

Spring 2023

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Recommended Citation

Moser, K., & Wei, T. (2023). Co-Existing with COVID-19: Language Teacher Resiliency in Rural Schools. *The Rural Educator*, 44(2), 30-43. <https://doi.org/10.55533/2643-9662.1358>

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Research Article

Co-Existing with COVID-19: Language Teacher Resiliency in Rural Schools

Kelly Moser
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*Language educators were unprepared for emergency remote language teaching (ERLT) due to lack of training in online pedagogy and negative perceptions of online instruction, and the rural community of language educators have been challenged in unique ways. Using the intersections of content (language teaching), space (rurality), and context (pandemic) as the theoretical framework, this comparative survey study aimed to investigate rural Mississippi language teachers' beliefs and practices to ERLT in comparison to their counterparts nationwide. Two independent samples, one consisting of 94 Mississippi language teachers and the other consisting of 255 national K-12 language teachers, responded to our electronic survey about their ERLT perceptions and practices. Independent-samples *t* tests were conducted to examine participants' responses, and the results indicated that rural Mississippi educators in general adapted significantly better than educators nationwide. Specifically, with the same four dimensions of ERLT practices as revealed by confirmatory factor analysis, Mississippi teachers reported having courses more in line with best practices in online course design with higher levels of interaction within their classes, and higher learner outcomes, while making fewer adjustments in their teaching due to the pandemic. Practical implications are discussed, and recommendations for future research are provided.*

Now into the third year of COVID-19, individuals across the globe report “pandemic fatigue,” (Americares, 2020, “The Crisis” section) ignoring previous safety procedures and returning to *normal*. In Fall 2022, K-12 schools in the United States welcomed millions of unmasked learners piled in adjacent desks (St. George, 2022). The lessons of 2020, however, should not be so quickly forgotten as we continue to co-exist with the various waves of COVID infections (Roy, 2020). Upon the beginning of the 2022-2023 academic year, the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] (2022) reported over 100,000 daily cases. These data mandate flexibility—educators may be teaching learners at home who report ill, delivering instruction to in-person students, or working in hybrid contexts depending on learner needs. Additionally, scientists anticipate the emergence of additional infectious diseases (e.g., Monkeypox) that have the potential to interrupt everyday life, including education (Morens & Fauci, 2020). As a result, teachers must find “the right mix of online vs. F2F [face-to-face] instruction” (Smith & Oskoz, 2021, p. ii) to reach and teach learners who may or may not be present in their physical classrooms, even if for brief, disrupted situations.

When the global pandemic initially forced educators into unfamiliar digital landscapes, the literature revealed that most language educators

(English as a Second or Other Language [ESOL] and World Languages [WL]) were unprepared for emergency remote language teaching (ERLT) due to lack of training in online pedagogy (Russell, 2020) and negative perceptions of online instruction (Blake et al., 2008). K-12 language teachers and those without prior online experiences reported lower learner outcomes (Moser et al., 2021), increased workloads that contributed to high emotion labor (MacIntyre et al., 2020), and a greater likelihood to leave the profession (Moser & Wei, 2021). Despite these important contributions to the literature on ERLT, “very little is known about how teachers in rural schools conduct[ed] online [language] teaching during this pandemic” (Kasuma, 2022, p. 204). This gap is disconcerting as approximately 9.3 million K-12 students are educated in rural spaces (Showalter et al., 2019).

This paper reports the perceptions and experiences of language teachers in the rural South one year following the initial disruption in 2020. The objective of this study was to explore how rural language teachers responded to a survey designed to explore course design, beliefs about online language teaching, and practices to support learners' needs. Specifically, the study aimed to identify any substantive change in perceptions about and practices related to distance education and/or ERLT over time. In particular, this study leads to “deepen[ing] our

understanding of effective approaches and strategies to facilitate online language learning in disruptive times” (Jin et al., 2021, p. vii).

Literature Review: Understanding Rural Communities and Schools

Historically, rural spaces have been characterized as predominantly White, impoverished, and “problems to be solved” (Longhurst & Thier, 2021, p. 101). Such deficit perspectives continue to be challenged by scholars who recognize rural communities as incredibly varied and increasingly diverse, rich in social capital (Hartman, 2021; Rose et al., 2020; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). This transition toward an asset perspective draws attention to schools that “knit the social fabric of rural communities” (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021, p. 8) and their teachers who serve as powerful change agents (Wright & Moser, 2017).

