

# Chapter 12

## Educating French Teachers in the Digital Era



Karen Ferreira-Meyers, Albertus Barkhuizen, and Karin Schmid

**Abstract** The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly influenced teaching and learning in and of French and has propelled all stakeholders towards integrating easily accessible digital technologies in their endeavours. One of the important shortcomings made visible since the advent of the pandemic is the apparent lack of appropriate skills to teach online on the part of teachers in general and French teachers in particular. It was, therefore, essential to find out whether teachers of French had been trained in the past and whether any continuous professional development had assisted them during the pandemic (and possibly beyond). Thus, in this chapter, we examine the ways in which teachers of French in Southern Africa (in particular in South Africa and neighbouring Eswatini) are trained at both pre- and in-service levels. It is noted that, for a long time (more than 30 years), French teacher education has undergone little or no change (curriculum, pedagogical approaches, etc.). Digitisation of teacher training and professional practices is needed to ensure that teachers are well equipped to assist learners from various socio-economic backgrounds to become fully-fledged 21st-century citizens, able to contribute to societal development. In order to adapt teacher training to the current demands of technological transformation, we first need to understand the levels of training obtained regarding teaching with technology, the skill sets acquired and the ways in which they were acquired. We gathered data through a survey sent to 200 French teachers and lecturers in Eswatini and South Africa. After data analysis, we recommend that further training is necessary to adapt to the digitisation of teaching and learning and to implement pedagogical approaches suited to the current (and future) digital era. Our recommendations further include the importance of creating digital spaces for teachers to engage, share and collaboratively

---

K. Ferreira-Meyers (✉)

Institute of Distance Education, University of Eswatini, Kwaluseni, Eswatini  
e-mail: [karenferreirameyers@gmail.com](mailto:karenferreirameyers@gmail.com)

A. Barkhuizen

Department of Afrikaans & Dutch, German & French, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

K. Schmid

School of Languages and Literatures, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

develop content as well as the raising of awareness of the benefits of Open Educational Resources (OER).

**Keywords** French teachers · Southern Africa · Digital era · Competencies · Teacher education

## 12.1 Introduction

Using ICT and multimedia resources in teaching, foreign languages has a number of important advantages which mainly stem from the multidimensional presentation of educational information and the creation of a more natural—albeit virtual—environment for learning a foreign language, especially in countries where a particular language is not part of the linguistic ecology (in the countries under study here, a non-Francophone context). This is the case with the French in South Africa and Eswatini. Offering online platforms to learners gives them an opportunity to see, hear, write and speak a foreign language which they would otherwise not frequently encounter in their personal and professional environments.

While the importance of using ICT and multimedia resources has been highlighted by numerous researchers (see our literature review), it is not evident to find teachers who are well equipped to apply these tools efficiently and effectively. Indeed, we hypothesise that little is done to adequately prepare French teachers before they start practising (pre-service training) or even during their professional life (in-service training). This lack of appropriate, timely training became even more apparent when the COVID-19 pandemic hit us hard in March 2020. Schools and university campuses were closed and teaching and learning had to go remote/online.

In this chapter, we look at how well (in terms of teaching experience, teaching qualifications, knowledge, and skills relating to the use of technology for education) teachers were prepared, before the pandemic and how they were able to adapt (during the pandemic) when confronted with curriculum changes, a shift in teaching methodology, and different personal and professional challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also take a closer look at whether the French teachers were offered any (online) workshops/continuous training to assist them in dealing with the transformations brought about by the pandemic.

## 12.2 Context

As indicated above, our focus is on Southern Africa—in particular, South Africa and Eswatini. French is taught in both countries as a foreign language (FLE—*Français Langue Étrangère*), in addition to a first language and a second language. In 2017, there were over 225 public and private educational institutions in South Africa offering the opportunity to learn French. This included a network of approximately

13 Alliances Françaises, 197 high schools and 14 universities. In Eswatini, French is part of the school curriculum (in selected primary and secondary schools) and the language is taught in teacher training colleges (2), at universities (2), and at the Alliance Française de Mbabane.

In both countries, public and private schools use different curricula. They have human and infrastructural resource differences, too. This has an impact on the quality and outcomes of teaching and learning in these institutions.

## 12.3 Literature Review

### 12.3.1 *Changing Times*

There are several factors that can be associated with the noticeable shift towards the deepening of the use of ICTs in education. Amongst these factors is the 21st-century skill set required by learners to be global citizens and to find employment in a post-industrial economy. This set of skills comprises elements such as “creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving; communication and collaboration; autonomy and flexibility; and lifelong learning”, all of which are made possible through the use of ICTs and competencies in digital literacy (Warschauer 2011, p. 13). In order for learners to be fully equipped to succeed in the digital world, educators need to be adequately trained and prepared for the integration of ICTs in the teaching and learning environment. Malinina remarks that “the most important thing about ICT in education is not the government policy but teachers themselves, their attitude towards ICTs, their knowledge and skills to work with it, their willingness to use it and readiness to further education in this domain” (Malinina 2015, p. 75).

