

# FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN TIMES OF CRISIS: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

DESARROLLO PROFESIONAL DE DOCENTES DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS EN ÉPOCAS DE CRISIS: DESAFÍOS Y SOLUCIONES

DÉVELOPPÉMENT PROFESSIONNEL DES ENSEIGNANTS DE LANGUES ÉTRANGÈRES DANS DES TEMPS DE CRISE : DÉFIS ET SOLUTIONS

DESENVOLVIMENTO PROFISSIONAL DE PROFESSORES DE LÍNGUAS ESTRANGEIRAS EM TEMPOS DE CRISE: DESAFIOS E SOLUÇÕES

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## ABSTRACT

The unprecedented situation of COVID-19 compelled many universities and colleges worldwide to reconsider both the management and delivery of classes, forcing faculty to use innovative online and mobile means. The transition also caused faculty to reevaluate their professional development (PD). This qualitative exploratory study focused on the PD experienced by a group of foreign language university instructors in Colombia during this crisis. Specifically it identified the challenges encountered and how these were tackled. Data were collected through an open-ended survey and analyzed using content analysis. Results show ten main challenges, which were then categorized into three themes: (a) adaptation to emergency remote teaching, (b) promotion of student engagement, and (c) handling of emotions. Conclusions reveal that professors embraced the crisis with a positive attitude, engaging in different PD opportunities, displaying agency, responsibility, and flexibility. Therefore, the challenges and their reaction to them fostered their PD and learning. These findings suggest that institutions should allow instructors to give input into the types of PD programs that they need for specific situations.

**Keywords:** challenges; COVID-19; emergency remote teaching (ERT); foreign languages; professional development.

## RESUMEN

La situación inédita planteada por la COVID-19 forzó a muchas universidades e instituciones de educación superior en todo el mundo a revisar tanto la planeación como la realización de sus clases, lo que llevó a los docentes a utilizar medios

13



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en línea y móviles. La transición también llevó a los docentes a reevaluar su desarrollo profesional (DP). El presente estudio exploratorio se centró en el DP que experimentó un grupo de docentes de lengua extranjera de una universidad en Colombia durante esta crisis. Específicamente, el estudio identifica los desafíos que encontraron y cómo los enfrentaron. Los datos se recogieron mediante una encuesta de preguntas abiertas y se analizaron usando análisis de contenido. Los resultados muestran diez desafíos principales, que luego se clasificaron en tres categorías temáticas: a) adaptación a la enseñanza remota de emergencia, b) fomento de la participación del estudiante, y c) manejo de emociones. Las conclusiones revelan que los docentes asumieron la crisis con una actitud positiva, iniciando diferentes oportunidades de DP, haciendo un despliegue de agencia, responsabilidad y flexibilidad. Por consiguiente, los desafíos y su reacción a ellos estimularon el DP y el aprendizaje de este grupo. Estos hallazgos sugieren que las instituciones deberían permitir la retroalimentación de los docentes sobre los tipos de programas de DP que necesitan para situaciones específicas.

**Palabras clave:** desafíos; COVID-19; enseñanza remota de emergencia (ERE); lenguas extranjeras; desarrollo profesional.

### RÉSUMÉ

La situation sans précédent posée par la COVID-19 a contraint de nombreuses universités et établissements d'enseignement supérieur du monde entier à revoir à la fois la planification et la prestation de leurs cours, incitant les enseignants à utiliser des médias en ligne et mobiles. La transition a amené les enseignants à réévaluer leur développement professionnel (DP). Cette étude exploratoire s'est concentrée sur le DP vécu par un groupe d'enseignants de langues étrangères dans une université en Colombie pendant cette crise. Concrètement, l'étude identifie les défis qu'ils ont rencontrés et comment ils les ont relevés. Les données ont été recueillies au moyen d'une enquête à questions ouvertes et analysées à l'aide d'une analyse de contenu. Les résultats font apparaître dix principaux défis, qui ont ensuite été classés en trois catégories thématiques : a) s'adapter à l'enseignement à distance d'urgence, b) encourager la participation des étudiants et c) gérer les émotions. Les conclusions révèlent que les enseignants ont assumé la crise avec une attitude positive, initiant différentes opportunités de perfectionnement professionnel, faisant preuve d'agence, de responsabilité et de flexibilité. Par conséquent, les défis et leurs réactions ont stimulé le DP et l'apprentissage de ce groupe. Ces résultats suggèrent que les établissements devraient permettre aux enseignants de participer du feedback sur les types de programmes de DP dont ils ont besoin pour des situations spécifiques.