Though there have been significant contributions to the profession regarding the role of place in education including the benefits of living in rural spaces, it cannot be ignored that rural communities are challenged in unique ways. First, over a dozen definitions of *rural* by the federal government all place urban places at the core (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021), failing to represent the great variety in rural communities (White et al., 2022). According to Azano et al. (2020):

Rural schools are found in the rolling hills of farmlands, in the winds of wide-open prairies, nestled in the valleys of mountains, deep in the woods, and on the slopes of desert landscapes. Rural schools may be located in places with natural beauty with amazing opportunities for outdoor recreation. Other rural schools may be in more industrialized settings with oilfields and wind farms. Rural communities may have thriving economies or may be grappling with economic uncertainty and decline. (p. 5)

Though rural communities vary substantially in terms of geography and industry, many are plagued by persistent poverty (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). These economic constraints create a ripple effect: lower land values affect the tax revenue funneled to schools resulting in fewer resources and lower teacher salaries (Azano et al., 2020). As a result, rural spaces report difficulty recruiting teachers (Swanson & Huff, 2010; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Smaller hiring pools force educators to teach outside of their area of expertise (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021) and schools struggle to provide sufficient

professional development to aid and retain their teachers (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

Context of Language Teaching in the United States: Pervasive Challenges

Prior to 2020, almost every state including Mississippi (the focal rural space of this study) reported a shortage of language teachers (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2017) often resulting in merging the responsibilities of both groups (Back, 2020). WL teachers, for instance, often serve their school communities as interpreters and as ESOL educators due to teacher scarcity (Back, 2020). Though professional organizations like the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) have embraced efforts to recruit additional teachers (ACTFL, n.d.), the discipline is most significantly affected by teacher attrition. WL and ESOL are identified as two of the content areas with the highest pre-COVID teacher attrition rate (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Additionally, rural schools and those located in the South have the greatest difficulty attracting and retaining teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Language educators leave their teaching careers for a variety of reasons. Swanson (2012) argued that those who reported low self-efficacy when teaching beginning language students were at a higher risk for early career attrition. Echoing this theme, Acheson et al. (2016) explored the emotion labor of the five rural language teachers who also reported lower confidence in the classroom particularly due to their difficulty motivating students who did not see the benefits of multilingualism. Other researchers have investigated the working conditions of language teachers. In their study, Acheson et al., (2016) referred to poor working conditions that led to an increased attrition of rural language educators. Similarly, López-Gómez and Albright (2009) underscored the relationship between attrition and the onerous tasks of language teachers. They asserted that language educators were expected to engage hundreds of students without adequate resources, often reporting feeling isolated from their colleagues.

The insularity of the profession has also been reported by others in the literature. Mason and Poyatos Matas (2016) found that frequently language teachers were the only individual representing their discipline in their school or district. As a result, language teachers frequently reported being on the periphery of the curriculum (Wright & Moser, 2017;

Swanson, 2012). Some scholars have urged language teachers (ESOL and WL) to collaborate in order to combat this perceived isolation with a common goal of challenging dominant views about the value (or lack thereof) of multilingualism. Such collaboration may be critical given the need to “replenish a weak professional development infrastructure...in the case of language education” (Knight, 2020, p. 303).

Content: Language Teaching During COVID-19

Though all educators have certainly felt the additional demands of teaching during recent and ongoing disrupted times, the aforementioned challenges affecting language teachers have certainly been exacerbated, leading to a precarious future for K-12 rural language education. Numerous studies during the initial onset of the pandemic explored the working conditions of and experiences of language teachers engaged in ERLT. Moser and Wei (2021), for example, predicted the pre-COVID attrition rate to nearly double as a result of such strenuous contexts. They found that perceptions of both online language teaching and learner outcomes were directly related to the educators’ intention to remain in or exit the profession. Further, language teachers described administrative and colleague level support, work factors that the authors found to be predictive factors for retention. Simply, those teachers who reported feeling supported professionally by others felt more satisfied and more likely to confront work-related challenges than those who did not.

