

Teaching Through Crisis: ELT Educators' Resilience After the February 6, 2023 Earthquakes

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to examine the professional resilience of instructors working at Mustafa Kemal University in Hatay, the city most devastated by the February 6, 2023 Earthquakes in Türkiye, which are described as the Disaster of the Century, and contributes to the discussions on teacher resilience in higher education institutions by understanding how instructors continue their professions in such a crisis situation. The study was designed as a qualitative study. The sample of the study was six lecturers and this sample was selected using the convenience sampling method. Semi-structured interviews were used as data collection tools and the data were analysed using thematic analysis method. As a result of the study, instructors experienced psychological, emotional, physical, housing problems and lack of hardware during the post-disaster teaching period, but despite these difficulties, they developed teaching resilience.

Keywords: Teacher resilience, professional resilience, earthquake

INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession is seen as one of the most stressful professions in the world. Throughout their teaching careers, educators have to deal with many challenges and problems, some of which are personal, some institutional, and some societal. Unexpected and devastating events such as natural disasters can seriously disrupt education, affecting both educators and students emotionally and academically. At this point, teacher resilience is an important aspect of education, considering the pressures and obstacles that teachers experience every day (Hascher et al., 2021; López-Angulo et al., 2022). Resilience is the ability of a person to cope with challenges, overcome failures, and cope with changing situations (Kangas-Dick and O'Shaughnessy, 2020). Teacher resilience can be defined as the teacher's capacity to maintain their effectiveness despite the difficulties and challenging professional requirements of the teaching profession (Mansfield et al., 2016). To put it in different way, teacher resilience is the developed or learned ability to adapt and achieve good results despite serious risks to development or adaptation (Mullen et al., 2021). Teachers are the cornerstone of education. It is imperative to retain teachers in the profession, increase the effectiveness of educational institutions, and ensure that teachers are resilient in times of crisis and disaster.

Natural disasters can unfortunately have long-term effects on education in an unpredictable way. Earthquakes in particular can cause devastating damage to educational institutions and serious psychological damage to educators and those receiving education. In this sense, research emphasizes the importance of educators adapting to the new situation and developing appropriate teaching strategies in order for education to continue in some way after disasters. However, research on the experiences of educators in educational institutions, especially higher education institutions, in disaster-affected areas is limited. This study examines the four main components of teacher resilience:

Individual Resilience: Personal management strategies and psychological arrangements made by the instructor.

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Professional Support Systems: The role of support from peers, institutions and educational policies to increase resilience.

Pedagogical Adaptation and Strategies: How the instructor adapt course content and teaching methods to take into account the post-disaster situation.

Emotional and Psychological Resilience: How the instructor copes with trauma and stress disorder resulting from the disaster.

The results of this study will provide useful perspectives for educators living in disaster-affected regions and for those designing strategies to improve education.

Purpose of the Research

This study aims to examine the professional resilience of some instructors working in a higher education institution in Hatay, the city most devastated by the February 6, 2023 Earthquakes in Türkiye, which are described as the Disaster of the Century, and contributes to the discussions on teacher resilience in higher education institutions by understanding how instructors continue their professions in such a crisis situation. In this context, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1. How do instructors define their professional resilience in Hatay, the city most affected by the February 6, 2023 Earthquakes in Türkiye?
- 2. What are the main challenges faced by instructors after the earthquake disaster?
- 3. What are the strategies of instructors to demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges?
- 4. What are the main factors that increase and decrease the professional motivation of instructors after the earthquake disaster?

METHOD

This study was prepared as a qualitative case study to investigate the effects of teaching resilience on the instructors working at Mustafa Kemal University in Hatay. Qualitative research provides detailed and in-depth investigation of people's perspectives and experiences in social circumstances (Lim, 2024). This method was suitable for the study so that the researcher could examine the post-disaster experiences of the teachers in detail within a social constructivist framework by expressing the perception and meaning-making process from their own perspectives.