**Mots clef :** défis ; COVID-19 ; enseignement en ligne en situation d'urgence (ESU) ; langues étrangères ; développement professionnel.

### RESUMO

A situação sem precedentes imposta pela COVID-19 forçou muitas universidades e instituições de ensino superior em todo o mundo a revisar o planejamento e a entrega de suas aulas, levando os professores a usar mídias online e móveis. A transição também levou os professores a reavaliar seu desenvolvimento profissional (DP). Este estudo exploratório enfocou o DP vivenciado por um grupo de professores de línguas estrangeiras de uma universidade na Colômbia durante esta crise. Especificamente o estudo identifica os desafios que eles encontraram e como os enfrentaram. Os dados foram coletados por meio de uma pesquisa

de perguntas abertas e analisados por meio da análise de conteúdo. Os resultados mostram dez desafios principais, que foram classificados em três categorias temáticas: a) adaptação ao ensino remoto emergencial, b) incentivo à participação dos alunos e c) gerenciamento de emoções. As conclusões revelam que os professores assumiram a crise com uma atitude positiva, engajando-se diferentes oportunidades de DP, exibindo agência, responsabilidade e flexibilidade. Consequentemente, os desafios e a reação a eles estimularam o DP e a aprendizagem desse grupo. Essas descobertas sugerem que as instituições deveriam permitir o feedback dos professores sobre os tipos de programas de DP de que precisam para situações específicas.

**Palavras chave:** desafios; COVID-19; ensino remoto emergencial (ERE); língua estrangeira; desenvolvimento profissional.

## Introduction

At the organizational level, a crisis is defined by Gigliotti (2019) as “the events or situations of significant magnitude that threaten reputations, impact the lives of those involved in the institution, [and] disrupt the ways in which the organization [regularly] functions”(p. 49). At this level, the role of crisis management and leadership is to ensure and provide support for immediate needs while planning long and short-term strategic goals (Gigliotti, 2020). At the onset of the coronavirus (COVID-19), the tumultuous impact was felt in educational institutions, businesses, and life in general. Thus, the unprecedented activities brought by COVID-19 compelled many universities and colleges worldwide to reconsider both the management and delivery of classes to ensure an equitable and quality education for their students. In turn, this impelled a rapid start of virtual instruction (synchronous, asynchronous, or a mix), creating an opening for “opportunity, innovation, and reinvention” (Gigliotti, 2020, p. 14) to meet the challenges of this transition to emergency remote teaching (ERT), which is “a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances” (Hodges et al., 2020, para. 12). Such a change has dramatically impacted PD as we know it.

To clarify, teacher professional development (PD) is defined as the improvement of teaching practice by strengthening knowledge and skills (Avidov-Ungar & Herscu, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This includes not only the way PD is delivered but also teacher learning (Scherff, 2018). PD, in general, has many different approaches for its delivery: (1) on- or off-site; (2) one-off or with follow-up support; (3) short, middle, or long-term; (4) insider or outsider; or (5) top-down or bottom-up (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012; Sansom, 2020; Seidel & Shavelson, 2007). PD also implies formal activities, individually or collaboratively (King, 2004; Villegas-Reimers, 2003), or informal activities such as “reading professional

publications, watching television documentaries related to an academic discipline, etc.” (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p. 9). PD can be passive or active (Meijs et al., 2016), local and situated in communities of practice (Li & Krasny, 2019), non-formal and social (e.g., coaching), and job-embedded (Scherff, 2018). Finally, PD can be implemented through “1) self-directed learning experiences; 2) formal PD programs; and 3) organizational development strategies” (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999, p. 242).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis has led to more innovative approaches to teaching through online and mobile means, taking traditional PD by surprise. Although there is much literature supporting and discussing teaching and learning at the onset and during the pandemic (Aliyyah et al., 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020; Lepp et al., 2021; Rannastu-Avalos & Siiman, 2020; Robinson-Neal, 2021), few studies have addressed PD during the transition to ERT. Some research interests have included crisis pedagogical strategies in a language teacher program (Castañeda-Trujillo & Jaime-Osorio, 2021), university instructor preparedness and burnout (Izquierdo et al., 2021; Trust & Whalen, 2020), and challenges primary teachers had encountered (Brown et al., 2021). In the same vein, this study contributes to scholarship that explores what foreign language university faculty are doing in worldwide contexts. Such research will facilitate decision making for the design of post-crisis PD that responds to contextually identified needs during challenging times (Watson-Todd, 2020).

This study explored the PD of a group of instructors from a foreign language department in a Colombian private university as they responded to the COVID-19 crisis. We sought to explore the challenges faculty faced and how they met said challenges. In doing so, this research considered the questions: (1) What were the challenges instructors faced in the shift to emergency remote teaching? (2) What strategies or approaches did instructors use to confront these challenges?