One additional factor that contributed to untenable work conditions was related to technology. Decades of literature under the umbrella of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) detail the use of innovative technologies to support language learning (White, 2006). During the pandemic, however, multiple studies suggested that language educators were not trained in online pedagogy (Jin et al., 2021; Moser et al., 2021; Moser & Wei, 2021; Russell, 2020). Though ERLT is different from planned online teaching (Hodges et al., 2020), the multiple requests for training by language teachers implies that they are able to use technology to support in-person learning but not as the mechanism for instructional delivery.

The critical importance of online training echoes pre-COVID calls to modify teacher preparation to reflect the realities of today’s K-12 schools (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). The *2020 Snapshot Report* (Digital Learning Collaborative [DLC], 2020) continues to indicate that K-12 enrollment in planned

online classes is growing thereby demonstrating a need for training in online pedagogy during teacher training. According to the report, 21 states offer K-12 virtual schools with over one million students enrolled collectively. Further, nine states require or highly encourage online experiences prior to graduation from high school (DLC, 2018)—a trend that is likely to continue in the future. Additionally, in this post-pandemic era, schools lean more heavily on technology when emergencies unexpectedly disrupt traditional in-person schooling. Reports suggest that only 20% of school districts across the country have reserved school closure days due to weather rather than shift to remote instruction (Cray & Ome, 2021). In early 2021 *Ice Storm Viola*, for instance, led to preemptive decisions to engage in remote instruction rather than cancel school for K-12 learners. Most recently, a water availability crisis caused public schools in Mississippi’s state capital to shift toward digital delivery (James, 2022). As a result, in one form or another “online instruction will be an inevitable part of teachers’ duties in the future” (Barbour et al., 2013, p. 63).

Space: Rurality and the Technological Infrastructure

For rural communities, online education has been instrumental in providing access to content and resources that are otherwise unavailable (Holia et al., 2014; Schwirzke et al., 2018; Slaughter, 2019). The teacher supply crisis has forced administrators to rely on online courses (Hannun & Adams, 2009). WL is the discipline with the highest online enrollment, nearly doubling from 2014-2017 (Digital Learning Collaborative, [DLC], 2019). Unfortunately, during the pandemic, many educators could not reach their learners in digital spaces due to the poor technological infrastructure. Over five million individuals living in the United States are living in internet poverty defined by its affordability, quantity, and quality of the service (World Data Lab, n.d.). In rural areas, approximately one-quarter of inhabitants lack access to reliable broadband internet (United States Department of Agriculture, n.d.). In their study of rural Native American learners, Bear et al. (2021) described learners’ contexts that made it impossible to interact with their teachers digitally: no electricity to charge devices, weak cellular signals, and long distances to access free wireless internet. On the contrary, in their study of national K-12 language teachers and ERLT course design, Moser et al. (2021) found that no difference emerged regarding

geo-spatial context and instead highlighted the perceived negative learner outcomes despite all educators having reported designing their classes well. They reported that educators sent paper packets to students, made phone calls to families, and risked their own safety by visiting learners in their homes (Moser & Wei, 2021). Simply, the lack of dependent technology to support out-of-classroom learning forced all language teachers across the country to enact ERLT *without* technology. As a result, it is not surprising that the return to in-person schools was up to eight times more likely in rural spaces than in suburban or urban communities (Longhurst & Thier, 2021).

Research Questions

In summary, the review of literature revealed the intersections of *content* (language teaching), *space* (rurality), and *context* (pandemic), which serve as the framework for our investigations. We hypothesized that rurality influenced these language teachers' self-reported perceptions about ERLT, how technology informed their praxis, and ultimately, how they enacted instruction throughout continuous, disrupted environments. The following research questions undergirded the current study:

1. What are rural Mississippi language teachers' beliefs and practices related to emergency remote language teaching (ERLT) and planned online instruction one year into the pandemic?
2. Are there any differences in such ERLT beliefs and practices between these participants and the national sample measured at the onset of the pandemic?

Method

Samples

Data for the current study were drawn from two independent samples representing two different populations of language educators: (1) the Mississippian Support for Online Language Teaching (SOLT) applicants, who were Mississippi language teachers during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years, and (2) national K-12 language teachers who were engaged in online and/or ERLT during the 2019-2020 term. Both groups of participants completed the survey questions related to online, hybrid, and/or emergency remote teaching during those years.