Sample

The study was conducted with 6 instructors, 4 female and 2 males working at School of Foreign Languages, Hatay Mustafa Kemal University in the 2024-2025 academic year. Although the number of participants in the study was small, they were determined based on data saturation principles and practical limitations. Interview invitations were sent to all faculty members working at Hatay Mustafa Kemal University School of Foreign Languages, but only 6 people responded to the invitation. As suggested by Lim (2024), the aim of qualitative studies is to explore in depth the experiences of individuals rather than to make statistical generalizations. The adequacy of the sample size was determined by ensuring data saturation. After six interviews, recurring themes emerged and no new striking views emerged, indicating that conducting more interviews would result in unnecessary information. For this reason, the sample size was deemed sufficient to reveal different perspectives within the context of this study. The sample was selected by the convenience sampling method since the interview invitation was sent to all lecturers working at the School of Foreign Languages, only those who volunteered to participate in the study and responded were interviewed. Convenience sampling is the process of making a research sample easily accessible to the researcher (Ruhi, 2017). Factors such as years of seniority and age were not taken into account as they did not contribute to this study.

Data Collection Tools

As the data collection tool, semi-structured interviews consisting of 8 questions prepared by the researcher were conducted with written responses to understand the participants' teaching resilience in detail. During the preparation of the interview form, the relevant literature was researched in detail, and a preliminary interview was conducted with two participants to find out whether the questions were clear and relevant feedback was received.

Process

Participants were first informed about the purpose, process and confidentiality principles of the research. Then, semi-structured interviews were sent by mail and responses were requested within a certain period of time. The depth of the answers varied, some were quite short and concise, some were lengthy. Further questions were sent in cases where clarification was needed in order to understand the participants' perspectives more clearly and in depth. Pseudonyms were used to ensure participant confidentiality.

Analysis of Data

The obtained data were analysed with thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis means classifying, interpreting and describing themes in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The participants' responses were coded in the context of teaching resilience and divided into meaningful categories according to the main and sub-themes. Thematic Analysis was performed manually based on the six-step approach of Braun and Clarke (2006). That is, first the data was thoroughly understood and initial coding was done. Then, themes were created and these themes were reviewed again. The themes were then described and named, and finally the final report was prepared. Considering the sample of this study, manual coding was deemed appropriate in order to reveal salient themes in the data. In order to prevent possible bias and increase reliability, the coded themes were reviewed several times and the coding and theme creation stages were noted step by step and an audit trail was provided. This analysis aims to reveal the difficulties experienced by the instructors who continued to work in Hatay after the February 6, 2023 Earthquakes in Türkiye and the strategies they implemented to cope with these difficulties.

RESULTS

Thematic analysis of data obtained from interviews conducted with six lecturers to understand post-disaster teaching processes revealed the themes of "challenges encountered, professional resilience, coping strategies, teaching motivation, use of artificial intelligence, and post-disaster pedagogical changes". Below, subcategories and codes under each theme are presented with participants' excerpts:

Table 1. Challenges Encountered

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Codes	Frequency (f)	Excerpts
Technical Inadequacies	Lack of technological infrastructure	Internet access problems	Difficulty in accessing the internet	2	"I had to give lectures at the homes of friends who had internet access." (Nina)
		Lack of hardware	Lack of computer and phone	2	"I didn't have my computer or mobile phone with me. I wasn't ready for online lessons." (Tiffany)
Psychological and Emotional Problems	Distraction and stress	Difficulty in focusing	Lack of attention and stress	3	"I experienced distraction and difficulty in focusing." (Oliver)
	Adaptation problem	Environmental adaptation difficulties	Adaptation problem due to personal problems	2	"It was difficult to return to the school term in another city without solving our personal problems." (Pamela)
Housing Problems	Living conditions	Loss of comfort and security concerns	Hygiene, heating and security problems	2	"We had to deal with many problems such as hygiene, heating and security." (Nina)
Physical Difficulties	Health problems	Physical ailments	Shortness of breath and fatigue	3	"Shortness of breath and physical fatigue made it difficult for me to teach." (Tiffany)

Table 1 presents the instructors challenges encountered after the disaster. It seems that the instructors experienced psychological and emotional problems (f=3), physical difficulties (f=3) as well as technical inadequacies (f=4) and housing problems (F=2) during the post-disaster teaching process.

