TEACHING FRENCH AT LANGUAGE CENTER OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF ESPÍRITO SANTO DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

O ENSINO DE FRANCÊS NO NÚCLEO DE LÍNGUAS DA UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO ESPÍRITO SANTO DURANTE PANDEMIA DE COVID-19

LA ENSEÑANZA DEL FRANCÉS EN EL NÚCLEO DE LÍNGUAS DE LA UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO ESPÍRITO SANTO DURANTE LA PANDEMÍA POR COVID-19

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ABSTRACT: We report the experience of teaching French as a Foreign Language in the Language Center of the Federal University of Espírito Santo (NL-UFES) in the first academic semester of 2020, in the context of the pandemic by Covid-19. The focus of this study is to register a specific reality and, from this context, discuss topics related to learning French. The research was based on documents such as minutes of meetings, institutional ordinances, investigations carried out by the NL-UFES with students and data on enrollments and evasion. For our reflection about this subject, in this paper, we used theoretical contributions from de Magnoni and Silva (2014), Galli (2012), Kaspary (2012), Bianchini (2003) and Nitzke (1999). The conclusions point to the difficulties of the students remaining in the courses in the face of the new context, to the methodological adaptations necessary in the transition from classroom to virtual and to the non-traditional forms of assessment that the new reality makes emerge.

KEYWORDS: Education. FFL teaching. Remote teaching. Covid-19.

RESUMO: Relata-se a experiência de ensino de Francês Língua Estrangeira (FLE) no Núcleo de Línguas da Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (NL-UFES) no primeiro semestre letivo de 2020, no contexto da pandemia da Covid-19. O objetivo é registrar uma realidade determinada e, a partir desse contexto, discutir questões atinentes ao ensino-aprendizagem de francês. O estudo baseou-se em documentos como atas de reuniões, portarias institucionais, pesquisas realizadas pelo NL-UFES junto ao alunado e em levantamentos de dados sobre matrículas efetuadas e evasão. As reflexões têm aportes teóricos de Magnoni e Silva (2014), Galli (2012), Kaspary (2012), Bianchini (2003) e Nitzke (1999). As conclusões apontam para as dificuldades de permanência dos alunos nos cursos face ao novo contexto, para as adaptações metodológicas necessárias na passagem do presencial ao virtual e para as formas de avaliação não tradicionais que a nova realidade faz emergir.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação. Ensino de FLE. Ensino remoto. Covid-19

RESUMEN: Reportamos la experiencia de enseñar Francés Lengua Extranjera (FLE) en el Núcleo de Línguas de la Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (NL-UFES) en el primer semestre académico de 2020, en el contexto de la pandemia por Covid-19. El objetivo es registrar una realidad específica y, desde este contexto, discutir temas relacionados con la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del francés. El estudio se basó en documentos como minutas de reuniones, ordenanzas institucionales, investigaciones realizadas por el NL-UFES con los estudiantes y datos sobre matrículas y evasión. Las reflexiones cuentan con aportes teóricos de Magnoni y Silva (2014), Galli (2012), Kaspary (2012), Bianchini (2003) y Nitzke (1999). La conclusión general es a las dificultades de permanencia de los estudiantes en los cursos ante el nuevo contexto, las adaptaciones metodológicas necesarias en la transición de la clase a lo virtual y las formas de evaluación no tradicionales que trae la nueva realidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación. Enseñanza de FLE. Enseñanza virtual. Covid-19.

Introduction

Although the remote teaching of foreign languages (FL) is far from being a novelty (MAGNONI; SILVA, 2014), the year 2020 was significant for this field of knowledge, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, because, given the scenario of social isolation, there was a need to reinvent pedagogical practices in traditionally face-to-face spaces. In this sense, the challenge of rethinking language teaching in a new context was imposed on the Language Center of the Federal University of Espírito Santo (NL-UFES).

The purpose of this article is to report the experience of teaching French at NL-UFES, pointing out the difficulties encountered and the solutions proposed in the attempt to transpose face-to-face teaching to remote teaching in an emergency, taking into account: aspects of the context of the pandemic in the Brazil and Espírito Santo; its impacts on UFES daily life; psycho-affective and structural factors and adaptations to remote teaching tools.