Mississippian Support for Online Language Teaching (SOLT) Sample. Mississippi has been

labeled repeatedly as a *high priority* state according to the most recent *Why Rural Matters* report (Showalter et al., 2019). Approximately half of Mississippi's learners are enrolled in a rural school, and nearly 75% of students qualify for free or reduced cost lunch (NCES, 2017). Many learners in the state lack access to a computer. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2020) reported that approximately one-fifth of Mississippi students do not have access to a computer, and 41% lack reliable broadband internet. The state spends much less than the national average per pupil, and teacher salaries are among the lowest in the country.

Following IRB approval, in Spring 2021, one year after the global COVID-19 pandemic disrupted American schooling, the researchers advertised a professional development workshop, Support for Online Language Teaching (SOLT), supported by the United States Department of Education through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief fund. The workshop was advertised through the Mississippi Department of Education who shared details with K-12 school principals, ESOL coordinators, and certified teachers. The researchers also shared recruitment material via the state's WL and ESOL language teaching associations. Within 48 hours of opening the electronic application system via Qualtrics, over 200 teachers had applied. The goal of the SOLT application system was to ensure that participants were K-12 language teachers, represented various rural areas of the state, and were supported by school administrators to participate in SOLT. Because these teachers were working in Mississippi, understanding their context is important to make sense of the findings related to how they enacted ERLT.

All SOLT applicants were asked to complete a set of survey questions related to their ERLT experiences during COVID-19 as part of their application, and a total of 94 K-12 language educators were selected from the over 200 SOLT applicants to form the sample for the current study. The majority of the 94 participants ($n = 80$, 85.1%) were female; approximately 46.8% ($n = 44$) were teaching ESOL, 23.4% ($n = 22$) were teaching Spanish, and the remaining 29.8% ($n = 28$) were educators of another language (e.g., French, German) or multiple languages concurrently. Prior to COVID-19, only 12.8% ($n = 12$) reported having taught a language class fully online, and 7.4% ($n = 7$) had taught a hybrid language class (a class that includes both in-person and online experiences). Only 8.5% ($n = 8$) of the educators had completed any training in

Table 1

Mode of Delivery Reported by Mississippian Support for Online Language Teaching (SOLT) Applicants During COVID-19

Mode of Delivery	Spring 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Online and required	23 (25.8%)	15 (16.9%)	15 (16.9%)
Online and optional	24 (27.0%)	4 (4.5%)	2 (2.2%)
Remote and required	6 (6.7%)	3 (3.4%)	1 (1.1%)
Remote and optional	13 (14.6%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)
Hybrid	0 (0.0%)	37 (41.6%)	46 (51.7%)
In-person	0 (0.0%)	20 (22.5%)	17 (19.1%)
Other	23 (25.8%)	9 (10.1%)	7 (7.9%)

online language teaching. At the time of completing the survey instrument, Mississippi participants had been teaching during COVID-19 for approximately one year. Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of mode of delivery used by these Mississippian language educators during COVID-19 across three semesters. As shown in the table, a majority of them returned to hyflex or in-person teaching starting in Fall 2020. For the purposes of this study, hyflex teaching includes in-person learning for those who opted to be in the classroom as well as online instruction for those learners who either opted to remain out of the classroom or for those who were ill and needed to quarantine at home for some time.

National K-12 Language Teacher Sample. The previous survey study by the authors (Moser et al., 2021) relied on a national sample of both K-12 and post-secondary language teachers. For this comparative survey study, the 255 K-12 participants' responses were used. Similar to the Mississippian sample, a majority of the national sample were female ($n = 227$, 89.4%), and their age and years of teaching were evenly distributed across all response categories from the survey. The majority of the participants were teaching Spanish ($n = 96$, 38.6%); however, many educators were also responsible for multiple languages ($n = 56$, 22.5%) or teaching French ($n = 36$, 14.5%), German ($n = 34$, 13.7%), or ESOL ($n = 34$, 13.7%). Additional demographic data related to the two participant groups are summarized in Table 2.

Instrument

The survey instrument was designed to understand language course features and educators' experiences and perceptions of online versus emergency remote language teaching. Respondents of the survey were asked to provide demographic

(e.g., age, gender) and contextual information (e.g., grade of teaching, teaching setting), share their experiences with online language teaching prior to COVID-19, and then rate a set of questions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*) about their emergency online teaching during COVID-19. Additional details related to the survey design and analysis of the national sample can be found in Moser et al. (2021). It is worth noting that data for the current study were collected prior to the beginning of the SOLT workshop; therefore, both groups of participants answered the same 22 Likert-scale items about their emergency online teaching during the same period of time, making it possible for us to conduct groupwise comparisons to further examine potential differences between rural language educators from Mississippi and nationwide.