### 12.3.2 *International Teacher Training Benchmarks*

Several frameworks for teacher training that involve the use of ICT have been developed since the 1990s in an attempt to create policies and set standards for international benchmarking. These frameworks aim to accommodate the rapidly changing role of technology and to ensure its successful implementation in educational environments. Several key frameworks have been developed by organisations such as UNESCO and the European Commission (Murotova and Kavilova 2020). The European e-Competence Framework provides a broad overview of skills in ICT that are required in various sectors (including education), and these are divided into five e-competence processes, namely: Plan-Build-Run-Enable-Manage (European e-Competence Framework 2014).

A framework that is perhaps more relevant to the area of language teaching is the ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (ICT-CFT) developed by UNESCO. This

framework describes three phases of knowledge acquisition (technology literacy, knowledge deepening, and knowledge creation) over six main areas:

- Understanding ICT in education (understanding and implementing policies)
- Curriculum and assessment (knowledge acquisition)
- Pedagogy (integration of technology)
- ICT (use of tools)
- Organisation and administration
- Teacher professional learning (regarding digital literacy) (UNESCO 2018).

This framework is an invaluable tool for evaluating the current policies and teachers' competencies with regard to the use of ICTs in education. Once the needs in each of these areas have been determined, the direction that teacher training needs to take will become apparent. This will ultimately allow educational institutions to bring their goals in line with the new requirements of the digital age.

### ***12.3.3 Digital Literacies***

With regard to the various competencies for the use of ICTs in education, these can be considered in terms of digital literacies. According to Hockly et al. (2014, p. 2), digital literacies are “the individual and social skills needed to effectively interpret, manage, share and create meaning in the growing range of digital communication channels”. These skills can be categorised into four main groups: “language and the communication of meaning” (examples include “print literacy, multimedia literacy and mobile literacy”); information (involving “search literacy, information literacy and filtering literacy”); connections (such as “network literacy, participatory literacy and intercultural literacy”); and (re-)design (which is primarily “remix literacy”). In simple terms, a person who is digitally literate is not only able to use various technologies but also able to search, filter, evaluate and use information retrieved through digital channels, participate in online communities through the sharing and distributing of information, and create resources by using digital media (Jose 2016).

The need for these literacies came about due to the development of Web 2.0, consisting of a range of tools (blogs, wikis and various social networking sites) that allows for the active participation in the production and sharing of knowledge by members of a worldwide community. Web users are, therefore, no longer “passive consumers of information” but “active contributors to a shared culture” (Hockly et al. 2014, p. 3).

Digital literacy in the field of language teaching and digital learning can be further subdivided into digital technical literacy, digital linguistic competency, digital multimedia competency, and telecommunication competency (Biletska et al. 2021).

### ***12.3.4 Recent Developments***

One of the most noticeable shifts in education in recent years which was further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic is the inclusion of social networks such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram in the pedagogical domain. These networks can be seen to “enhance pedagogical communication, facilitate interactive learning organisation, and strengthen communities of learners and teachers” (UNESCO 2018). However, one of the common risks associated with the frequent use of these networks is a strain on mental health. Other possible effects are “online bullying and harassment” and “discriminatory speech” (ibid.). Teacher training programmes, therefore, need to address these issues and prepare teachers to mitigate the negative effects of social networks.

The use of mobile technologies in the sphere of education has also seen an increase in recent years. Devices such as smartphones and tablets allow for easy access to the Internet and have the added possible benefit of offering a personalised learning environment (ibid.). Their inclusion in the teaching and learning environment can greatly increase access to education if the necessary infrastructure such as WiFi is in place, or data is made available at a reasonable price. Consequently, teacher training needs to develop the knowledge and skills to adequately incorporate these devices in teaching methodologies.

Another promising development in the digital domain is the possibility of using or adapting Open Educational Resources (OER). These resources support educational transformation in that they are readily available to teachers on the Web without any payment or licensing required (ibid.). They can be adapted by teachers to their own educational contexts, which saves time, thereby offsetting one of the main drawbacks of the use of ICTs—time consumption. However, knowing how to access and filter the various resources that are available is a skill that needs to be acquired by teachers.

### ***12.3.5 Offerings in Professional Development***

Institutions such as the International Society for Informatization in Education (ISTE) have offerings in professional development that address the needs of educators in areas such as designing courses, assessment, creating a sense of community, and ensuring equity and inclusion in online teaching and learning environments (ISTE 2021). This categorization shows that the integration of ICTs goes far beyond the scope of knowledge and skills regarding the mere manipulation of technological tools and that the entire teaching environment together with its various components (technological, socio-ethical, pedagogical and professional) need to be reconsidered. Ravenscroft (2001) alluded to this in the early 2000s when he stated that the rush to include maturing technologies in distance learning could very well be downplaying the opportunity to re-evaluate our pedagogical practices and to truly consider processes of learning. He also argued that “e-learning initiatives have been

technology-led rather than theory-led” (ibid., p. 134). To this aim, Hafner et al. (2015) formulated several important questions for pedagogy. These revolve around how we can “effectively manage information with digital tools”, “effectively communicate using hypertext and combinations of word, image, graphics and text”, “how we can use digital tools to manage relationships, attract the attention of an online audience, and collaborate with peers”, “what the mindsets are that lead to the most productive uses of digital media”, “what identities are possible in digital spaces” and, finally, “how these identities relate to those that are possible in the classroom spaces” (ibid., 2015, p. 2).