The present report shares experiences that, having been lived within the scope of the NL-UFES, can illustrate perspectives and conceptions of different realities. Such record of the teaching of French as a foreign language (FFL) in a specific location and at a precise moment can reveal aspects of methodological and evaluative practices, continuing formation and use of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs) in the teaching of FL.

To support our reflections, we have data provided by NL-UFES, such as: number of students active in the system and actually attending classes; minutes of meetings; prospective and evaluative questionnaires carried out before and after remote education.

In this way, a qualitative research, of a basic nature and exploratory and descriptive objectives is configured, because it is an aspect still little researched in Espírito Santo, that is, the new scenarios of teaching FFL in the context of the pandemic and the adaptation of face-to-face teaching to the emergency remote.

To this end, the discussion will be organized as follows: we will briefly explain aspects of the pandemic's progress in Espírito Santo and its impacts on UFES's daily life; then we will bring the actions taken within the scope of NL-UFES in the face of the new scenario; we will describe the reality of the French course offered by the institution and outline a profile of the student in view of access to DICTs. From this context, we will report the first virtual interactions, the implementation of remote education, the methodological adaptations and the forms of evaluation adopted. In addition, we propose a discussion about dropping out of courses, as a result of the new reality.

The advance of the pandemic in Espírito Santo and the impacts on the daily life of UFES

It is not intended here to outline details of the pandemic's progress in Espírito Santo territory, but to outline in general terms the impacts of the virus's arrival on the daily life of the University - in order to highlight the challenges that would be faced by the institution's management and, consequently, by the academic community as a whole - and thus illustrate the context of NL-UFES.

In the NL-UFES language courses, the first academic semester of 2020 began in February, when the Covid-19 pandemic was already strongly affecting Asia and Europe. On Brazilian soil, there were no officially confirmed cases and, therefore, there was no measure to restrict social interaction, that is, the routine of Brazilians had not yet been changed.

In early March, the disease arrived in Espírito Santo (GOVERNO DO ESPÍRITO SANTO, 2020a), which led local authorities to take more effective measures to try to contain its progress. In this sense, in the middle of that month, the state government and city halls determined the stoppage of activities considered non-essential, such as classes in schools, courses and colleges (GOVERNO DO ESPÍRITO SANTO, 2020b; PREFEITURA DE VITÓRIA, 2020a).

Following the state guidelines, on 16 of March, UFES suspended the activities of the university restaurant, the authorizations for domestic and international trips, the face-to-face classes of undergraduate and postgraduate courses and collective events, in the period from 17 to 29 of March and maintained the research, extension and administration activities to be carried

out only remotely. Subsequently, maintaining the academic calendar, the suspension of face-to-face activities was extended for periods ranging from fifteen days to one month (UFES, 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; 2020e).

Between April and August 2020, the undergraduate and postgraduate classes remained suspended in any modality, while the Rectory promoted actions such as: creation of a group to think about the return of classes (UFES, 2020f); sending online research to students, in order to identify the conditions of access to DICTs (UFES, 2020g); discussions about a Biosafety Plan and a Contingency Plan, (UFES, 2020h; 2020i); and preparing the community for remote work (UFES, 2020j; UFES, 2020k).

However, an effective return to classes, in the remote mode, came to be implemented only from the month of September within the scope of the undergraduate and postgraduate courses at UFES. For NL-UFES, according to its managers, the wait for the return to graduation would imply a significant financial impact, and could even compromise the continuity of the project, as we hope to make clear later.

Therefore, in the next section, we will deal with the first actions taken within the scope of the UFES Language Center, which aimed to continue the work, aiming at the continuity of the extension project of language courses for the community.

Actions within the UFES language center

The NL-UFES occupies a very peculiar position among the instances of the University: on the one hand, it is administratively linked to the Center for Human and Natural Sciences (CCHN-UFES), functioning as an aggregating center for several extension projects, among them the courses of languages; on the other hand, it is managed by the Foundation for the Development of Espírito Santo (FEST), which gives it relative autonomy.