## Theoretical Framework

Professional development for online teaching during a crisis such as COVID-19 is full of challenges such as technological problems and knowledge, stress management, and students' engagement. Therefore, it is not only necessary to recognize the traditional needs of PD, but also to address the understanding and use of technology as well as the emotional needs of those involved in it. Thus, our conceptualization of PD is nested in the definitions and ideas provided by three frameworks: PD for teachers, PD integrating technology, and PD for social and emotional learning.

### PD for Teachers

Conventional PD paths for faculty include systematically planned activities in which a teacher engages to develop their skills, knowledge, and expertise (Avidov-Ungar & Herscu, 2020) and improve teaching practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Most generally, PD involves "processes through which teachers learn to learn, learn to teach, and improve their pedagogical, innovation, and research skills in the development of their teaching, extension, and research activities" (Palacios-Sánchez et al., 2017, p. 2). Furthermore, as described by Spilker et al. (2020), PD in education is conceptualized from different perspectives (Kennedy, 2005, 2014), which are derived from models of teacher learning or change (Desimone, 2009; Guskey 2002). This includes a permanent and continuous commitment to tackling learning needs and challenges (Scherff, 2018; Villegas-Reimers, 2003) that encompass both the pedagogical and professional fields as well as the social and personal life of the educator (Cárdenas et al., 2011).

In terms of PD, the Continuing Professional Development Framework (CPD) proposed by the British Council (2015) targets educators of all subjects. This framework involves a plan in which teachers develop their professional competences within four stages of development (i.e., awareness,

understanding, engagement, and integration) and voluntarily engage with 12 distinct professional practices comprising a series of micro-practices. Teachers can move at their own pace through these stages, attaining skills and knowledge and applying these to well-planned and self-directed goals. For the purposes of this study, we focused on seven of those professional practices that seem more relevant during times of crisis. Table 1 summarizes the relevant elements.

Another model presented by TESOL International (n. d.) provides professional teaching standards within the categories of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and performance indicators which is measured by the either *approaching, meeting, or exceeding* the set standards, respectively. Additionally, an online version aimed toward TESOL professionals (TESOL International, 2021) lists activities such as developing materials and sharing ideas, conducting research, writing for publication, becoming lifelong learners, and focusing and investing in personal time and institutional responsibilities to foster PD. Besides the aforementioned areas current PD requires the effective integration of technology into teaching.

### PD Integrating Technology

A consensus in the literature demonstrates the importance of technological expertise and integration regardless of the means of learning (i. e., face-to-face, online, blended, virtual, or remote) which implies knowledge and principles, skills, and an understanding of the techniques and theories that underlie technologically mediated instruction (Okojie et al., 2006). One of the most widely used frameworks to identify technological competencies in teaching is *technological pedagogical content knowledge* (TPACK) (Rientes et al., 2020). The TPACK framework, designed by Mishra and Koehler (2006), integrates content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge. The elements are relevant to current PD needs as the intersection of the three areas demonstrates effective technological



**Table 1** Summary of CPD Professional Practices and Defining Elements

Professional Practice	Defining Elements
Planning Lessons and Courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Learner needs</li> <li>* Learning needs</li> <li>* Anticipating problems</li> </ul>
Understanding Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Making decisions by understanding learners' characteristics</li> <li>* Conducting needs analysis</li> <li>* Reflecting on approaches to understanding learners</li> </ul>
Managing the Lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Responding to unexpected events</li> <li>* Monitoring learning engagement</li> <li>* Checking understanding</li> <li>* Selecting resources</li> </ul>
Managing Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Developing and adapting material</li> <li>* Using materials</li> <li>* Evaluating effectiveness</li> </ul>
Integrating ICTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Developing effective strategies</li> <li>* Promoting autonomous learning by exploiting digital content</li> <li>* Developing strategies for resolving issues</li> </ul>
Assessing Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Applying principles and practice of assessment</li> <li>* Utilizing a range of different types</li> <li>* Using appropriately and providing feedback</li> </ul>
Promoting 21 <sup>st</sup> -Century Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Developing awareness of digital literacy</li> <li>* Creative and critical thinking</li> <li>* Collaboration and communication</li> </ul>

Source: British Council (2015).

pedagogical knowledge (Rientes et al., 2020). This can be seen in Setiawan et al.'s (2019) review of research articles from 2011 to 2017 characterized emerging TPACK development. The authors found a gap in the use of technological tools by in-service teachers, which also seems to be the case for Colombia. Studies in Colombian English classrooms show a passive, consumer approach to integrating technology by focusing on very traditional uses in the classroom (e.g., grammar applications and ready-made worksheets) (García Chamorro & Rey, 2013; Herrera Mosquera, 2017). Regarding teacher use of resources and interaction, Izquierdo et al. (2021) revealed that

teachers lack the “knowledge and experience on the use of software and applications for language education” (p. 674), suggesting the need for teacher PD to focus on an effective use of technology in the classroom.

