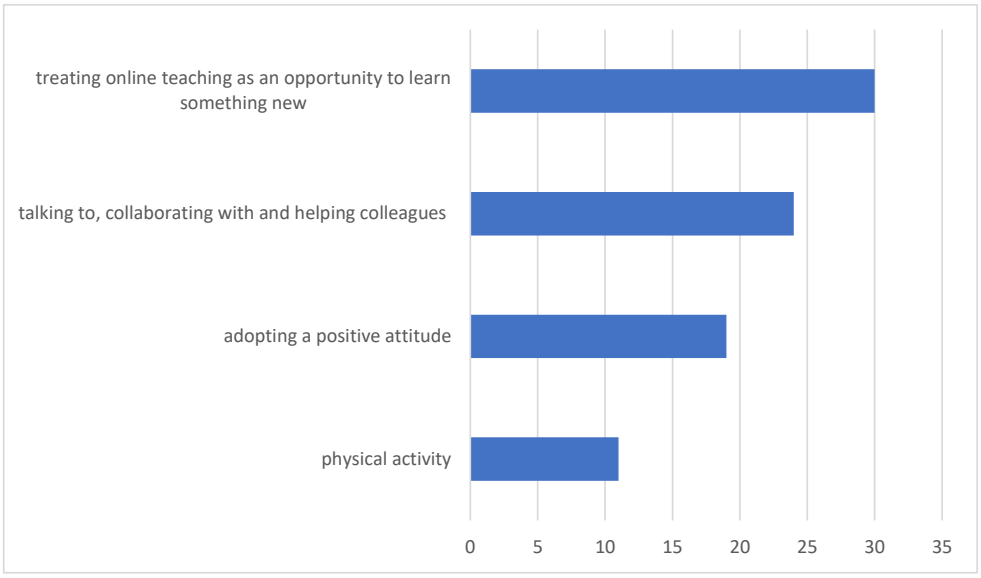

Figure 4. The most efficacious stress-relief strategies employed by teachers

Some teachers observed that their stress levels were so high that none of the stress-relief techniques presented in question 8 were truly effective. Interestingly, a few respondents emphasised that they enjoyed working online and that the transition to remote teaching provided a springboard for opening their own business activity: *'(...) and now I feel I am an expert in what I do, so I also train others'.* [10]

4.4.3. Student adaptation to online learning and its impact on teaching

Since the beginning of the pandemic language teachers have accumulated considerable levels of stress. One of the reasons for it was the need to adapt, in record time, to provide online classes in unexplored environments and with the help of unfamiliar tools. Additionally, teachers' wellbeing and functioning were affected by students' difficulties related to and caused by online teaching. In order to determine the students' problems which impacted respondents' teaching practices most severely, in question 9 the authors of the research project devised a list of 20 potentially disruptive student behaviours. Similar to questions 5 and 7, respondents were requested to indicate the ones that had the most serious effect on their wellbeing during online lessons. The analysis of the findings reveals that the 10 most problematic challenges[11] were as follows:

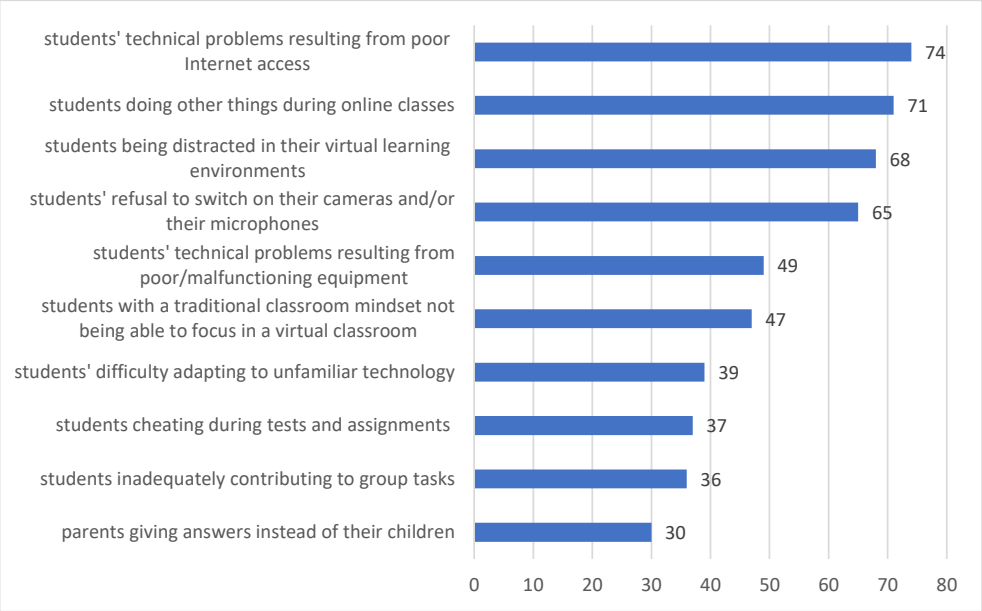

Figure 5. The most frequent students' problems which impacted respondents' teaching practices

10 All citations from research participants included in this article are presented in their original version.

11 The data concerning less frequent challenges are available from the authors upon request.

In item 10 which, similar to questions 6 and 8, was an open-ended question, respondents explained which of the student difficulties were the most bothersome. According to study participants, the most acute problems were:

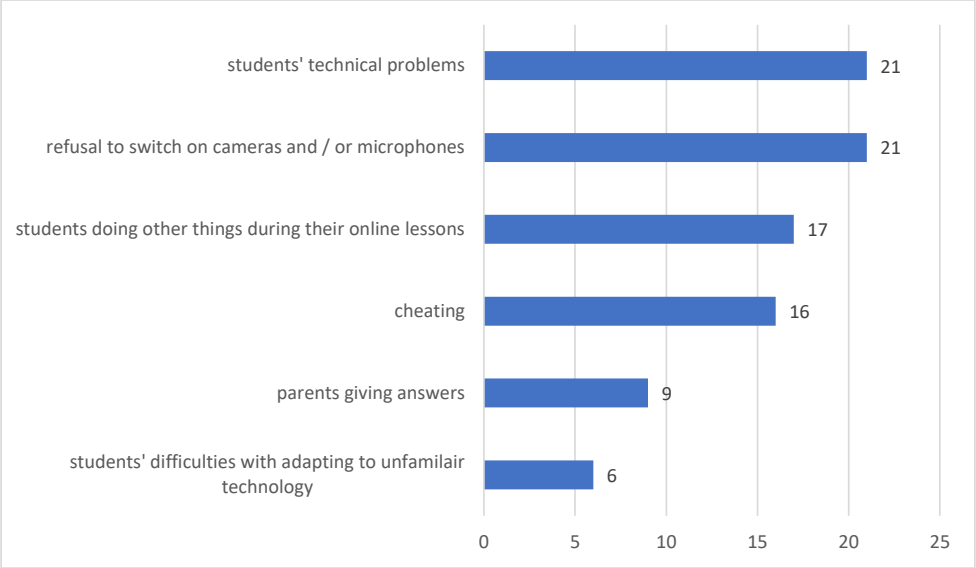

Figure 6. The most acute students' problems which impacted respondents' teaching practices

4.4.4. Teachers' professional hopes and expectations for the following school/academic year

In the last item of the questionnaire, which was an open-ended question, respondents were invited to share their professional hopes and expectations for the new school/academic year. Their responses can be grouped under the following categories:

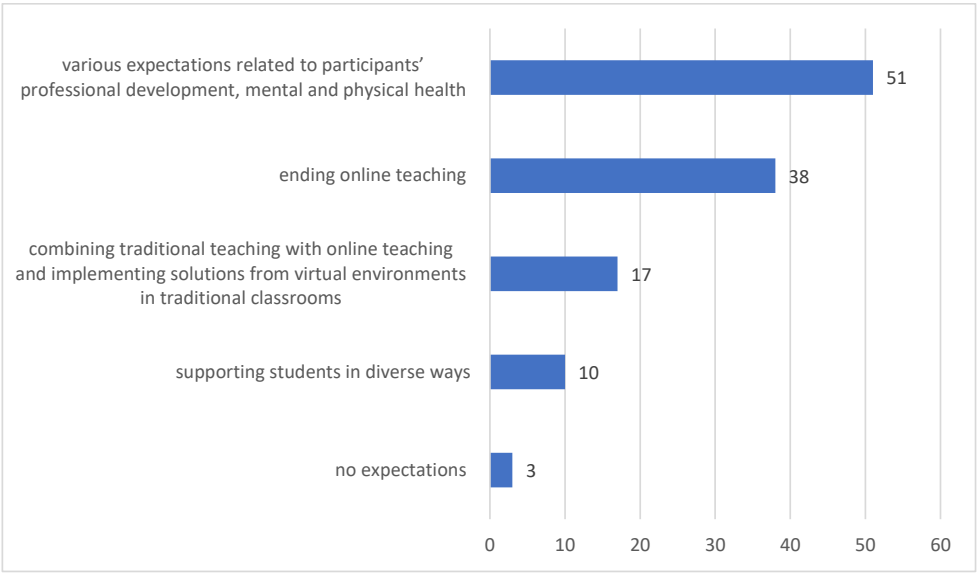

Figure 7. Respondents' professional hopes and expectations

5. Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic and global school closures forced students from every corner of the world to learn from home. Research investigating how learners cope with remote learning (e.g., Dong et al. 2020; Parczewska 2020; Mælan et al. 2021) has revealed that school-aged children struggle to maintain motivation in virtual classrooms. It has been suggested that leaners' dwindling motivation is caused, to a large extent, by the fact that for many students the transition was their first experience of remote learning (Rahiem 2021), inadequate social support from peers and instructors (Tan 2020), poor academic achievements prior to the transition, the lack of reliable Internet access and necessary equipment (Mak 2021), or insufficient technological skills. It is therefore unsurprising that difficulty motivating students to learn online was the most frequently indicated challenge of remote education. It was also regarded as the most serious one. As one of the participants observed: '*I think sustaining my students' motivation was the most serious because I think some students did not like that form of the lessons. Sometimes they were very shy to say something in front of the group, they did not like to have their cameras on. Some students had problems with internet access and could not participate in activities, which was demotivating*[12]'. The respondents observed that it was difficult to motivate students due to the following reasons:

(1) lack of interest on the part of students,
(2) students' shyness,
(3) students' connectivity and technical problems,
(4) no physical contact and no eye contact,
(5) students becoming depressed,
(6) students feeling isolated and lost,
(7) teachers' inability to monitor students' progress,
(8) students' inability to ignore the distractions of virtual environments.

Interestingly, the analysis of respondents' answers to question 10 points towards possible reasons behind students' low motivation. One of the participants observed that students who were not interested in learning in traditional classrooms would not learn in online environments, either. Other teachers argued that students were discouraged by the limited number of peer-to-peer interactions: '(...) *all of a sudden their school, classes and friends turned to virtual and they have lost human interaction and consequently motivation*'. One respondent concluded that students who had a '*traditional classroom mindset*' would not be able to focus in a virtual learning environment because '*online classroom is not real'*. Moreover, students also found it difficult, according to the respondents, to adapt to new learning styles, and they frequently had no one at home who would help them study: *'there is no one on the other side of the screen to make child focus'*.

12 The respondents' spelling and grammar has been preserved in the quotes.

It is generally believed that many children and teenagers are 'digital natives', a term describing individuals who grow up under the constant presence and influence of the Internet and digital media. Prensky (2001: 2) emphasises that today's learners are "all 'native speakers'" of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet'. However, a striking finding to emerge from the data is that some respondents reported being startled to discover that '*many students did not know how to deal with technical problems online although they seemed to be tech savvy as most youth are*'. This unfamiliarity with online learning technology was yet another factor leading to a decline in student motivation, especially when learners' parents were unable to help them with technological issues. Additionally, one of the respondents observed that '*Although many school-aged students were accustomed to working with their computers, they were doing this all day before joining our after-school classes'*. This indicates that many learners were unwilling to participate in online lessons (and when they did, they '*struggled to concentrate'*) because they had already spent a lot of time in front of a computer screen. The observation is unsurprising in light of the fact that an excessive amount of screen time can lead to poorer concentration, weaker memory, and slower information processing (What are the … n.d.).