Analysis

To examine whether language educators in rural Mississippi and nationwide shared similar experiences and perceptions of their online language teaching during COVID-19, independent-samples *t* tests were performed at the item level. Additionally, the authors explored whether the four-factor structure identified in Moser et al. (2021): Design (Cronbach $\alpha = .76$), Interaction (Cronbach $\alpha = .81$), Outcomes (Cronbach $\alpha = .72$), Adjustments (Cronbach $\alpha = .73$), also applied to the SOLT applicants.

This second analysis relied on confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) via *Mplus* v.8 followed by groupwise comparisons at the factor level.

Results

The results of the series of independent-samples *t* tests are presented in Table 3. Significant between-group differences are found in the ratings of 15 out of the 22 items, and the effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) suggest

Table 2

Demographic Breakdown of Mississippian Support for Online Language Teaching (SOLT) Applicants and National Survey Participants

Variable	Mississippian SOLT (N = 94)		National Survey (N = 255)	
	<i>n</i>	<i>valid %</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>valid %</i>
Gender				
Female	80	85.1%	227	89.4%
Male	14	14.9%	24	9.4%
Other	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
Prefer not to disclose	0	0.0%	2	0.8%
Missing	0	--	1	--
Age				
21–30	18	19.1%	29	11.4%
31–40	21	22.3%	67	26.4%
41–50	33	35.1%	90	35.4%
51–60	19	20.2%	55	21.7%
61 or older	2	2.1%	11	4.3%
Prefer not to disclose	1	1.1%	2	0.8%
Missing	0	--	1	--
Language Taught				
English as a Second Language (ESL)	44	46.8%	34	13.7%
Spanish	22	23.4%	96	38.6%
Multiple Languages	12	12.8%	27	10.8%
Others	9	9.6%	13	5.2%
French	3	3.2%	36	14.5%
Classics	3	3.2%	1	0.4%
German	1	1.1%	34	13.7%
Chinese	0	0.0%	8	3.2%
Missing	0	--	6	--
Years of Teaching				
1–5	28	25.7%	43	16.9%
6–10	24	22.0%	49	19.2%
11–15	19	17.4%	56	22.0%
16–20	19	17.4%	38	14.9%
More than 20	19	17.4%	69	27.1%
Missing	43	--	0	--
Primary Teaching Assignment				
Preschool/Early Childcare	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
Elementary/Grades K–5	32	34.0%	41	16.1%
Middle/Grades 6–8	13	13.8%	48	18.8%
Secondary/Grades 9–12	49	52.1%	165	64.7%
Current Teaching Setting				
Public K–12	94	100.0%	218	85.8%
Public Charter	0	0.0%	4	1.6%
Private K–12	1	0.9%	30	11.8%
Other	0	0.0%	2	0.8%
Missing	0	--	1	--

that such differences are small-to-medium ($0.20 < |Cohen's d| < 0.50$) for 10 items, medium-to-large ($0.20 < |Cohen's d| < 0.50$) for three items, and large ($|Cohen's d| > 0.80$) for two items. Specifically, the rural Mississippi participants reported significantly

higher levels of agreement for Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 13, 18, 21, and 22 and significantly lower levels of agreement for Items 15, 17, 19, and 20. These results suggest that Mississippian language educators generally adapted better to ERLT than their

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Results of Independent-Samples t Tests by Question