Studies have reported that teachers often experience a transition period in which they explore new mediums for delivery during a shift from face-to-face to online teaching and, thus, adjust accordingly (Salmon, 2011). Gregory and Salmon (2013) indicated that, during such a shift, teachers will generally revert to an apprenticeship stage (i.e., a more novice role) as they relearn teaching practices for this medium. Therefore, while facing difficulties and taking risks brought about by this transition, their beliefs are challenged. In this sense, support for these teachers is decisive to their development. Hence, Gregory and Salmon (2013) proposed a pedagogical model for a successful shift to online learning, namely: (1) adapt whenever possible; (2) contextualize the learning; (3) create apprenticeship during the online activities; and (4) advocate the ideas and programs provided.

When looking at the literature on faculty development, pre-pandemic scholarship shows a robust body of literature on how institutions have supported PD by integrating technology. Studies on the topic evidence that institutions generally select the approach that best suits their context and resources, use role models, ask students for help using technology, and develop strategies to overcome technophobia (Gregory & Martindale, 2016; Herman, 2012). What can be extracted from the above information is that teachers, in an emerging online environment, need to develop technological knowledge and match the content with the appropriate technology. They also require acquiring knowledge quickly and being willing to work with peers. Furthermore, they need to engage in a facilitation strategy, online course design, and instructional design. Finally, teachers need to manage groups and meet students' needs.

## Social and Emotional Learning

The final aspect is social and emotional learning. Stress can be overwhelming during crises, and while some faculty will demonstrate better coping skills, others' emotions could be detrimental to their success. In times of crisis, there are many concepts to consider, including agency, responsibility, flexibility, and choice, to create an *effective learning ecology* (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). On a similar note, emotional intelligence (EI), self-awareness, and emotional management (inter and intrapersonal processes) are also essential aspects of PD to help ensure teacher effectiveness. As Gregory and Salmon (2013) posit, when educators are forced to modify their teaching practice significantly, some may feel that they relive the experience of being novice teachers. Extremera (2020) suggests working with faculty by enabling and aiding them to discover healthy habits to stay well and learn to deal with negative emotions that could arise over time. By doing this, instructors could also apply these practices to help students check in with their feelings and willingness to participate (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020) and create an environment of empathy and care (Darling-Hammond & Hyster, 2020).

## Method

This section describes the context, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures of this exploratory qualitative study.

### Context

This study was carried out at a private university in Colombia which serves approximately 13,000 undergraduate and graduate students. At this institution, the Department of Foreign Languages has 105 faculty, including tenured, non-tenured, and adjunct professors who teach English, German, French, or Portuguese. During ERT, these instructors were affected by some external challenges including a lack of dependable electricity and internet service as well as difficulties with cell phone

signals which impacted the smooth transition to online teaching and learning.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators began teaching remotely on March 30, 2020, and up to the time we wrote this article, they continued to do so. Before moving to remote classes, instructors were allotted two weeks to prepare for the shift from face-to-face teaching to ERT. During that time, the academic departments of the institution worked to define what ERT would be for their context. Therefore, ERT for this department was conceived as a combination of synchronous and asynchronous sessions with a minimum of two hours per week devoted to synchronous lessons. The other two hours consisted of independent work on which instructors would review and give feedback. In addition, during these two weeks, the university's *Center for Teacher Excellence* offered PD activities and mandatory campus-wide training in the institution's technological platforms to be used. This was delivered in two modalities: Face-to-face and synchronous.

Further workshops focused on organization, lesson planning, and assessment design throughout the remaining part of the academic semester. Other PD, in the form of one-on-one or small group mentoring, collaborative course design, and online training, was offered by our department and related directly to the needs of faculty. These sessions were voluntarily led by the more tech-savvy instructors who offered to help their colleagues.

### Participants

Faculty in the department teach either English, German, French, and Portuguese and are a mixture of Colombian and non-national instructors. All instructors were invited to participate in the study but only 71 accepted the invitation. Participating faculty were informed of the study's parameters and were asked to sign the informed consent. Each of them has been teaching for between 3-30 years at the university level. Concerning online education, some had previous experiences with

**Table 2** Faculty Demographics of Participating Professors

English	Language Program			Nationality	
	French	German	Portuguese	Colombian	Non-national
88 %	4 %	2 %	6 %	79 %	21 %

learning online, but the vast majority had never taught online. Table 2 shows faculty demographics.