Table 2. Professional Resilience

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Codes	Frequency (f)	Excerpts
Professional Resilience	Alternative work environments	Teaching from different locations	Using alternative venues	1	"Sometimes I even had to teach on the rooftop." (Nina)
	Instructional strategies	Making lessons short and effective	Developing effective teaching strategies	1	"I tried to keep the lesson more briefly and effectively." (Oliver)
	Use of technology	Utilizing online platforms	Effective use of digital tools	1	"Systems that evaluate students' homework and applications that personalize learning methods provided me with significant support." (Thomas)
	Individual resilience	Struggling to stay strong	Continuing despite difficulties	1	"Despite the difficulties I encountered, I made a great effort to carry out the lessons in the most effective way." (Orla)

Table 2 shows the professional resilience of the instructors. In the post-disaster period, they seem to have demonstrated professional resilience by creating alternative working

environments for themselves, effectively using distance education tools, and providing individual flexibility and adaptation with different methods.

Table 3. Coping Strategies

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Codes	Frequency (f)	Excerpts
Coping Strategies	Social support	Solidarity with colleagues	Receiving emotional support	1	"Meeting with friends who had similar problems made me feel like I was not alone." (Nina)
	Interaction with students	Providing motivation	Increasing student participation	1	"I felt compelled to develop new methods to respond to students' needs." (Thomas)
	Personal adaptation	Developing patience and flexibility	Developing patience in the face of challenges	1	"Despite my traumas, I learned to be more patient." (Oliver)

Table 3 reports the instructors coping strategies in the post-disaster period. It is clear that they increased their resilience through emotional support, interaction with students, and personal adaptation strategies.

Table 4. Teaching Motivation

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Codes	Frequency (f)	Excerpts
Teaching Motivation	Academic and personal development	Developing new skills	Self-development, endurance	1	"I tried to stay resilient by finding opportunities to improve myself." (Thomas)
	Professional Responsibility	Supporting students	Providing motivation to students, conscientious obligation	1	"The conscientious obligation I feel towards my students living in the earthquake zone has been the biggest driving force for me." (Nina)
	Perspective on the Future	Adapting to the process	Progress despite trauma, managing the process	1	"Developments in the world do not stop just because we are experiencing trauma." (Oliver)

Table 4 presents the instructors teaching motivation in this process. It seems that the instructors increased their motivation to teach by focusing on academic and personal development, seeing it as their responsibility to provide support to students, and thinking that it was essential to adapt to the post-disaster process.

Table 5. Use of Artificial Intelligence

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Codes	Frequency (f)	Excerpts
Use of Artificial Intelligence	Course content development	Creating learning materials	Enriching course content	1	"I used it to create course content and add visual richness." (Oliver)
	Time management	Speeding up assessment	Using automated homework	1	"Systems that assess students' homework have

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Codes	Frequency (f)	Excerpts
		processes	assessment systems		saved me time." (Thomas)

Table 5 presents the use of artificial intelligence in the post-disaster era. It is clear that the instructors used AI-enabled tools to effectively manage time in developing course content/materials and evaluating student assignments.

Table 6. Post-disaster pedagogical changes

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Codes	Frequency (f)	Excerpts
Post-disaster Pedagogical Changes	Digitalization and online education	The spread of online education	All courses are online	1	"All courses are online." (Nina)
	Flexible teaching models	Individualized education	Providing flexibility for students' different needs	1	"A flexible system has been created." (Oliver)

As the table presents, in the post-disaster teaching process, instructors stated that education was digitalized and continued online, and they needed to adapt a flexible teaching model.

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

This study evaluated the difficulties experienced by instructors in the post-disaster period, their professional resilience, teaching motivation, use of artificial intelligence, and pedagogical changes through thematic analysis. As emphasized in the studies of Beltman et al. (2018) and Luthar and Brown (2007), many difficulties and limitations can occur in education and training in post-disaster periods. In this context, it is seen that instructors have developed some strategies. What is done to continue education in such difficult and restrictive situations is related to teacher resilience, which is consistent with the results of the study of Masten (2014) and Luthar (2005). As stated before, the professional resilience of teachers is impacted by the difficulties encountered in education environments. Regarding this, Beltman (2021) emphasizes that both singular and environmental aspects are essential to keep teacher resistance alive. A similar view was stated by Gu and Day (2013) who claimed that the strategies developed by teachers against difficulties not only improve their pedagogical skills, but also increase their motivation and reduce their burnout. In line with this view, Liu and Onwuegbuzie (2012) emphasize the importance of developing coping strategies to ensure effective teaching and to increase teacher resilience.