The autonomy of the Language Center is given, for example, in the definition of a specific calendar of activities, not following the academic calendar, in the possibility of hiring CLT employees linked to the support foundation and not to the University and in the collection of fees for the services provided, since the projects do not have financial support from the University, but are self-sustainable, that is, the NL-UFES is responsible for raising funds to guarantee its financial support.

One of the main sources of income at NL-UFES is the Language Courses project, which offers language courses (English, French, Spanish, Italian and German) for about 4,500 people from the Espírito Santo community, for an amount of R$ 580.00 per semester, a price lower

than those applied in the language school market. Part of the vacancies are offered as scholarships for public school students, undergraduate students and UFES servers.

Between 17 of March and 01 of June, NL-UFES followed UFES' determination to suspend face-to-face classes and not propose ways of remote education, believing that a return to normality would be possible in a short or medium term (NL-UFES, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d). During this period, its managers had to make important decisions, considering the complexity involved in carrying out the project's activities.

To support the decisions, a questionnaire was sent to students of all languages in order to collect information about students' access to information technologies and the availability to take courses remotely. During this period, another measure of the NL-UFES was to propose actions to keep in touch with students through social media (especially Facebook and Instagram) and sending non-mandatory activities through electronic addresses.

In mid-May, it was decided to start synchronous virtual classes through the Microsoft Teams platform (NL-UFES, 2020e), implemented from 02 of June. Such a measure was considered, because the maintenance of the Language Courses project is directly linked to fundraising through semestral fees. That is, the NL-UFES judged that it could not wait for a decision from the UFES Rectory on the resumption of classes (in person or remote) at graduation, since the failure to offer a second academic semester would make the project unfeasible.

It is important to highlight the motivations for the choice of the teaching platform and the choice of the format of the remote courses, on the part of the managers of the NL-UFES: the Microsoft Teams platform was chosen because it facilitates the control of the works from the institutional point of view; and the maintenance of synchronous classes, so that the course remains as close as possible to the face-to-face, regarding the previously established schedules and synchronous meetings.

In this decision-making, there is a yearning to replicate the face-to-face model. As a consequence of this, there was a sudden change from face-to-face to virtual. That is, there was no process of adapting and reflecting a teaching practice typical of the conventional classroom to innovative practices.

An example of the difficulty of transposing the foreign language teaching-learning process is present in one of the questions in the semester assessment questionnaire sent to the student at the end of the course. They should answer whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "I can copy in the notebook what is shared in class".

Such concern points to the way in which the institution and its leaders understand the concept of FL teaching-learning, in which elements such as notebook, copy of the board (physical or virtual) and the need for printed material are indispensable items for a positive result in the process language acquisition, which does not necessarily correspond with a proposal for a virtual language course.

On the one hand, it seems that the presence of the teacher in conducting the students' learning is fundamental for the institution and its agents. On the other hand, there is a risk that expectations will be frustrated, considering the immense distance between the classroom and the remote in the context of FL teaching. Add to this the fact that the student body also indicates a preference for usual forms of learning, as shown by the course evaluation survey, in which 75.6% of the students stated that "even using the digital platform, they still prefer to write on the notebook".

This view of teaching with the use of predominantly printed material was pointed out by the respondents to the questionnaire. Among the graduates of the course, 55.1% said they preferred to have access to printed materials instead of virtual materials, reinforcing the idea that physical support is necessary to subsidize the teaching-learning process. In addition, the fact that 67.7% of students who completed the academic semester in the virtual model stated that they prefer face-to-face classes.

Before discussing the transposition of the course from one modality to another, we want to illustrate, in the subsequent topic, the format of the French course traditionally offered by NL-UFES. In this sense, the next section will be dedicated to describing the course in terms of the levels offered, the number of students, the teaching material used, among other information relevant to our analysis.

The French course at NL-UFES

The French course at NL-UFES is organized in eight levels (French 01 to French 08) and, for those who already have intermediate knowledge of the language and want to improve fluency, a Conversation course is offered. The courses are semiannual, fully in person and have a duration of 55 hours. Assessments are standardized by level and applied in three stages, based on four skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading). Each skill is assigned a concept that ranges from A to D.