### Data Collection and Analysis

At the end of the semester, in order to explore faculty’s PD during the shift to ERT, participants were asked in an open-response survey about the most significant challenges they faced and how they dealt with them. Because of the variety of native languages, participants were asked to answer in English. They were also assigned a number (coded P#) to ensure anonymity.

Data were analyzed by identifying keywords and categorized using content analysis (Elo et al., 2014). Challenges were identified and organized according to the frequency of the responses from the most to the least frequent. In this analysis, ten main challenges emerged as shown in Table 3. To build intercoder reliability, each researcher analyzed the responses individually and then discussed the categories to agree upon the final list.

### Results

When analyzing the ten challenges that instructors reported, three themes became apparent (see Table 3). The first relates to the process that instructors experienced in the transition to remote teaching: *adapting to ERT* (which encapsulates challenges 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8). The second aspect refers to encouraging students to participate in the remote classes: *student engagement* (which comprises challenges 2, 9, and 10). Finally, the third theme reveals the challenge of dealing with both instructors’ and students’ emotions during the time of crisis: *emotional issues* (in which challenge 5 is embedded). The challenges in Table 3 were numbered from most (1) to least (10) frequent.

The following paragraphs describe and illustrate these findings with excerpts from the participants’ survey responses.

### Adapting to ERT

Unsurprisingly, adapting to ERT was the challenge that instructors claimed the most (with 68 % of the total responses), which makes sense since all of them had to shift from face-to-face to remote teaching. This theme encompassed a wide variety of issues and methods that instructors used to cope with and/or mitigate.

**Table 3** Themes and their Associated Challenges

Themes	Associated Challenges	Percentage of incidences
Adapting to ERT	Challenge 1: Learning new technologies	23
	Challenge 3: Issues with electricity or internet connection	17
	Challenge 4: Adapting teaching practice to ERT	13
	Challenge 6: Time spent on grading and giving feedback	6
	Challenge 7: Supporting students’ transition to ERT	5
	Challenge 8: Adapting material to online classes	4
Student engagement	Challenge 2: Level of student engagement or participation	18
	Challenge 9: Students’ refusal to use cameras	3
	Challenge 10: Student absences	3
Emotional issues	Challenge 5: Emotional issues in times of crisis	8



*Learning new technologies* (challenge 1) was the one that instructors reported the most. One instructor (P22) stated that she had to develop her “digital skills and the use of social networks as learning tools [sic].” To face this, instructors learned to use various platforms, apps, software, and Google extensions, through various formal and informal PD activities. The selection and use of different educational technology tools were also influenced by the department’s philosophy of learning, which involved promoting active learners through student-student and student-teacher interaction. Furthermore, teachers took into account the nature of language teaching, which entailed boosting the use of all language skills (i.e., listening, reading, writing, and speaking). As Instructor 31 stated:

Teaching online restricts the type of communicative activities you can do. It is up to the teacher to change aspects of some activities or to leave others out because there is no practical way to do them. There are some virtual platforms and tools that are very useful.

Some technology-based tools that teachers used included Flipgrid and Vocaroo for the development of oral skills; Google Docs for writing; YouTube videos for listening; and Jamboard, Mentimeter, Pear Deck, and Nearpod for interactive classes, among others, as can be observed in the following statement:

I planned the classes in such a way that all the students could be involved and not just listening. I used Mentimeter, breakout rooms, and many activities that allowed the students to feel part of the class and not just observers. (P52)

An interesting finding was that some instructors mentioned having also included students’ suggestions in relation to which technology to employ.

The second factor, *issues with electricity or internet connection* (challenge 3), refers to managing conditions that were external to the class, some of which were entirely out of the hands of instructors while others were under their control. Therefore, in order to cope with this challenge, instructors implemented various actions. First,

to teach online classes successfully, some had to upgrade their computers and their internet capacity. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, electricity and internet services are not entirely reliable in Colombia, thus affecting the adequate delivery of classes for both instructors and students. Thereby, instructors realized that they had to plan in case of interruptions that could occur during their synchronous classes. Some of these strategies included having possible parallel activities with those students who lost connection, creating WhatsApp groups to keep an ongoing communication channel, and changing platforms used for synchronous sessions. Many also recorded their classes to allow students to access them at their convenience. In addition, some instructors decided to extend their office hours and deliver smaller group class sessions to allow students to participate when they could. Furthermore, educators learned to accept that many aspects of the teaching-learning process during ERT were out of their control. One of the instructor’s responses summarizes many of the challenges mentioned above:

The biggest challenges are the lack or failure of internet connection and power outages. Also, there are students who do not have the necessary equipment and only have a cell phone but can’t afford an internet plan. Several students could not connect for many days and they missed everything in the synchronous sessions, they did not send the assignments, and they did not present the scheduled evaluations, so I had to work with them on this. (P4)

Regarding the next aspect, instructors reported that a significant challenge was *adapting teaching practice to ERT* (challenge 4). Some of these changes resulted from formal PD described previously. Others emerged from trial and error, personal experience, sharing insights with colleagues, learning autonomously with tutorials, watching YouTube videos, reading articles, and soliciting direct feedback from students. One instructor asserted that they “had to study videos to learn to use tools like Collaborate, and also learned with the [sic] YouTube tutorials about Meet, Hangouts, Google Classroom, Flipgrid,

etc.” (P4). Instructors also indicated specific strategies that were necessary to adapt from what they usually employed in face-to-face classes such as leaving more time during the sessions for students to ask questions, giving clear instructions, and being flexible with timing and deadlines. In order to create an appropriate online learning environment, instructors mentioned that they maintained a calm attitude when there were issues during synchronous classes. Many of these factors can be seen in the response below:

After listening to the comments of the students, I decided to group the activities by weeks so that they knew with certainty which ones they should do and when. Besides that, I selected the most relevant activities and content for them and for the course, and I focused on them to reduce the stress generated by having many activities due. In this way, I decided to do two or three activities per class and to have them done within the session to avoid conflict with other subjects. (P65)

22

Another adaptation that instructors made concerned the time spent on grading and giving feedback to students (challenge 6). Because of assessment changes to fit the online learning environment and the addition of autonomous student work for the asynchronous classes, instructors stated that in ERT grading assignments required more time. Using their prior experience to face this challenge, instructors, first, invested extra time in these tasks and, second, learned to be more flexible with themselves regarding the time they took and the method they used to grade students’ assignments. For example, some used new tools for grading (e.g., Google Forms, Socrative, Quizizz) and sent oral instead of written feedback via WhatsApp (P43), which they believed saved time.

With regards to students, although they have been called digital natives, the shift to ERT has shown that they are rather social media natives since many struggled to cope with the technology needed to learn remotely. This became the seventh challenge (i.e., *supporting students’ transition to ERT*) for faculty, who not only taught content but

also helped students to adapt to the new means of learning. First, instructors taught their students to use educational technology tools and the platforms through which they delivered their classes. Many claimed that every time a new tool was introduced, they walked students through how to use it. Second, they had to adapt their class plans to include different interaction patterns and activities to keep students engaged. Finally, they adopted an attitude of “being the calm in the storm” (P51) by showcasing patience, understanding, flexibility, and a positive attitude toward students’ struggles.

Finally, adapting material (Challenge 8) was the last aspect identified under the theme of adapting to ERT. Faculty indicated that it was necessary to create or adapt the typical materials they used in their face-to-face classes (P36). For example, if they previously gave students a task to carry out in class, in this modality, they had to transform it through tools such as Liveworksheets, Kahoot, Quizizz, or embedded videos. In order to make sure these materials supported student learning, some instructors asked students to provide feedback. This was one way to keep students at the center of the shift. Instructors also shared student feedback with their colleagues in the process of creating new material collaboratively.

All the aspects stated above were acknowledged by faculty as an opportunity to learn and allowed them to maintain a positive attitude during the transition. One instructor stated that they embraced the shift “with a lot of enthusiasm” and added: “I have learned that challenges are nothing more than opportunities to grow, learn, and prove what you are made of. It was gratifying to see how each day was a new beginning, each day better than the previous one” (P54).

### Student Engagement

One of the challenges of online education, in general, is to maintain students’ attention and offer opportunities to engage with and participate in

class. This was the second most reported theme (with 24 % of the total responses) since it was something that instructors noticed very early in the transition and became a key topic in faculty discussions. The three main aspects identified in this theme included the low level of student engagement, the fact that students did not want to turn on cameras, and student absences.

Instructors met challenge 2 (*level of student engagement or participation*) by initially focusing on bettering their online teaching practice. To do this, they participated in formal PD activities such as attending institutional training and workshops, carrying out autonomous activities including watching webinars or tutorials, and sharing experiences with other instructors. All of these ultimately helped them plan their lessons more appropriately. Additionally, instructors indicated that they needed to adopt positive attitudes toward the online shift in general and students. For example, as mentioned earlier, they became more flexible with assignments' due dates, more attentive to learners' needs, improved communication by creating class WhatsApp groups, and emailed those who were not participating in the class to follow up on them. Instructor 66 emphasized this when he said, "fortunately I had WhatsApp groups because I like to be attentive to the needs and concerns of the students."