Item	Mississippian SOLT		National Survey		Independent Samples <i>t</i> Test		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
1. My online course was/is very detailed. [For example, it may include modules with instructions for learners and common objectives.]	3.60	0.99	2.97	1.27	4.45***	202.50	0.53
2. My content was/is shared with students through a learning management system (e.g., Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle, Google Classroom, etc.).	4.65	0.82	4.29	1.22	2.92**	233.94	0.33
3. I reach(ed) out to students frequently (3-5 times per week) through email and/or announcements.	4.31	0.90	3.85	1.21	3.56***	215.36	0.41
4. My students were/are aware of when/how frequently I am online to assist them and/or provide feedback.	4.43	0.85	4.09	1.07	2.58*	276.00	0.33
5. My course included/includes opportunities for students to interact with one another synchronously (at the same time)	3.56	1.27	3.06	1.42	2.94**	178.81	0.37
6. My course included/includes opportunities for students to interact with one another asynchronously (but not at the same time).	3.02	1.25	3.18	1.36	-0.94	279.00	-0.12
7. My course included/includes opportunities for students to interact with me (the educator) synchronously (at the same time).	4.14	0.97	3.72	1.25	3.06**	207.01	0.36
8. My course included/includes opportunities for students to interact with me (the educator) asynchronously (not at the same time).	3.99	1.04	4.21	1.01	-1.65	279.00	-0.21
9. My course included/includes opportunities to build a rapport with students and between students (e.g., a community of learners).	3.58	1.10	3.30	1.11	1.95	278.00	0.25
10. My course included/includes authentic examples of language and/or culture.	4.05	0.83	4.10	0.97	-0.47	278.00	-0.06
11. My course was/is designed to afford learners with opportunities to collaborate with native speakers.	2.84	1.19	2.26	1.20	3.69***	278.00	0.48
12. I provide(d) written or verbal feedback at least once per week.	4.08	0.96	3.93	1.08	1.14	278.00	0.15
13. My students did/are doing as well (or better) regarding class work than prior to COVID-19.	2.63	1.04	2.24	1.02	2.90**	278.00	0.38
14. My language learners appear(ed) more anxious than prior to COVID-19.	3.38	1.07	3.54	1.18	-1.12	278.00	-0.15
15. I have altered my grading policies or procedures during COVID-19.	3.86	1.02	4.43	0.90	-4.69***	279.00	-0.61
16. I made accommodations due to differences in student access to tools and/or technology during COVID-19.	4.36	0.68	4.28	0.96	0.78	222.23	0.09
17. I made accommodations due to differences in my students' ability to balance school and other responsibilities during COVID-19.	4.06	0.93	4.31	0.91	-2.11*	279.00	-0.27
18. I learned new things about my students during COVID-19.	4.24	0.83	3.86	0.99	3.18**	279.00	0.41
19. I reduced the amount of work during COVID-19 that my students might normally complete in a typical semester.	3.84	0.99	4.59	0.77	-6.26***	132.00	-0.90
20. My language learners seem(ed) less motivated or less engaged during COVID-19.	3.60	1.21	4.15	1.03	-3.63***	141.31	-0.50

21. I would be interested in teaching online again in the future.	4.08	0.86	2.91	1.32	8.86***	241.14	0.98
22. I accomplished all of my main objectives related to my class.	3.10	0.97	2.55	1.22	4.06***	201.70	0.48
Design (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$)	4.16	0.54	3.92	0.74	-3.02**	217.82	-0.35
Interaction (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$)	3.77	0.85	3.36	1.05	-3.46***	199.34	-0.41
Outcomes (Cronbach's $\alpha = .65$)	2.90	0.61	2.20	0.86	-7.81***	225.87	-0.89
Adjustments (Cronbach's $\alpha = .69$)	4.09	0.68	4.34	0.74	2.65**	279.00	0.34

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

counterparts nationwide with only a few exceptions. For example, one year into the pandemic, Mississippian educators did not report altering their grading policies (Item 15), accommodating students' technology needs (Item 16), or reducing the amount of coursework (Item 19) as much as educators nationwide at the onset of the health crisis.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed that the four factors—Design (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, & 12), Interaction (Items 5, 7, & 9), Outcomes (Items 13, 20, 21, & 22), and Adjustments (Items 15, 16, & 17)—also fit the Mississippi data well, $\chi^2(113) = 135.56$, $p = .07$, CFI = .91, TLI = .89, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .05, 90% CI [.00, .08], $p(\text{RMSEA} \leq .05) = .52$, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = .09. Because the 22-item scale demonstrated good factorial validity across both participant groups, composite scores were calculated by averaging the item scores of each subscale. Independent-samples t tests were then conducted at the factor/subscale level. As also shown in Table 3, the Mississippi participants scored significantly higher in Design, Interaction, and Outcomes but significantly lower in Adjustments. As a result, these data suggest that Mississippi teachers reported having courses more in line with best practices in online course design with higher levels of interaction within their classes, and higher learner outcomes. However, these same educators reported making fewer adjustments in their teaching as well as modifications regarding expectations of their learners due to the pandemic.