It is one of the largest extension projects of the University in order to reach a large number of people. In the first semester of 2020, 42 classes were offered, covering 677 students:

French 01 (10 classes); French 02 (09 classes); French 03 (06 classes); French 04 (04 classes); French 05 (04 classes); French 06 (03 classes); French 07 (03 classes); French 08 (02 classes); Conversation (01 class). Such data show the size of the project, as well as the evasion along the formative path.

Although no formal research has been carried out on the factors that usually lead to evasion, managers note that abandonment rates have been increasing since 2016, with the economic crisis experienced in Brazil.

Classes are taught by a team composed of professors hired under the CLT regime by FEST and interns from the Portuguese and French Dual Degree course at UFES. At the beginning of the semester, there were 08 teachers and 01 intern. All of them are graduated in Literature: two with qualifications in French by UFES and two others in the process of concluding a second degree in French, also by UFES. In other words, the team of teachers has solid training in the area, in addition to being in continuing formation.

The teaching material adopted by NL-UFES is the book *Entre Nous*, by the Maison des Langues publisher: composed of 4 books, each book corresponding to two levels of French, that is, it is used for one year. It is imported material, to be acquired by the student, at a cost of, on average, R$ 200.00 each book. In the classroom, copies of the material are not allowed. Thus, in addition to semestral fees, there is a cost with didactic material.

It is noticed that the French course at NL-UFES follows the traditional molds of free language courses and plays a relevant social role for the external and internal UFES community, promoting the teaching of the language to different audiences and interests: from young people of 15 years old to senior citizens; College students; interested people in general; from diverse social strata. Because of this heterogeneity of public, the adoption and acceptance of remote education promoted developments that deserve our attention.

Access of French students from NL-UFES to DICTs

With the arrival of the pandemic and the impossibility of continuing the face-to-face classes, there was concern above all with a massive dropout that could jeopardize the existence of the project, since the resources for the payment of teachers, employees, equipment and maintenance come only from semiannual payment for courses. Therefore, the alternative found to solve this problem was the virtualization of classes.

In order to support the discussions on the subject, in early April, a questionnaire designed by the administrative, pedagogical and general coordinators was sent to all NL-UFES

students. The questionnaire was prepared in GoogleForms, containing 13 closed and one open question, related to the use of social networks, knowledge of digital platforms, access to the internet and the availability of electronic devices.

In a population of 4,500 students enrolled (of which 677 were of the French course), there was a sample of 2940 responses (of which 440 were of the French course). Considering the total number of students at the Language Center, 65.3% responded. Considering only students of French, 64.9% responded. It is, therefore, a very representative sample of the reality of the public at NL-UFES.

It was found, through research, that 93.86% of students have the didactic book. The fact that the questionnaire raises this concern shows that, for NL-UFES, this element can facilitate the conduct of the class in a non-face-to-face context, in the sense that students have physical support in hand. However, one of the points raised by the teachers in meetings is that the activities proposed by the book assume face-to-face interaction between students and, therefore, adaptations were necessary.

It took a while for them to become familiar with the platform and think of ways to adapt the activities of the book to the possibilities of interaction via the platform, so that the communicative approach was not compromised: initially, the classes gained a more expository character, the textbook contents were transmitted more quickly than foreseen in the face-to-face modality and, for this reason, it was necessary to complement the course with extra activities and materials.

> Although technology is a very expressive element of culture, it needs to be properly understood in terms of the implications of its use in the teaching and learning process. This understanding is what allows the teacher to integrate it into the pedagogical practice [...] for this it is essential that the teacher, regardless of his area of activity, be able to know the potentialities and pedagogical limitations involved in the different technologies, be it video, Internet, the computer among others [...] (SILVA; MEDEIROS; SANTOS, 2016, p. 231, our translation).

Another important issue to remember is the fact that 6.14% of students do not have the didactic book. When classes were in person, there was the possibility of borrowing through the NL-UFES library or of accompanying the classes with a classmate, sharing the material. With virtualization, these students probably had more difficulties. It is necessary to say that the didactic material can be consulted in its entirety in the publisher's virtual space, however, at a cost to the student.