The second aspect that instructors noted was the lack of student use of cameras (challenge 9). In the classroom, having visual contact with students would allow faculty to read their body language and adjust the lesson plan and activities accordingly. However, during this transition, many students were loath to turn on their cameras, and instructors felt they missed valuable opportunities to promote a better teaching-learning process. To face this challenge, instructors asserted that they turned on their cameras to model how they felt an appropriate online class should be and invited their students to follow their example (P36).

This was only partially successful, so instructors also had to ensure participation by asking frequent questions, especially about personal application of topics covered in the class. Finally, some of them mentioned that they decided to trust that students were paying attention to the class and not worrying about this aspect.

The last, challenge 10 (*student absences*), relates to decreased students' attendance. This may have been associated with several factors: (1) external issues with electricity and internet service, (2) the waiving of the institutional attendance requirement, and (3) students' attitude and motivation. Since the first two factors were out of instructors' control, they addressed the third aspect by trying to teach more effectively online to motivate students to connect to the synchronous sessions.

The way instructors faced the three challenges of this theme can be summed up in the following quotation:

I addressed the motivation of my students, always keeping in mind the human part and developing interactive classes for them. Regarding the use of the camera, I was always a model for them and had it on throughout the class. I also spoke of the importance of seeing them and that in certain activities it was vital to have the camera on [...] During this transition, I have been active, trying new applications and tools to be able to apply them in my classes. (P34)

### Emotional Issues

Learning has always been influenced by emotional factors. In the pandemic, *emotional issues* (challenge 5) were especially visible during the shift to online environments. Instructors contended that their emotions affected the teaching-learning process, having feelings normally found in novice faculty. This sentiment can be clearly seen in the following quote: "We went through unimaginable times in which the teaching and learning models we knew demanded radical changes. For most teachers, the effects of the pandemic meant working like never before." (P61).

Not only did instructors need to manage their emotions but also the emotions and anxiety expressed by their students. One instructor showed the need “to be able to understand [her] students in their [sic] personal problems. Not everything is academia. Emotions play a very important role in learning” (P21). Therefore, faculty implemented strategies at the student, faculty, and personal levels. At the level of the students, some instructors indicated opening a weekly time during the synchronous session to discuss feelings, creating activities to address the emotional challenges of students, and reporting students to the *Student Services Center* when they identified severe cases of anxiety and depression. Faculty also stated that one way to alleviate their own anxiety was to talk to their colleagues and explore ways to deal with both student and personal emotions. Lastly, several instructors highlighted the need to take care of themselves in order to be able to address the needs of their students. For instance, one instructor remarked that “learning to teach also means learning to take care of yourself, knowing your limits and possibilities. It means meeting with other educators, through collaborative networks that help build learning” (P61). Others did this by exercising, doing yoga, and making time for personal hobbies.

### Discussion

Faculty adaptation to ERT was supported by the PD opportunities offered by the institution. During the time of crisis, the challenges instructors faced and how they met them fostered their PD and learning. In our case, similar to what Watson Todd (2020) found, “many teachers had a healthy attitude towards seeking support where needed and experimenting with different approaches” (p. 11). Instructors recognized the challenges posed by the crisis, were determined to find solutions by being proactive, and embraced the transition to ERT.

This positive attitude helped faculty to adapt strategies to face ERT. These adaptations align

with those identified in the PD literature (Avidov-Ungar & Herscu, 2020; Cochran-Smith et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Sansom, 2020; Scherff, 2018) and the framework proposed by the British Council (2015). In our case, instructors reported that they learned to adapt materials, plan, and manage lessons and resources, and integrate ICTs and content knowledge (Herrera Mosquera, 2017; Mishra & Koehler, 2006) by increasing their TPACK (Cabero-Almenara et al., 2020; Eyo, 2016; García-Pérez et al., 2016; Izquierdo et al., 2021; Porlan & Sanchez, 2016; Rientes et al., 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2020) to be empathetic with learners and to assess learning in this modality (British Council, 2015). In that process, they also adjusted to external contextual issues regarding electricity and internet connections and helped their students adapt to emergency remote learning by providing different pathways to solve emerging challenges.