Other challenges of online teaching included issues that teachers had very little or no influence over. The issues included Internet access, which had cost implications that teachers were unprepared for: *'(…) there was not internet service provided in my community so I had to purchase data plans. (…)Teachers are not that highly paid. I made the sacrifice because of the students but I could not maintain that as a monthly add on to my budget. The government neither the school subsidized that cost so it was financially draining*'. Similarly, inadequate equipment and limited access to online tools and teacher training often contributed to teacher frustration. Thus, the question arises of whether teachers can be expected to bear the costs of the transition to remote teaching: '*I had to pay for course on online teaching, platforms and other online resources as well*', '*I had to pay for equipment, zoom, other resources, training courses, etc.*', especially when no training opportunities, and subsequently no pedagogical and technological support, were offered. It seems that adopting a positive and proactive attitude to online teaching was indeed the most effective way to proceed in such circumstances.

Positive thinking is one of the factors that enhances resilience, as positive individuals are characterised by faith in themselves and their ability to face and overcome challenges. They also perceive setbacks as temporary and modifiable, and treat them as a learning opportunity (Richardson 2020). Significantly, this is how the majority of the respondents reacted to the transition: '*Viewing it* [online teaching] *as something new and challenging to be done to the best of my ability (and accepting that it wouldn't be perfect) helped this 60+year-old'*, '*Online teaching was a big challenge but I treated it as an opportunity to learn something new, especially that I have feared new technologies. Now, I am happy that I have learnt so many new solutions'*, '*Enjoying finding ways to use the technology to do things*

I couldn't face to face – I enjoyed the challenge'. Interestingly, the proactive attitude and perceiving the sudden transition as a learning opportunity opened up new professional opportunities for some teachers: '*I put a lot of effort into learning how to teach online and turned it to a business opportunity and started giving private lessons to adults online. I got better really quickly and now I feel I am an expert in what I do, so I also train others'*.

On the one hand, respondents attempted to adopt a positive and proactive attitude to online teaching in order to treat it as an opportunity to develop new skills. However, their comments expressing their unwillingness to continue teaching in virtual classrooms indicate how difficult the period had been for many of them. This seems to reinforce the observation by Besser et al. (in: Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. 2021), who emphasise that educators have been severely affected by stress resulting from having to adapt to online teaching with no time to prepare. Many respondents felt the transition had been rushed: '*Moving into a new teaching reality without being prepared for it*' and insufficient support was provided: '*Maybe the lack of training and support from my employer was the most serious because it was frustrating to see how, after 15 years working for the organisation, they didn't even think I might need support. They took it for granted that I knew how to do things'*.

The data collected in the study suggest that the most serious obstacles to effective participation in online lessons from learners' perspective included unstable Internet: '*Poor internet access is definitely the worst – students get kicked out of zoom meetings or cannot see the shared screen*', the lack of adequate equipment: '*bad quality microphones',* frequently resulting from a difficult financial situation at home: *'(...) not all of the students afford adequate equipment (...)*'. Consequently, the feelings of frustration and helplessness seem to be the direct effect of those challenges: '*Technical problems because there was nothing I could do and I felt helpless and powerless to help my students. I could feel them disengaging and it was hard for me*'.

Significantly, teachers' frustrations increased with students' refusal to switch on the cameras and/or microphones: *'Students not turning on their camera. It's really distracting and demotivating for me. I'm talking to black boxes not real people. It's difficult to conduct the lesson when I can't see my students'*, '*Talking to the initials instead of faces was surreal and annoying (...)*', '*I felt deceived* (...)'. It needs to be emphasised, however, that in some cases the refusal was the result of low bandwidth, while in others teenager learners were too self-conscious about their identity and how they looked on camera to let others see their face. Furthermore, it can be hypothesised that students turned off their cameras because they benefited more by processing the lesson auditorily. In virtual classrooms, with their cameras turned on, many students are prone to scanning their own faces in addition to observing the facial expressions of their peers, which is mentally exhausting (Miller 2018). Other issues, such as embarrassment about one's home environment or the fear of screenshots being used to bully and ridicule, discourage learners from showing their faces in online contexts (Miller 2018). Regardless of the reason behind learners'

cameras and/or microphones being switched off, respondents felt frustrated, as teachers generally need to see students' faces to assess how learning is progressing: '*Monitoring* [was a challenge] *because you can't really see what the students are doing*'.