The survey revealed that only 36.82% of them were in the habit of accessing the publisher's virtual platform. This is relevant to the extent that students did not anticipate that the content of the French course could also be accessed virtually: praxis was, for most, a learning based exclusively on classroom interaction.

Considering that almost all students answered that they had access to the internet and equipment such as computers and smartphones, it is suggested that it is not the lack of technological resources that prevented them from having access to extra and virtual content. This points to a lack of acclimatization to the virtual in relation to foreign language learning.

The data suggest that students made use of the internet, social networks and platforms such as YouTube. In addition, more than 93% responded that "they would be willing to access and have access to online content and/or activities through other channels such as blogs, platforms and other tools". It is not clear from the question asked in the questionnaire whether this opening of students to virtual content concerned an effective resumption of classes in order to complete the course virtually.

Once classes resumed, most students remained enrolled, expressing a desire to try to study in a different way than usual, that is, most imagined that there were conditions to take the course remotely. For the reticent, teachers were instructed to encourage them not to give up before experiencing remote teaching.

Before experiencing remote teaching, in a proper way, other forms of virtual interaction between teachers and students were proposed by the NL-UFES management team, namely: contacts through social networks, e-mail and messaging applications. In the subsequent section, we will report on how such interactions took place.

The first virtual interactions

Before opting for the implementation of virtual teaching, the management of NL-UFES requested that teachers of each language establish interactions with students. The objective was that the students did not lose contact with the languages studied and maintained a link with the institution. It was recommended that light, objective, punctual content be provided through virtual platforms and/or social networks, addressing subjects such as: vocabulary, grammar, videos, curiosities, virtual visits to museums, theaters, libraries.

During this period, the publisher gave teachers access to the premium version of the virtual space, which allows the use of all the book's resources and, in turn, they launched into new seas: they experienced different forms of virtual interaction and became a little more

familiarized with the *Maison des Langues* publisher's virtual space, identifying the possibilities of remote work with students.

The approximation between students and teachers through virtual resources took place via social networks of the French course (Facebook page and Instagram), Whatsapp groups and e-mail. Weekly, the students received a virtual cultural activity or a study tip, according to the level studied. In addition, teachers remained available for virtual feedback regarding posted activities.

It was stressed that such activities would not be considered as "classes given" or substitutes for face-to-face hours, although the privileged themes and contents were those related to the textbook units. It can be observed that there was an increase in the number of followers on social networks, as well as in the number of likes of the posts, that is, the contact between the institution and students was intensified, as desired by the direction of the NL-UFES.

It is noteworthy that there was an involvement of the teaching professionals since the selection and elaboration of activities, culminating in virtual meetings through varied platforms of the teacher's choice, such as Zoom, Skype and YouTube. Such occasions were configured as virtual conversations about cultural subjects, as well as "big classes" and lives, about contents already taught in person and open to all students enrolled in the course.

This moment was very positive in the sense that they got used to virtual interactions, with the practice of autonomous study, with a new organization of life and work required by the context of pandemic and isolation.

However, the evaluative questionnaire on the course showed that these actions were not sufficient to promote a more expressive connection between the NL-UFES and the students, since 18.9% stated that they did not feel connected to the French course through activities and 31.5% were indifferent to this initiative.

In the next topic, we intend to detail how remote teaching was implemented in the French course at the UFES Language Center, trying to highlight the consequences and implications of the methodological adaptations necessary for the continuity of the teaching-learning process.

Implementation of remote education and methodological adaptations

In mid-May, the management took the decision to promote a return to activities in a virtual way, through platforms. Google classroom and Microsoft Teams were tested, which was

chosen for the following reasons: greater control of the work carried out and the use as close as possible to reality and normality. It was decided to continue classes on days and times as scheduled for face-to-face teaching, at the beginning of the semester, synchronously, according to a statement announced on the NL-UFES website:

> After evaluating several possibilities, the **Microsoft Teams platform was chosen**, one of the **Microsoft Office Online tools**, available for free to educational institutions. This platform will allow contact and interaction between students and teachers, enabling synchronous classes and exchanges of video, text and audio during class hours, with due security in the exchange of information and data recording. Thus, it will be possible to offer an efficient adaptation of the teaching-learning activities of the Language Center courses to this new modality. (NL-UFES, 2020e, highlights in the original, our translation).