### ***12.3.6 Teaching of Foreign Languages and Use of ICT***

Face-to-face contact in the teaching of foreign languages is considered to be important due to the communicative nature of the discipline and the interpersonal relationships that are formed amongst peers and with the language instructor. Nevertheless, studies conducted with foreign language teachers after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic show that the online environment had several positive and negative effects.

In a study conducted by Gao and Zhang (2020), some teachers expressed that their teaching was limited by the shift to online learning, as the full participation of students was difficult to bring about. They also felt that “self-management and metacognitive ability” became increasingly important for the students to master in the distance learning environment (ibid., p. 7). This was seen to decrease the influence of the teacher on the learning environment. Other participants in Gao and Zhang’s study expressed more positive views, stating that the use of ICT expanded the traditional classroom due to the inclusion of useful resources, platforms that allow for easy and effective follow-up and the various channels of communication that livens the learning environment (ibid., p. 7). All the participants mentioned anxiety and psychological pressure during the initial stages of the pandemic relating to the choices they needed to make in terms of learning platforms and resources. This was in addition to the worry about the correct functioning of these tools (ibid., p. 7). MacIntyre et al. (2020) also report that, amongst the biggest stressors for teachers were workload, family health and a sense of loss of control over the work environment. In the Netherlands, Van der Velde et al. (2021) report that the shift to online learning was rather positive all around due to the country being relatively well equipped for online learning.

There is limited research published on the teaching and learning of French in Africa during the pandemic. Opaluwa (2020) noted the importance of all stakeholders working together to ensure continued French language teaching and learning during the pandemic, while Ferreira-Meyers and Dlamini-Zwane (2021) highlighted the need for the inclusion of socio-constructivist, collaborative and active learning paradigms in the online teaching and learning of French, as well as the adoption and/or adaptation of policies on the shift (or extension) to online education.

## 12.4 Methodology

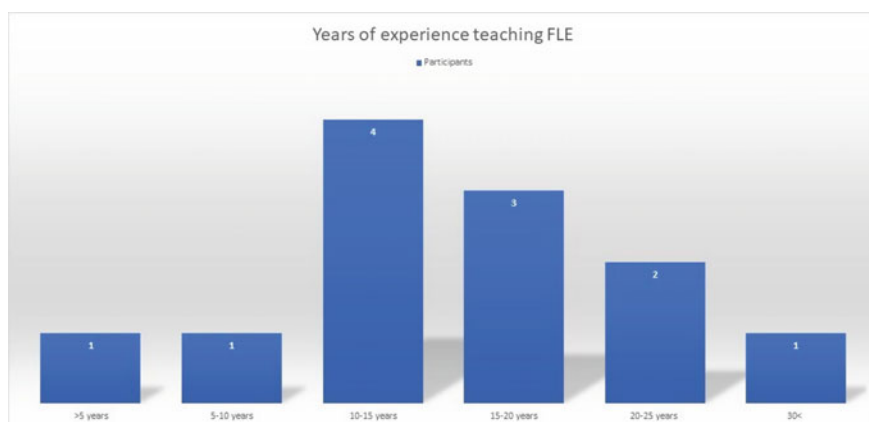
Our main research question was whether teachers of French in two Southern African countries—namely, South Africa and neighbouring Eswatini—received adequate training to teach and support their students' learning through the use of technology and digital resources. In order to respond to this question, we intended to find out which teaching and learning methodologies and principles were used before the COVID-19 pandemic started and how the pandemic has had an impact on these.

In this study, we chose a survey research design as our procedure for collecting, analysing and combining both quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the uptake and usage of technology and digital resources by practising French teachers in Southern Africa before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A questionnaire, consisting of 28 multiple-choice and open-ended questions, was sent to 200 participants, and responses were collected from 14 participants from private and public primary and secondary schools in South Africa and Eswatini. The respondents were identified through convenience sampling. We adopted this method because of “proximity”; in this case, proximity referred to the fact that we had the e-mail addresses of the sampled 200 participants. In addition, convenience sampling is uncomplicated and economical. It was impossible, especially during the pandemic, to reach the entire population of French teachers in South Africa and Eswatini.

Out of the 14 responses, we received, after gentle reminders for participation had been sent out, 12 responses were from practising teachers in public schools, while two were gathered from private schools; 10 responses came from South African teachers and four from teachers located in Eswatini.

The study participants (hereafter referred to as P1–P14) came from a wide age range with an equally large distribution of experience. The collective teaching experience of roughly 95 years was divided as follows:



The low response rate (14 out of 200, or 7%) is regretted but was probably influenced by the pandemic. Nevertheless, it has been noted, pre-pandemic, that mailed

surveys yield a considerably lower response rate than surveys that are distributed personally (Roth and BeVier 1998) and “using electronic administration modes (e-mail) may result in lower response rates due to concerns of Internet security, the receipt of electronic ‘junk mail’ or ‘spam’, and lack of personal relationship between researcher and respondents” (Sills and Song 2002).