Analyses of the interviews revealed that instructors experienced hardware insufficiency, psychological and emotional problems, physical difficulties and accommodation problems. Lack of access to the internet and instructors' lack of equipment after the disaster were the main factors that prevented the continuity of education. Similar to these findings, in the study of Sarıgöz (2024), it was stated that teachers and students experienced serious difficulties in teaching and learning after the earthquake disaster, and the reasons for this were the inadequate physical conditions of schools, heating, shelter and health problems. Corresponding to these, the study of Liu and Onwuegbuzie (2012) propose that education has been disrupted in crisis situations due to insufficient and missing materials and needs. In addition, the results revealed that instructors experienced psychological and emotional problems such as concentration and stress disorder in the post-disaster period, which affected the effectiveness of teaching. Similar findings were obtained in the study of Bayar et al. (2024), in which participants experienced emotional exhaustion, psychological behavioural disorders, and economic problems

after the earthquake disaster. Moreover, instructors reported environmental adaptation problems and hygiene, heating and security problems due to housing problems, which was another factor that prevents education from continuing regularly and efficiently in the disaster area. This study is in line with Mullen et al. (2021) study on this point. The ability to be resilient varies depending on environmental conditions and challenges.

According to the results, despite these difficulties and inadequate resources, instructors seem to have found solutions to improve the situation and increased their teaching resilience. To be clearer, instructors seem to have developed professional resilience during this crisis period. increased their teaching motivation and coping strategies, used artificial intelligence-supported teaching tools and made pedagogical changes in their teaching. Teacher motivation is the most common personal resource in the context of resilience and influences a teacher's perseverance, effectiveness, and even ability to advance within the classroom (Mullen et al., 2021). Similar to this result. Sarıgöz (2024) stated in his study that teachers studying for a non-thesis master's degree at Hatay Mustafa Kemal University tried to adapt to the situation in some way after the earthquake disaster and tried to continue their education and training. A related conclusion was reached in Luthans et al.'s (2006) study which revealed that developing strategies to minimize problems during the crisis and teaching resilience is important for the continuity of education and training. Chen (2024) made a literature synthesis on teacher resilience and evaluated teacher resilience as physical resilience, emotional resilience, psychological resilience, social resilience and spiritual resilience. In our study, the terms "physical adaptability, positivity about the future, self-awareness, emotion regulation, personal growth, social support seeking, social acceptance, sense of mission" was emphasized as some of their encompassing ones (Chen, 2024).

Another finding that emerged as a result of thematic analysis shows that instructors have developed professional resilience in the post-disaster period. This is evident in their statements regarding "creating an alternative environment for teaching, developing teaching strategies, integrating technology into lessons and increasing individual resilience". In line with the present study, Beltman et al. (2018) suggested that teachers used technology to ensure that education continued without interruption during disasters and thus increased their professional resilience.

In addition to professional resilience, when the use of artificial intelligence in the post-disaster period was considered, it turned out that instructors use artificial intelligence to enrich course content and reduce student assessment time, that is, to manage time more effectively. Weston and Parkin (2010) using artificial intelligence in times of crisis after a disaster can increase the effectiveness of education.

Besides artificial intelligence, in order to increase their resilience, instructors appear to have utilized coping strategies such as social support from their immediate environment, maintaining interaction with students, and developing personal adaptations to the situation. In this context, studies argue that teachers play an important role in ensuring the resilience of students and even society after a disaster (Edmeade & Buzinde, 2021; Pacheco et al., 2022). What's more, instructors' receiving social support from their peers during this process, interacting with students and providing motivation, and trying to be flexible and patient in the face of difficulties in this process seem to have made them more resilient in the education process. This finding is in agreement with Vygotsky's (1978) basic principle of social constructivism, which suggests that "learning is a social process and occurs within the interaction of individuals". Consistent with the findings above, Öztürk (2013) emphasizes the importance of providing social support and psychological assistance to teachers and students in order to quickly recover after an earthquake disaster.