The minority that declared in the questionnaire that they did not have structural conditions, would be given the option of a printed study plan, made available for withdrawal at the NL-FES facilities, with activities to be carried out autonomously by the student.

As a support measure for teachers, the pedagogical coordination promoted a formative afternoon, that is, a training workshop for the use of the platform, in order to enable them to use the tools of the virtual environment. In addition, a lecture was offered with a psychologist, in order to promote a dialogue on the emotional issues experienced during the period.

They were instructed to interact with each other and with students through the chosen platform, in order to practice the new modality and interact with the virtual environment before the official beginning of classes. On 2 June 2020, with the implementation of synchronous virtual classes (NL-UFES, 2020e), a new phase of FL teaching in the NL-UFES began during the pandemic.

There was no teaching participation in the choice of platform and the teachers stated that there was little time to prepare for the use of the determined virtual learning environment (VLE), which ended up giving rise to feelings of anguish, stress and insecurity, corroborating Kaspary's statement (2012, p. 35, our translation), when he says: "[...] it is not possible to evaluate, coordinate and propose tasks within a medium in which you are not comfortable".

In the first weeks, they showed above all the anguish of not having enough control over the platform's resources to help students with difficulties. In addition, there was a fear that any technical problem would be interpreted as lack of care and preparation for the class. This shows that "[...] applying newly acquired knowledge is not an immediate task, requiring a whole period of experimentation, in order to obtain mastery of the new technology" (BIANCHINI, 2003, p. 30, our translation).

Some positive factors were also raised: students anxious for a return to school, open to experiencing the virtual modality, longing for teachers and colleagues.

The dynamics of the "new" classroom imposed reflections on the methodology used, since new elements emerged that defied the usual praxis: low internet speed, lack of knowledge of the platform, students who did not have a microphone, distractions from the home environment that impaired concentration and turned off cameras that prevented the teacher from connecting with the individuals to whom he spoke. All of this corroborated for the class to be less fluid when compared to the face-to-face reality.

For authors like Silva, Medeiros and Santos (2016), the use of DICTs has been configured as a "precious aid" to the teaching of foreign languages. In fact, as a form of "aid" to the face-to-face course, NL-UFES teachers and students were - even before the pandemic - used to the potential of the web: interaction through Whatsapp and social networks and smartphone research about topics brought up by didactic book, giving dynamism to the classes.

However, such a transition from face-to-face to virtual brought "[...] concern, anxiety, precisely in relation to the proper functioning of the material and the lack of technical support when a problem arises" (GALLI; AUBIN, 2012, our translation).

> The difficulties make the technological resources start to be seen as a "foreign body" that would arouse a certain number of fears before entering the pedagogical habits: the fear of losing credibility, of having your competence judged by the students if the material does not work. These are some of the reasons that dampen teachers' enthusiasm for using new technologies for learning, which are often perceived as a "foreign" element. (GALLI; AUBIN, 2012, our translation).

In addition to the technical concerns, there were those of a methodological nature. Teachers dealt with new expectations from students. Among them, the availability of class materials in advance so that they had a first contact with the content that would be addressed in class. In the evaluative questionnaire, 82.7% of the students stated that the previous sending of materials worked as a facilitating element.

In this way, a demand is created for the teacher that was not previously common: the preparation of classes earlier than usual and the prior sharing of media, materials and content with students.

One of the biggest challenges was to provide students to interact with each other and with the teacher. Gradually, this challenge was overcome, while a greater ambiance was formed for the "new" classroom and its rhythms, limitations and potential. For that, freedom of

experimentation in the context of the class and also the collective reflections held in weekly meetings were essential.

At the end of the semester, an evaluation research was carried out with the students about the new modality implemented. Of a total of 510 students who actually completed the course, 128 answered the questionnaire, providing interesting data for an analysis of the situation.