All respondents participated on a voluntary basis, and informed consent was obtained from all of them. In addition, ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the South African university where one of the researchers was permanently employed at the time of the study.

## 12.5 Findings and Discussion

### 12.5.1 *Teachers, Methods and Changes*

Various degrees and courses were completed by the participants in preparation for a career in teaching FLE. Where some participants held only primary education teaching diplomas (one participant), some had PhDs in French linguistics (one participant). Nine participants indicated that they had obtained a BA degree in French or language-related fields. Four participants completed the South African Diploma in Higher Education (DHE)—a requirement to teach at the high school level in South Africa for individuals who have not completed a degree in education but rather in a subject field (e.g., French). The South African DHE programme is restricted to university graduates. Seven participants indicated that they had completed a Master’s degree in teaching FLE.

Of all the cited qualifications, only one participant indicated that the course (MA TFLE, Université Lyon 2) included some type of digital environment teacher training for a module for Teaching French for Specific Purposes (FOS). P14 stated that this module catered to online pedagogies like teaching through Skype and + Moodle. The same MA course included modules that were specifically designed to teach students how to create video material and pedagogical resources from multimedia sources. This course structure directly aligns with the ICT-CTF framework as proposed by UNESCO with regard to pedagogy (integration of technology), ICT (use of tools), and teacher professional learning (digital literacy).

Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, most participants had attended various workshops related to the teaching of FLE. Three participants (P2, P8, P11) mentioned having learnt about online teaching tools during these workshops. Only two participants indicated that they had not attended any workshops before the outbreak of the pandemic.

Among all participants, the overall understanding was that teaching should be learner-centred and an attempt to broaden horizons while instilling a passion for the subject matter.



The communicative and action-based approaches represent the two main foreign language teaching approaches used by the participants without necessarily alluding to the inclusion of ICT in the classroom and broader learning environment. Two (P10 and P11) of the 14 participants explicitly stated that they used a mixture of these two approaches. P3 admitted not knowing what approach was used in class, P8 indicated that a variety of approaches were used, whereas P4 claimed to use an original personally developed approach without giving further details as to what this approach entailed. In addition to using the communicative approach, P14 claimed that they attempted to include the neurolinguistic approach that focuses mainly on the implicit grammatical acquisition, whereas P7 expressly focused on traditional grammar-based teaching. P2 simply described the approach as being FLE without further deliberation. As regards the third category of the ICT-CFT framework (pedagogy), there was very little consensus among teachers about the most relevant pedagogical approach in foreign language teaching. Considering the preceding information, we can infer that there is even less consensus about the best pedagogical approach to undertake where ICTs are concerned.

As the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Southern Africa and teaching moved from face-to-face to remote and often fully online environments; important changes in pedagogy were expected. However, only four participants adopted new teaching approaches and methodologies that they believed were better suited for online environments. Eight participants categorically denied that they had made changes to their teaching methods, but two participants (P7 and P13) highlighted that, although there were no changes in the methods, the mode of delivery changed from face-to-face to online, and thus this naturally included an enhanced use of ICT. Two other participants (P2 and P4) mentioned that they were not certain about a change in method but that they had started including more digital resources. Based upon the evident abrupt inclusion of more ICT in the learning environment and by taking the teachers' previous training (where little attention was given to ICT) into account, one could estimate that a number of issues arose due to an absence of a competency framework for teachers (see Sect. 12.3.2 for more information on the ICT-CFT). This sudden shift would not have allowed teachers to undergo the required training prior to implementing ICT in their teaching environment.

Furthermore, although they represented the majority of the participants, only eight teachers adapted their syllabus due to factors relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. In most cases, fewer assessments and compressed syllabi were presented. P14 indicated that assessment types changed to include more oral than written work to stop students from presenting machine translations as their own work. These point to UNESCO's category 2 (Curriculum and Assessment).

### ***12.5.2 Recent Training***

In the first 14 months since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdowns in South Africa and Eswatini, eight participants attended a variety of

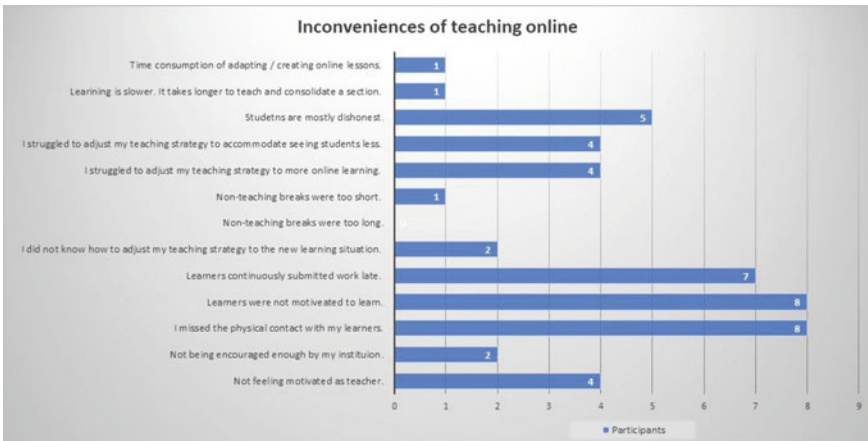
teaching FLE workshops. P14 was in the process of completing a Master’s degree and participated in two extra workshops.