Discussion

This study was undertaken to learn more about how rural Mississippi language teachers perceived and enacted ERLT one year after the initial onset of COVID-19. The results suggest that one year past its initial onset, these rural teachers in Mississippi were more aware of instructional design for online courses including integrating opportunities for interaction between students and between the students and educator. However, these teachers initiated a new

norm—one that no longer required them to make significant adjustments to their instruction or lower their expectations for their learners. Confirming the findings of Longhurst and Thier (2021), these rural Mississippi teachers were most likely to teach learners in person one year into the pandemic, relying on technology primarily to reach learners who opted to or were required to learn from their homes.

The findings that differentiated rural Mississippi teachers from others with regard to ERLT might be explained in two ways. First, it would be remiss not to recognize the difference in timing of data collection. That is, the national sample had only been engaged in ERLT for two months. At that time, educators and their learners were thrust into digital teaching and learning, thereby reducing their sense of agency (Russell, 2020). Teachers were unprepared for emergency contexts as well as online instruction. Further, they struggled to balance personal and professional responsibilities that led to nebulous boundaries between work and home (Moser & Wei, 2021). They reported high emotion labor, a consequence of worrying about their learners' wellbeing and finding it difficult to reach and teach their learners. Many teachers considered leaving the profession—potentially increasing the already high attrition rate of language teachers across the country (Moser & Wei, 2021). It is only logical to attribute lower outcomes, increased accommodations, and poorer design features to these circumstances. After all, educators were simply trying to survive.

A second potential explanation for the differences reported by these rural language teachers is intrinsically tied to place. Rural teachers are not unaccustomed to adversity. Rather, rural teachers routinely thrive rather than merely survive under challenging contexts such as high learner poverty and increasing workloads. According to Gu and Day (2013), "resilience is not primarily associated with the capacity to 'bounce back'... but, rather, the capacity to maintain equilibrium and a sense of commitment and agency in the everyday worlds in which teachers teach" (p. 26). The rural teachers of

this study were likely accustomed to surpassing obstacles; the pandemic may have just produced an additional hiccup in their professional journeys. Because COVID affected learners globally, they may have had less of an influence on teacher resilience than microsystems such as classroom behavior, learner motivation, or school policies (Morgan et al., 2010). If resilience is connected to how teachers perceived and enacted ERLT, several factors are valuable for stakeholders as they work toward supporting educators and their learners during the pandemic and beyond. Exploring these factors can “contribute to the development of teachers’ resilience, thus, helping teachers survive and grow in emergency situations” (Liu et al., 2022, p. 5).

Collaborative Networks

Because the teachers of this study all desired to participate in a professional development workshop as a result of the pandemic, the role of collaboration in rural teacher resiliency cannot be underestimated. At the very least, the teachers in this study desired engaging with one another through professional learning, a critical factor in language teacher retention (Mason, 2017). Research on professional development highlights the scarcity of opportunities for rural language educators (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). For those who can find and take advantage of existing professional learning, many criticize them for failing to connect to their needs and interests (Calvert, 2016). However, when designed well, rural language educators have reported changing their practice and increasing their knowledge base related to online pedagogy (Beriswell et al., 2016; Moser & Wei, 2023). When professional development leads to increased self-efficacy, teachers are more likely to “conceptualize problems as challenges rather than threats” (Daniilidou, 2020, p. 554).

Many studies have explored the role of teacher-to-teacher support and resiliency. Román et al. (2021), for instance, found that teachers relied on one another, increasing their sense of agency and mediating their instruction in order to co-exist with the pandemic. The educators in their study minimized the insular nature of the profession through digital collaborations and challenged the systemic constraints such as unequal access to technology and resources. A study of high school teachers across various disciplines underscored the role of teacher support in professional enjoyment (Brunetti, 2006). Additionally, in their literature review of teacher resilience, Kangas-Dick and O’Shaughnessy (2020)

emphasized the importance of contextual factors such as trusting relationships with colleagues. Similarly, Gu and Day (2013) found that positive relationships with other professionals were critical in retaining resilience, especially for those educators who were working with impoverished learners. Additionally, Morgan et al. (2010) asserted that teachers can overcome micro-level obstacles that threaten resilience when surrounded by a professional network.