A number of respondents reported irritation caused by students doing other things while participating in online lessons: '*Doing other things was the worst. They were always distracted and could not focus on anything'*. They also indicated difficulties with monitoring students and designing effective tasks for online learning: *'problems with designing tasks for it. It was hard to get feedback from students what they like and what they don't like*' as well as students' physical conditions at home: '*The biggest issue is the distractions, especially young learners struggle concentrate on the lesson while other things happening in their house*'.

A major cause of exasperation for teachers was dishonesty on the part of the students. Not only did they cheat during tests assignments, but they also '*cheated during participation',* i.e., they refused to switch on their cameras which allowed them to avoid active participation in classes. Consequently, '(...) [students] *did not bother to do their in-class activities with quality'*. It is nevertheless cheating during tests that seemed to be the ultimate source of frustration for participants: '*Students cheating during tests – it was so irritating when weak students started getting much better grades than those really good ones*', '*cheating was, to put it mildly, horrible! There was simply no way I could have stopped it!*', '*Cheating during tests and assignments was the most worrisome concern, as it prevented us from judging students' performances and teaching results correctly and thus from maintaining the quality of teaching'*. Analysis of respondents' replies suggests that students were dishonest because teachers were unable to confront them effectively in virtual classrooms. Furthermore, parents were too invested in their children's education and often solved tasks for them: '*Parents whispering answers to their children was the problem which affected me most because it hindered my ability to make an adequate assessment of student learning. It made it harder to determine if the child actually learnt the concept or if they were regurgitating. I had to explain to parents that they were hindering their children rather than helping*'. Consequently, students started receiving better grades than they would normally get in traditional classrooms: '*I can see students are stressed and their grades are reflecting the year spent cheating on evaluations'*.

Moreover, it can be hypothesised that many learners cheated because, as one of the respondents observed, they were not willing to take responsibility for their own learning. This is echoed in the words of Little (1995: 175): "The basis of learner autonomy is that the learner accepts responsibility for his or her learning". However, autonomy is not simply a matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent (Sinclair 2000: 6–13), and the capacity for autonomous learning behaviour inevitably varies according to context and task (Rixon 2000: 70). The question thus arises of whether under the circumstance of sudden transition to remote learning students can be expected to be autonomous, especially when they struggle to adapt to unfamiliar technology and when

'Neither teachers nor students had knowledge or experience in online classes prior to pandemic. So everyone found themselves in the chaos at once'.

6. Conclusions

The sudden transition to remote teaching has been one of the most stressful experiences so far for the teaching profession. Participants of the project were left with no alternative but to adopt a resilient attitude, especially when a number of different factors were beyond their control. Analysis of the data also points towards the importance of emphasising various stress-management techniques during teacher training, as a relatively small number of the respondents resorted to stress relievers other than adopting a proactive attitude or seeking advice from colleagues. Proietti Ergün and Ersöz Demirdağ (2022) developed the concept of foreign language teaching enjoyment (FLTE), i.e., positive emotions that are crucially important in the profession of language educators. FLTE seems to be correlated with emotion regulation and psychological wellbeing. Emotional regulation involves, among other things, effective implementation of strategies that help individuals modify, exert control over, and manage their emotional state, so as to accomplish their professional and personal goals (Sutton 2004). The ability to regulate one's emotions is likely to lead to in-depth professional engagement and consequently enhanced efficiency, as well as a marked improvement in work-related and personal wellbeing (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak 2020). Mercer and Gregersen (2020) emphasize that, in fact, wellbeing is one of the factors affecting educators' pedagogical practices which might, in turn, be positively or negatively correlated with learners' willingness to pursue their language learning goals in the classroom. It seems reasonable then, in light of the results obtained in this research project, especially those revealing how burdensome language education in virtual classrooms has been, to urge for pre-service as well as in-service professional development courses to equip language teachers with the tools allowing them to cultivate positive emotions and manage heavy, difficult, or uncomfortable emotions.