Of the workshops attended during this period, two workshops were on preparing learners for language benchmark tests; three dealt with online teaching (practice and theory), of the workshops did not include adapting strategies for online and remote teaching; and one dealt with the adaptation of curriculum to the adjusted academic calendar. Unfortunately, five participants did not attend any workshops.

Twelve participants indicated that they used more digital resources in their teaching since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Two participants claimed they used the same number of digital resources. One of the latter, P14, started using social network platforms like WhatsApp in teaching even before the start of the national lockdown in South Africa and claimed the transition to fully online teaching was smoother because of this. Unanimously, the participants agreed that using digital tools in teaching was a positive experience. Importantly, we note that an increase of digital resources in the classroom does not automatically translate into their effective use, whether it be by teachers or learners. The relatively low number of completed training sessions on the use of ICT and adaptation of curriculum for the digital learning environment in addition to the existing confusion as regards teaching methodologies should be seen as a matter of concern. It is also possible that a surflux of digital resources in the classroom for the sake of including them without proper understanding of how to use them could contribute to adding to the issue.

### 12.5.3 *Inconveniences and Advantages of Using ICT in the FLE Classroom*

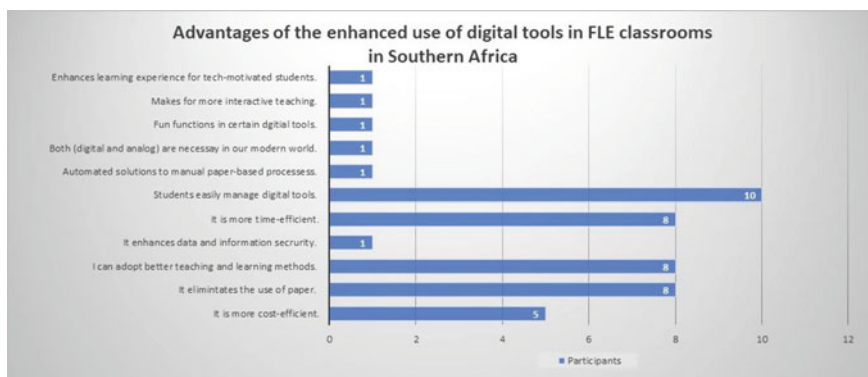
The participants indicated the following challenges linked to teaching in an online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic:



In general, the support given to the participants by their institutions was welcomed. Only one participant (P9) indicated that the institutional support was poor. Two participants (P1 and P10) mentioned that the support was developing, and P13 and P14 received no extra support from their institutions. The random administration of institutional training only underlines the need for a framework, as suggested by UNESCO, to benchmark training across institutions. Once such a framework exists, training focused on digital literacy development becomes an attainable goal.

Despite the general belief among the participants that the use of ICT would encourage learners to participate, eight participants claim that learners were not motivated (as was the case in Gao and Zhang’s study highlighted in Sect. 12.3.6). Given the 2020/2021 health crisis, during which this study was conducted, we have to consider that it was not necessarily only the use of ICT that negatively impacted learners’ will and motivation to participate in learning and that the mere integration of ICTs does not automatically equate to motivated high school learners.

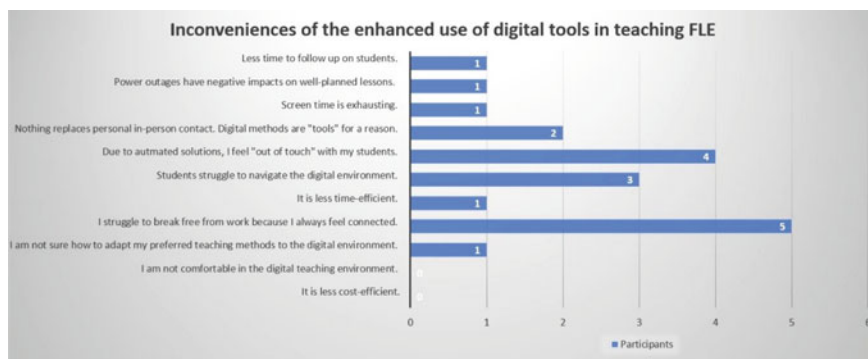
The participants indicated the following advantages of the enhanced use of digital tools in teaching:



The use of ICT in the FLE classroom appears to be a positive addition to the teaching experience (P3, P9, P12). As the COVID-19 pandemic forced many teachers to enter the digital era (P10), the benefits are numerous and widely appreciated. Time saved on marking and other menial administrative tasks (P1) can now be repurposed to make the overall process more efficient (P5). The participants were also convinced that, while the use of ICT in the FLE classroom environment allowed learners to be more independent in that they could easily access required resources (P11), it also encouraged student-resource, student-student and student-teacher engagement and participation (P4). P5 and P8 made special mention of the detailed individual feedback that was easier when using video and voice recordings as marking tools.