Because collaboration is critical in retaining resilient teachers, school leaders should make a concerted effort to fund targeted teacher professional development. It may be critical to focus on mid- and late-career teachers who may be less inclined than novice educators to engage with others through professional membership and joint work (Easterly III & Myers, 2017). In addition, simple steps to reduce the insular nature of the profession by supporting co-planning and co-teaching may provide an economical alternative to professional development when schools face budget constraints.

Supportive Leadership

Teacher support is not solely related to teachers’ relationships with one another. Rather, studies consistently point to the role of supportive leadership within school communities. Gu and Day (2013), for example, found that resilience was directly linked to administrative support. In their study of rural language teachers engaged in professional development related to ERLT, Moser and Wei (2021) identified a relationship between teacher retention and administrative support. Simply, those language teachers who felt supported by their school leaders were more likely to remain in the profession beyond the pandemic. In a study of 15 rural districts in Tennessee, scholars (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2021) made several recommendations to build teacher resiliency including building networks and opportunities for school leaders to collaborate; and training school leaders to support educators. School leaders particularly need training to learn how to better support the teachers working in today’s challenging and disrupted environments. This is vital because less resilient teachers are more likely to exit the profession, and teacher turnover adversely affects learner outcomes. Further teacher leavers contribute to a significant economic burden on schools, as great as \$4000 per rural teacher leaver (Adnot et al., 2016).

Training in Resilience

Though resilience has been identified historically as a personal attribute (Brunetti, 2006), scholars now recognize its dynamic nature, the complex interaction between internal and external systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Gu & Day, 2013). Gu and Day (2013) claimed that resilience is directly tied to context: school leadership, learner engagement, relationships with colleagues, and professional responsibilities. Others recognized personal characteristics such as devotion to learners as critical in teacher resilience (Stanford, 2001).

Though context can certainly erode resilience (e.g., accountability that may devalue educators or reduce teacher agency) or lead to its growth (e.g., teacher self-efficacy, professional support), Wuest and Subramaniam (2021) argued that “the behaviors, thoughts and actions associated with resilience can be learned, developed and strengthened” (p. 8). As a result, teacher preparation and in-service programs should consider how to train teachers in resiliency. One suggestion in the literature is to engage teachers in reflective practice. Several scholars have explored the role of teacher reflection in developing and sustaining resilience (Ayoobiyan & Rashidi, 2021). One study, for example, explored teacher journaling and found that positive experiences had a greater impact on commitment to the profession than negative events (Morgan et al., 2010). Similarly, Ayoobiyan and Rashidi (2021) asserted that “teacher reflection can be a predictor of their resilience.” (p. 302). Teachers who reflect on daily occurrences can be empowered by positive events rather than dissuaded by those less-than-positive occurrences. Further, if teacher preparation identifies ways to support and nurture teacher resilience early in their careers, schools would benefit significantly. First, they would not be required to devote time, energy and money toward replacing teachers who leave their schools. Most importantly, because teachers also serve as role models for students, resilient teachers

are needed if we want resilient students (Brunetti, 2006).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Though the results of this study revealed that one year into the pandemic these rural teachers reported better designed online classes, improved learner outcomes, and needing to make fewer adjustments as a result of the health crisis, several limitations are worth noting. First, the study relied on teachers’ self-reported data. Future investigations might include qualitative methodologies to explore teachers’ practices in action. Further, studies can explore if the authors’ hypothesis related to resilience is indeed connected to the changes these teachers reported one year into the pandemic. Second, it is important to recognize that the participants of this study were rural Mississippi educators. Generalizing the results to other contexts (e.g., rural areas in general; other content areas) should be done with caution.

Conclusion

These rural teachers had already begun to find their way back to *normal*, particularly as most had returned to their classrooms to teach their language learners in-person. In her essay, “Pandemic is a Portal,” author and political activist, Arundhati Roy argued, “nothing could be worse than returning to pre-pandemic(s) normality. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break from the past and imagine their world anew” (n.p.). Perhaps, *normal* for these rural teachers did not imply a return to the status quo. Instead, their resiliency led them to reimagine their teaching--including designing online classes well to provide instruction to those learners who needed to connect digitally while simultaneously engaging learners physically in their schools. Clearly, developing and sustaining resiliency in teachers can have a positive effect on all stakeholders as we continue to reach learners even when challenged by disrupted events.

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Suggested Citation:

Moser, K.M., & Wei, T. (2023). Co-existing with COVID-19: Language teacher resiliency in rural schools. *The Rural Educator*, 44(2), 30-43.

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