Further, it was concluded that instructors focused on academic and personal development during this process and tried to adopt the post-disaster teaching process. Parallel to the findings of this study, Turhaner and Polat (2024) also found that teachers adapted to the post-earthquake process and preferred to focus on the positive aspects of their lives by presenting a

picture of acceptance of the situation. These findings are consistent with the findings obtained in the study of Masten and Barnes (2018) in which it was emphasized that teachers tried to adapt to the changing situation in the post-disaster teaching process and continued their professional development. Similarly, in their studies on resilience and coping strategies, Edwards et al. (2014) suggested that participants adopted strategies such as friends, family and peer support, time management, and personal therapy to become resilient. Along with academic and personal development, it was concluded that instructors provided moral support to students and tried to keep their teaching motivation high during this process. Regarding this, Luthar and Brown (2007) argued that keeping teachers' motivation high in the post-disaster process affects their teaching resilience, which is very important for the continuation of education during this process. Taken together, teacher resilience is encouraged by the teachers' ethical principles and educational goals and is also influenced by their working and living conditions (Gu and Day, 2013).

When the post-disaster pedagogical changes of the instructors were considered, it was concluded that the transition to online education, digitalization in education and the importance of individualized education were remarkable. Woolner et al. (2007) included the expression "resilient school concept" in their study, that is, not only in the physical sense but also in the psychological, social and technical sense, in order to prevent any disruption of education and training during disaster periods. In this context, Salhab and Daher (2023) emphasized online education as technical resilience. Similarly, Gu and Day (2013) mentioned the importance of flexible and individual education models in crisis periods and argued that such situations may lead to pedagogical changes.

To summarise, understanding that teacher resistance is a multifaceted and dynamic concept is important for teachers' professional commitment and teaching effectiveness. This study addressed the teacher resilience of instructors within the themes of "challenges encountered, professional resilience, coping strategies, teaching motivation, use of artificial intelligence and post-disaster pedagogical changes". By learning how to rise above challenging experiences, teachers gain self-actualization, enhancement, and a new perspective. Accordingly, it was concluded that the instructors encountered accommodation problems and technical deficiencies in addition to psychological, emotional and physical problems. However, despite these, they adopted to the post-disaster process with pedagogical changes and the use of artificial intelligence in their teaching. In addition, they developed teaching motivation and coping strategies and reinforced their professional resilience. Teaching is a stressful, emotionally tiring and intellectually challenging profession. Long working hours, problematic student behaviour, paperwork, lack of emotional support, and personal problems are some of the factors that affect teacher resilience. Increasing teacher resilience is very important to ensure the quality of education and to increase its effectiveness. Considering these results, in order to prevent interruption of education and training in critical situations such as disasters and to increase teacher resilience, it is important to eliminate infrastructural deficiencies, disseminate flexible and digital teaching models, make necessary pedagogical changes and provide psychosocial support. In order to improve standards and quality in educational institutions, it is necessary to understand not only what increases teacher resilience but also how teacher resilience can be sustained. In other words, more studies should be conducted on the teaching resilience of faculty members working in higher education institutions to increase their resilience and continue to contribute to the literature in this sense.

The convenience sampling method used in this study has some limitations, such as exposure to sampling bias. The voluntary nature of participation may suggest that instructors who responded to interview questions are inherently more resilient or use better coping strategies than those who did not participate, which may lead to a disproportionate presentation of the instructors' more resilient perspective and thus limit the full extent of their resilience experience in the study. To minimize this limitation, further studies can use maximum variation sampling to identify participants and provide a wider range of participants. In addition, a more

comprehensive understanding can be obtained in this context by triangulating the data with other data collection tools such as surveys and questionnaires. Another limitation of this study is that inter-coder reliability is not sufficient because coding was done with only one researcher. However, in order to prevent possible bias and increase reliability, the coded themes were reviewed several times and the coding and theme creation stages were noted step by step and an audit trail was provided. Future studies can be conducted using more than one coder and qualitative analysis programs to ensure rigor in the analysis.

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