Digital native learners also find it easy to navigate online learning tools and platforms, and this could be used as an advantage by the teachers who can rest assured that navigating ICT would not distract learners from the content.

The following inconveniences linked to the enhanced use of digital tools in FLE teaching were highlighted by the participants:



When it comes to student-teacher interaction, the biggest concern from the teachers' point of view was the sudden lack of control over activities and progress (also see findings by MacIntyre et al. (2020) in Sect. 12.3.6). Previously, in-class human interaction gave the teacher the opportunity to encourage, evaluate and track learner progress. Furthermore, judging from the questionnaire answers, the participants seemed concerned that the online environment favoured a lack of student participation over which teachers had little control, as it was easy for students to "disappear" from the learning environment by switching off their cameras (P14). This lack of participation also limited spontaneous language production (P7) and promoted delayed thinking and problem-solving, which, according to P9, forced learners to become more reliant on "gadgets as [...] sources of information" instead of fruitful student-teacher interaction. One would like to see teachers having the skill to accompany learners to develop digital literacy through conscious interaction around digital tools and subject matters. These findings are in direct contradiction to the findings discussed in the paragraphs that deal with the advantages of including ICT in the teaching environment, as our study participants also indicated that interaction was rather stimulated by technology. The gap possibly exists between initial participation and use of ICT that is met with enthusiasm and later use when the novelty has worn off, and students and teachers alike start experiencing screen fatigue that could put unnecessary strain on the student-teacher relation and has a negative impact on the mental health of both parties (see Sect. 12.3.4). The notion that interest fades as the novelty of ICT in the FLE classroom wears off could point to the unsuccessful integration of digital tools and necessary adaptation of pedagogy.

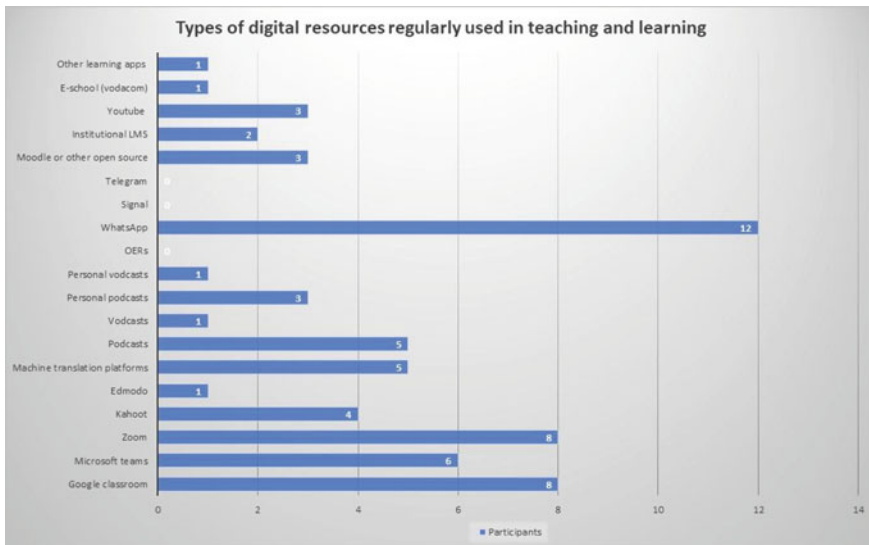
Without suitable adaptation of learning material, teachers could also fall "into the trap of online quizzes" as the sole means of evaluation (P1). With this type of evaluation being done at home, there is little control over the honesty of learner participation. This issue ultimately highlights the need for teachers to be well equipped and fully digitally literate in order to manage all ICT aspects in the teaching environment. Furthermore, continuous training and lifelong learning become a requirement

for teachers to keep up with developing ICT trends and how these trends could be used in the foreign language classroom. These preliminary suggestions all point to the six categories listed in the UNESCO framework (see Sect. 12.3.2) namely, understanding the role of ICT in education, knowledge acquisition, integration of technology, use of tools, organisation and administration (also of training), and digital literacy (UNESCO 2018).

### 12.5.4 ICT Tools, Applications and Platforms

The teacher participants in this study made use of a variety of both interactive and one-directional platforms to engage with students, communicate information, stimulate learning and request students to complete assessments.

The following ICT tools were indicated as most frequently used by the teachers.



The telecommunication smart-device application WhatsApp is currently the most popular digital tool used by FLE teachers in Southern Africa; video-conferencing applications such as Zoom and Google Classroom follow suit. It is important to note that the most popular applications and platforms are mostly communication or video-conferencing applications and not teaching and learning management platforms per se. The use of podcasts and vodcasts—whether personally created or third-party content, including YouTube channels and vlogs—could underline an interesting blend between real-time contact lessons via the various communication platforms and audio-visual material that the learner would be able to access without immediate intervention from the teacher.

Despite the rapidly growing OER databases, high school teachers seem reluctant to use these resources in their teaching. The relative newness of OER in Southern African pedagogical circles could be a reason for its absence in the participants' classes. Although only one participant (P1) commented on the idea that creating ICT resources is time-consuming, the easy access to OER could still be an underplayed factor that leads to reluctance among teachers. The fact that none of the participants indicated the use of OER leads us to believe that not enough is being done to promote the use and benefits of these valuable, time-saving resources. The skill to source OER successfully is also questioned, and further investigation is needed to understand the extent of the participants' digital literacy (see Sect. 12.3.3) with regard to information processing.