For example, while teachers expressed insecurities regarding both the conduct of classes in digital media and the perception of students about their teaching practice, the survey revealed that 89.8% of students perceived the teacher as well prepared to conduct the class. Proof of this is that 74.8% stated that the group activities were well adapted to the new virtual format.

Reflecting on the teaching methodology and looking for ways to overcome the difficulties faced in this process, led the team in the French area of the UFES Language Center to focus also on a very relevant element: the forms of assessment. In order to report such an adaptation, in the next section, we will deal more closely with the evaluation theme.

Evaluation

Traditionally, in face-to-face courses, NL-UFES maintains a standardized assessment system for all languages, divided into three moments of the semester, with pre-established dates in the academic calendar, that is, there are weeks reserved for the application of tests. Such tests have a summative character and measure knowledge of skills: oral expression and comprehension; written expression and understanding.

As soon as classes were resumed virtually, students expressed concern about the evaluation process. However, the assessment methods to be used in remote education had not yet been discussed, which occurred during the month of July 2020, when the NL-UFES management decided to allow each language to establish its forms and evaluation dates.

The French team considered that a summative assessment could bring stress or discouragement to students, since the assessments could not be thought of in the same dynamics of classroom teaching, given the technical difficulties and apprehension about the new modality.

In this sense, we opted for a formative, constant, flexible assessment through activities and projects, emphasizing the importance of the student having feedbacks throughout the semester. Priority was given to correcting difficulties along the learning path, promoting collective work and lightness to the process.

The evaluative activities were applied during a specific class, through exercises developed from the textbook, with a view to working on all skills. The projects consisted of directed studies and research around a theme chosen for each level, which culminated in productions made by the students, such as: posters, videos, poems, chronicles etc.

At the end, the products generated were posted on the French social networks of NL-UFES as a way of highlighting and disseminating the results of the projects and valuing collaborative learning, which provides for an active action between students and teachers, corroborating for the development of language and interactional skills (NITZKE, 2002).

Evasion

Before the platform resumed classes, there were requests to cancel enrollments and return semester fees, which generated concern in the management team about a mass dropout and the consequent bankruptcy of the project. Therefore, it was insisted that students experience the virtual modality before thinking about giving up.

With remote teaching, the French team was particularly concerned with dropout, especially regarding scholarship students and students over 60 years old: would the requirement of using digital tools and the Internet exclude them from learning? Would the mediation through the computer and the lack of face-to-face meetings discourage them? In addition, several other worrying elements were to be unveiled along the way, as we will try to report later.

Table 01 (below) illustrates the evasion scenario in the first academic semester of 2020, when there was an interruption of the face-to-face classes and the transition to remote education.

Table 1 – Panorama of dropout in the French course in 2020/1

	active enrollments in March (face-to-face classes)	active enrollments in June (remote classes start)	effective attendance of students in July	effective attendance of students in August (end of school term)	Enrollments made in the second semester (remote education)
French 01	197	195	148	130	26
French 02	146	137	116	105	93
French 03	98	89	78	75	83

French 04	69	68	63	60	47
French 05	43	42	40	40	46
French 06	40	38	34	34	28
French 07	45	44	36	36	26
French 08	22	22	20	20	27
Conversation	17	14	10	10	0
Total	677	635	541	510	376

Source: Devised by the authors

As can be seen in table 01, in March 2020, there were 677 people enrolled in the French courses, in the face-to-face modality. With the interruption of face-to-face activities and, consequently, the implementation of remote education, in the beginning of June 2020, the majority remained in the framework of active students, that is, students did not cancel their enrollment.

Of the 677 enrolled at the beginning of the school term, in March 2020, 635 remained linked to the course when implementing remote education in June 2020. We believe that the high adherence of students to learning through the digital platform was due to the following factors: 1) the encouragement of teachers in the first virtual interactions already reported in the previous section of this article; 2) encouraging students to experiment with classes in the remote mode and 3) the short period available for cancellation of enrollment, that is, one week after the resumption of classes in the new mode.