Furthermore, teachers’ PD was influenced by their own and their students’ emotions. That is to say, the attention they paid to students’ psychological and academic issues was fueled by their own emotions and the uncertainty of the situation. Current PD recognizes the human aspect as part of instructors’ understanding of learners and their needs. In other words, instructors’ increased awareness of the social-emotional side of teaching and learning helped them develop their capacity to focus on emerging needs, recognizing and proposing authentic and formative strategies to, in turn, help create an empathic and caring environment. Therefore, faculty started to incorporate a *humane aspect* into their remote teaching practice to ensure not only students’ cognitive but also their social and emotional presence (Garrison & Anderson, 2005).

Another area where the emotional aspect manifested in teacher development was in the perception that some had of their inability to adjust and adapt sufficiently to this modality despite their previous education and experience. Nevertheless,



when confronting the shift, instructors were able to take control of the situation and reinforce their faculty development to the point of eventually feeling comfortable teaching remotely.

Keeping students engaged and active in remote foreign language courses also impacted strongly faculty's PD. Even though students are often considered digital and social natives (Brandtzaeg, 2016), which is a status that presupposes familiarity with and the use of personal computers, learning management systems, cell phone applications, and social media (Castellanos et al., 2017; Marín, 2013; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2019; Šorgo et al., 2017), they seem not to be as competent in their management of technology as expected. This means that rather than "[being] 'digital natives,' students are 'routine experts,' i.e., they know how to use technology but not intelligently" (Cabero Almenara & Valencia, 2020, p. 222). Hence, in order to promote active learning in the new online environment, instructors learned to integrate more interactive tools that tapped into students' existing knowledge of social media and technology to engage them in effective academic learning.

Another aspect that, for teachers, impeded student engagement was the refusal to turn on cameras and microphones. To support student engagement, instructors learned how to mediate interaction with technology (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) by using features inside the various meeting platforms such as *blur* and *background change*. This was important because, similar to what González (2021) found, ERT has invaded instructors' and students' learning spaces in a way that not only brings a sense of closeness and connection but also discloses living conditions that perhaps many would rather remain private. In addition, this challenge also relates to the fact that in the face-to-face classroom, learners and often instructors are not expected to be constantly the *center of attention* or be seen at all times but rather include faculty-led activities, engagement with materials, or group work. For this reason,

instructors had to learn how to use technology to motivate student participation with respect.

In this study, PD occurred not only by engaging in the external, institutional offer made available to instructors but also through other more bottom-up, faculty-driven strategies. One recurrent area that we noticed was the role that collaboration among peers played in faculty development, similar to what Quezada et al. (2020) discuss. Since successful ERT implementation requires time and effort from teachers, especially in delivering remote language courses and designing materials and assessments to meet students' needs, in this study, many instructors approached this task collaboratively. Cabero-Almenara et al. (2020) indicate that collaborative work stands out as one of the digital competences that instructors must possess. Some of the strategies that they used included tutoring each other on the use of platforms and educational technology tools, sharing materials and assessment, and stimulating PD by sharing articles, tutorials, and research with each other.

The vulnerability instructors experienced when transitioning to ERT seemed to have triggered a need for engaging in PD. In light of this forced shared experience, they learned about themselves and their students as well as technology and its effective use in ERT. Thus, this study has found that a crisis stimulates PD and faculty learning. Surely, as more studies surface on the impact of emergencies, a new body of knowledge will reveal more understanding of how PD takes place and what instructors have learned in different parts of the world.

## Conclusions

We began this paper by exploring the PD process of a foreign language department in times of crisis. In our study, faculty demonstrated a positive attitude to the emergency, the PD opportunities, and what they were learning. When confronted with a particular challenge, faculty displayed agency, responsibility, and flexibility in finding



what worked best for them and their learners. They received support from their peers and made their own informed choices. In addition, instructors coped with negative emotions and empathetically supported their learners in coming to terms with the abrupt change in their lives and educational experiences.

Forced by the crisis, teachers faced ERT by attending educational sessions provided by the institution. As time went on, they began implementing what they learned and took control of their PD through self-directed individual and collaborative learning. Furthermore, the collaboration with their peers strengthened their practice and stimulated the growth of organic learning communities. This study demonstrates how crises can positively affect teachers' PD and learning. Thus, PD happens unexpectedly and perhaps without notice, but it happens.

As teachers begin to return to face-to-face situations, we encourage institutions to use what has been learned during this experience to advance teacher development. We suggest that PD be conceived from a perspective that recognizes teacher agency and knowledge. Hence, this sort of development should include opportunities for instructors to make decisions and choices on what PD they need, how they need it, and for what they need it. The findings reported here are expected to enrich the literature on PD and guide institutional policies regarding future teacher development programs.

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