### ***12.5.5 Need for Adequate Training***

Although some participants said that they were not interested in further training (P3, P8, P11), the desire for continuous training at various levels was emphasised among 11 participants. The participants expressed the need for training that would provide the necessary tools to successfully adapt existing teaching methodologies for online (and distance) learning and how to design methods that would cater to hybrid class environments (P1, P4, P10, P13, P14). Apart from theoretical skills, the participants expressed the need for training on the various learning and most popular applications currently used in online teaching (P5, P6) as well as on the integration of emerging applications into the FLE classroom environment (P2). This particularly speaks to the need not only for subject knowledge and literacy but also for broader digital literacy among teachers and pedagogical content developers who are ultimately responsible for the proper integration of ICT in the FLE classroom.

In this study, we set out to discover how FLE teachers changed their teaching methodologies and if they were adequately trained prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to adapt swiftly and with ease to the new teaching environment and demands.

The shift in delivery mode did not imply the necessary change in methodology as expected, and most teachers depended on ICT for communication purposes only (see Sect. 12.5.4). The lack of in-depth understanding by some of the participants of language teaching methodologies (see Sect. 12.5.1) shows that even the methods used in the classroom before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic are questionable. We could, therefore, also argue that not only was the training offered by institutions during 2020 inadequate to equip language teachers successfully for the online environment but prior training was in some cases not up to standard either. We acknowledge that some ICT training during the 2020–2021 period was successful, as teachers were able to navigate and incorporate ICT (communication mostly) in their endeavours.

The somewhat contradictory findings discussed in this chapter testify to the overall need for further teacher training in ICTs and the importance it will play in the future development of teaching and learning platforms and teaching applications. Teachers

also need to be trained to understand the true nature of their own approaches to language education and how these approaches can be adapted to incorporate the use of ICT without merely thinking that using technology to communicate constitutes a blended learning approach. Overall, and despite some misunderstanding about how to incorporate ICT fully in the teaching and learning experience, the participants were largely in favour of the use of ICT in the FLE classroom. Teachers seem to be aware of the multitude of advantages (and inconveniences) that ICTs could bring to the learning experience. The full use of these technologies should be explored in more depth through well-structured teacher training in an attempt to merge and adapt teaching approaches with the online environment and, in so doing, equip teachers to navigate this space successfully with their learners.

## 12.6 Recommendations

The study findings allowed us to formulate recommendations for the training of French teachers in Southern Africa, particularly relating to the use and integration of ICTs in their pedagogical approaches and teaching methods. Clearly, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore a number of teaching aspects that many teachers lack.

In order to enhance teacher training and subsequently teaching (and learning) practices in the (online) classroom in both South Africa and Eswatini, we suggest the following:

- Design and adoption of an adequate framework for skills acquisition and development for the use of ICTs in the classroom within the geocontext of Southern Africa where digital resources can sometimes be scarce;
- Development of new pedagogical approaches that cater to hybrid and fully online environments (not just adaptation or pandemic “crisis management”);
- Introduction of digital skills/literacy in teacher training programmes (Biletska et al. 2021);
- Creation of digital spaces for teachers to engage, share and collaboratively develop content;
- Awareness-raising of the benefits of OER and the use, adaptation and contextualisation, of OERs for the FLE classroom;
- Training by language experts on the use of different applications in the language classroom: this training, in particular, should not be theoretical in nature—listing or describing applications, platforms and systems—but practical. The training, both at the initial and in-service level, should practically show how these apply to language teaching and learning.

One of the main aspects of the use of digital tools and working in an online environment in the context of Southern Africa is linked to the cost of data. We recommend that this be dealt with at a national policy-level first and foremost. Policy

development, together with appropriate frameworks for initial and in-service teacher training, is urgent.

Given the multitude of avenues that can be pursued to qualify as a French teacher in South Africa and Eswatini (as can be seen from the data we have collected), in addition to the low number of teachers who have completed a DHE (only four out of 14 in our sample), training by means of the national education system does not seem to be the most effective and reliable avenue for the development of competencies in integrating ICTs in teaching. For this reason, we feel that there is a need to bring teachers together for training purposes through other channels (organised by federations/organisations of French teachers) in order to share knowledge and skills from their “self-learning” experiences. This can be done through online meetings (national conferences, webinars, forum discussions, and websites for the sharing of digital resources).

Further research on teacher education, ICT integration in teaching and learning of foreign languages (e.g., French) in Southern Africa and beyond, before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, is required. There are too many questions awaiting answers if we want languages to be taught in such a way that they assist learners to become 21st-century citizens capable of meaningfully contributing to national and regional socio-economic development.