Another element that deserves our analysis is the effective attendance of students to classes on the Microsoft teams platform. The fact that there are 635 students with active enrollment in the system does not reveal the reality of the dropout scenario. That is, to address the issue, it is necessary to visualize the effective frequency of students in order to attend synchronous classes.

Table 01 shows relevant data for our analysis. In July and August, surveys of frequent students were carried out: the presence was low in some classes, regardless of the days and times. Many students reported to the teachers that they had kept their enrollment active because they thought they would be able to finish the course in a virtual way, but they observed that the new reality of social isolation brought new elements and an organization of life that took them away from their studies.

Among the factors mentioned, are: isolation in rural areas (where there is no internet signal or this is insufficient for the good use of the teaching platform); care for the elderly and children (especially women said they accumulated tasks, reducing or preventing the time to be devoted to studies); the need to share essential equipment for monitoring classes; insecurity and inability to use technologies; changes in working hours; deafness; and changes in priorities.

All the factors mentioned above contributed to the dropout rates illustrated in Table 01. After the cancellation of enrollments for the first semester of 2020, 635 people remained enrolled in the course, meanwhile 510 students finished the academic semester. In other words, the non-adherence to virtual classes can be seen in addition to the cancellation of enrollments, that is, it was revealed throughout the school period with the progressive abandonment of classes.

In view of this scenario, the management team of the UFES Language Center instructed teachers to conduct a campaign to convince students to remain enrolled in the second semester of 2020. Thus, there was an intense appeal from teachers to 510 frequent students to continue their studies. French studies at NL-UFES, still remotely.

On the one hand, this effort was successful, as shown in Table 01, since there were considerable rates of re-enrollment in the classes from French 02 to French 08. This means that among the students who managed to follow the remote classes until the end of the semester, most of them chose to continue the course. The data show that a significant part of the students remained at the institution.

On the other hand, we found that enrollments for French 01 in the second semester of 2020 had a considerable drop when compared to the previous semester: while in 2020/1 there were enrollment of 197 beginners, in 2020/2 there were only 26. With that, only 03 classes of French 01 had a minimum number of enrollments to be opened, while, usually, the number of beginning classes was 10 to 12.

This demonstrates that the institution was not successful in attracting new students for the French course, although there was disclosure about the course in the official profiles of the French area of NL-UFES (Instagram and Facebook) and also in the teachers' social networks.

If we consider the total number of French students at NL-UFES before and after the implementation of virtual education, we see that the scenario led to a significant reduction in supply for the subsequent semester. Before the pandemic, the course used to have about 700 students and during the social isolation resulting from it, only 376 enrollments were made. Thus, the evasion caused by the new reality of remote education is evident, with social isolation as a background.

Final considerations

With this article, we aimed to report the experience of teaching FFL at NL-UFES during the first academic semester of 2020, with a view to recording aspects of the changes that occurred in the process of adapting face-to-face teaching to the remote, given the context of pandemic.

The study was based on documents such as minutes of meetings, institutional ordinances, research carried out by NL-UFES with the students and data collection on enrollments and dropout. Such documents showed anxieties and anguish about the resumption of activities, as well as the reflection process of the French team, from the first virtual interactions to the consolidation of synchronous classes, methodological and relative adaptations to the evaluation model.

We conclude that access to DICTs was fundamental to this transition, although insufficient to prevent evasion. Another important conclusion has to do with teacher formation: although the teachers had solid experience, the advent of this new educational format generated uncertainties and insecurities in the group.

However, the collaborative work allowed to minimize the adversities, since they looked for creative solutions to the obstacles, in order to promote lightness without losing the focus of learning, as evidenced by the repercussion of the projects developed by the students and posted on social networks.

The scenario reported in this work evidenced a process that was already taking place in the universe of education, namely: the virtualization of language courses. However, it happened in this context in an accelerated way, given the circumstances of the imposed social isolation. We believe that the experience markedly demonstrated in the context of NL-UFES is similar to others at national and international level.

The experience, although it has negative aspects, was positively configured as a possibility of learning new ways of reaching audiences previously not reached, which made the NL-UFES management manifest the desire for remote education to remain as a reality beyond the pandemic period, with a view to serving people from other locations, far from the capital Vitória.

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