Respondents' frustration could have been reduced if they had been trained to teach, monitor, design tasks, conduct assessment and work with new technology in virtual classrooms. That is yet another aspect that should be taken into account while designing contemporary teacher training courses. As it seems that Covid-19 is here to stay for some time and other outbreaks of infectious diseases are not unlikely, other forays into virtual education might be necessary. However, if teachers are to be truly resilient, they need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge enabling them to handle professional challenges effectively.

Furthermore, the research project also showed that learners cannot be expected, even though they are believed to be digital natives, to function effectively in virtual classrooms without any training or support. The lack of preparation led to students misbehaving, which consequently affected the respondents' psychological wellbeing.

The evidence of students' unwillingness to take charge of their learning also seems to urge us to reconsider, apart from teachers' resilience and wellbeing in times of hardship, the role of learner autonomy in the language learning process. The study participants work in a wide range of national cultures, and different cultures define learner autonomy in various ways. In other words, the type of autonomy stressed in a given educational context will be reflected in the practices employed to promote it. What is appropriate in one context may not be acceptable in another. For instance, British learners seem to prefer open-ended learning opportunities with vague objectives, broadly defined assignments, and hardly any timetables. German learners, on the other hand, might favour learning situations characterized by more structure, learning tasks with detailed requirements, and tighter deadlines (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010). As mentioned previously, in the study the respondents, regardless of their national background, implied several times that their frustration in virtual classrooms was further exacerbated by their pupils' refusal to take responsibility for the learning process. The participants were not diverse and numerous enough for their answer to suggest that the Western understanding of the concepts is now universally acknowledged and implemented, but they do seem to imply that, regardless of the national background, a certain degree of learner responsibility is necessary in virtual learning environments. The question remains, however, how to define what leaner autonomy during the virtual learning process in a given culture is, what differences between learner autonomy in brick-and-mortar as well as online classrooms there might be, and to what extent and in what ways precisely it affects the quality and effectiveness of language instruction and educators' resilience, depending on cultural background.

Apart from the need to reconceptualize learner autonomy in virtual classrooms, the transition to online education has revealed that cheating on the part of the students has become even more of a problem. Even though many possible sources of cheating can be identified, as enumerated by the respondents, high stakes examination practices stand out, as does the fact that teachers and the institutions they work for are held responsible for delivering great results, rather than great teaching. This has led to the emergence of educational cultures in which 'teach to test' has become one of the main teacher responsibilities and in which students are determined to exploit every possible advantage to obtain positive grades. In virtual classrooms cheating comes with ease as, more often than not, teachers cannot control what their learners are doing, especially if, for instance, they refuse to switch on their cameras and have access to other electronic devices that otherwise would not be permitted in traditional classrooms. This situation calls for, as in the case of learning how to manage difficult emotions, pre-service and in-service professional development courses during which teachers would be able to learn how and why to focus on what is within their sphere of control when it comes to teaching and testing languages. This would help individuals focus their time and energy on the things they

can change and influence, so that they can have a greater impact where it matters most. It is one of the pillars of professional and personal resilience. Furthermore, the sudden transition to virtual classrooms showed that the lack of adequate online teaching and testing tools, as well as training on how to use them, increased teachers' stress levels. However, it has also given rise to the following *ethical* question: should money and effort be invested in developing online testing tools that would procure more reliable testing outcomes, or should online and traditional testing be finally discontinued.

The data collected in the study lead us to believe that the participants' wellbeing has been influenced by students' online struggles, and that attempts to adopt a proactive and positive attitude to the transition were not fully successful when the respondents '*felt helpless'* to support their learners. Although building resilience can require time, every teacher and student can learn to be resilient. However, both educators and learners need support, both at professional/academic and personal levels, so that feelings of helplessness, inadequacy and loneliness do not outweigh the willingness to treat a new challenge as an opportunity to learn something new.

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