## 12.7 Conclusion

The brief study on French teachers, COVID-19 and ICT integration examined how Southern African educators fared during the worldwide pandemic which forced us to go online in many aspects of our daily lives, profession included. While our intention was to reach as many French teachers in South Africa and Eswatini as possible, only 14 participants (out of 200 who received the questionnaire) responded to the survey which was administered online in August–September 2021. Nevertheless, the research findings indicate a lack of understanding of pedagogical approaches and teaching methods on the part of the participants, especially when it comes to online teaching and learning. In addition, even though some teachers appreciated the support and resources provided by their work environments, many noted the need for continuous and additional training regarding the integration of ICT in the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

Our recommendations are multiple: there is a need to develop pedagogical approaches which will allow teachers to integrate ICTs to fully benefit from the opportunities and advantages offered by virtual learning environments, to develop themselves professionally, before they start teaching and also while they teach. The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated that change is inevitable, especially in an educational setting and that teachers need to be flexible, motivated and ever-ready to learn new skills. The education system cannot depend on teachers’ voluntary and personal updating of skills. Institutions, ministries of education and all stakeholders must offer opportunities for updating teachers’ skills and knowledge. This



is in line with what scholars have been requesting since at least the beginning of the 21st-century.

## References

- Biletska IO, Alla FP, Halyna DA et al (2021) The use of modern technologies by foreign language teachers: developing digital skills. *LingCuRe* 5(S2):16–27
- European e-Competence Framework 3.0 (2014). <https://www.ecompetences.eu/>. Accessed 5 Sep 2021
- Ferreira-Meyers K, Dlamini-Zwane N (2021) Intégration du numérique: l'impact de la pandémie de COVID-19 sur l'enseignement supérieur en Eswatini (Afrique australe). In: *Revue internationale des technologies en pédagogie universitaire—Int J Technol High Educ* 18(1):212–220
- Gao LX, Zhang LJ (2020) Teacher learning in difficult times: Examining foreign language teachers' cognitions about online teaching to tide over COVID-19. *Front Psychol* 11
- Hafner CA, Chik A, Jones RH (2015) Digital literacies and language learning. *Lang Learn Technol* 19(3):1–7
- Heyworth F (2013) Applications of quality management in language education. *Lang Teach* 46(3):281–315
- Hockly N, Dudeney G, Pegrum M (2014) *Digital literacies*. Routledge, London
- International Organization for Standardization. Quality - what it means. [https://transition-support.com/what\\_is\\_quality.html](https://transition-support.com/what_is_quality.html). Accessed 10 Sep 2021
- International Society for Informatization in Education (ISTE). <https://www.iste.org/>. Accessed 3 Sep 2021
- Jose K (2016) Digital literacy matters: increasing workforce productivity through blended English language programs. *HLRC* 6(4):1–17
- MacIntyre PD, Gregersen T, Mercer S (2020) Language teachers' coping strategies during the Covid-19 conversion to online teaching: correlations with stress, wellbeing and negative emotions. *System* 94:102352
- Malinina I (2015) ICT competencies of foreign languages teachers. In: *Procedia Soc Behav Sci* 4th World Conf Educ Technol Res 182:75–80
- Murotova G, Kavilova T (2020) Digital technologies and information-communication competence of a foreign languages' teacher. *IJRESS* 10(11):9–15
- Opaluwah A (2020) French language teaching and learning at the tertiary level in a pandemic lockdown Nigeria: pressures and prospects. *J Educ Res Rural Commun Dev* 2(2):1–12
- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/>. Accessed 3 Sep 2021
- Ravenscroft A (2001) Designing e-learning interactions in the 21st century: revisiting and rethinking the role of theory. *Eur J Educ* 36:133–156
- Roth PL, BeVier CA (1998) Response rates in HRM/OB survey research: norms and correlates 1990–1994. *J Manag* 24:97–117
- Sills SJ, Song CY (2002) Innovations in survey research: an application of Web-based surveys. *Soc Sci Comput Rev* 20:22–30
- UNESCO (2018) ICT competency framework for teachers version 3. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/ict-eduction/competency-framework-teachers-oer>. Accessed 13 Sep 2021
- Van der Velde M, Sense F, Spijkers R et al (2021) Lockdown learning: changes in online foreign language study activity and performance of Dutch secondary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Front Educ* 6
- Warschauer M (2011) *Learning in the cloud*. Teachers College Press, Columbia

**Associate Professor Karen Ferreira-Meyers** lives and works in Eswatini. She is currently the Coordinator of Linguistics and Modern Languages at the Institute of Distance Education, University of Eswatini. Her research fields vary from the teaching and learning of languages (French in particular) to distance and e-learning, the use of ICTs in education, online facilitation and assessment for learning to autofiction and autobiography, crime and detective fiction. She regularly participates in international conferences and publishes articles and chapters in international journals and books. She is a keen translator and interpreter.

**Dr. Albertus Barkhuizen** is a lecturer of French at the University of the Free State in South Africa where he is responsible for the language component of the FLE courses. His research fields include: teaching French as a foreign and second language, language teaching methodology and the use of translation and interpreting in language learning, and decolonised teaching strategies. He is also an avid translator and interpreter.

**Ms. Karin Schmid** is a lecturer of French at the University of Cape Town in South Africa where she teaches French as a foreign language in addition to courses in Didactics and French for Special Purposes. Her research interests include intercultural pedagogy and teaching with technology.