Transitioning to Emergency Online Teaching:
The Experience of Spanish Language Learners' and Teachers' in a US University

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👉 *Narrated presentation:* **http://bit.ly/EOTstudy**

🏛 CONTEXT

In March 2020, WHO officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic ➡ **Educators worldwide had to transition to emergency online teaching (EOT)**, including language teachers and learners.

In this unique term, educators in this university had **2 weeks to prepare a fully online term**, building on an already existing hybrid model including a digital textbook (*Contraseña*).
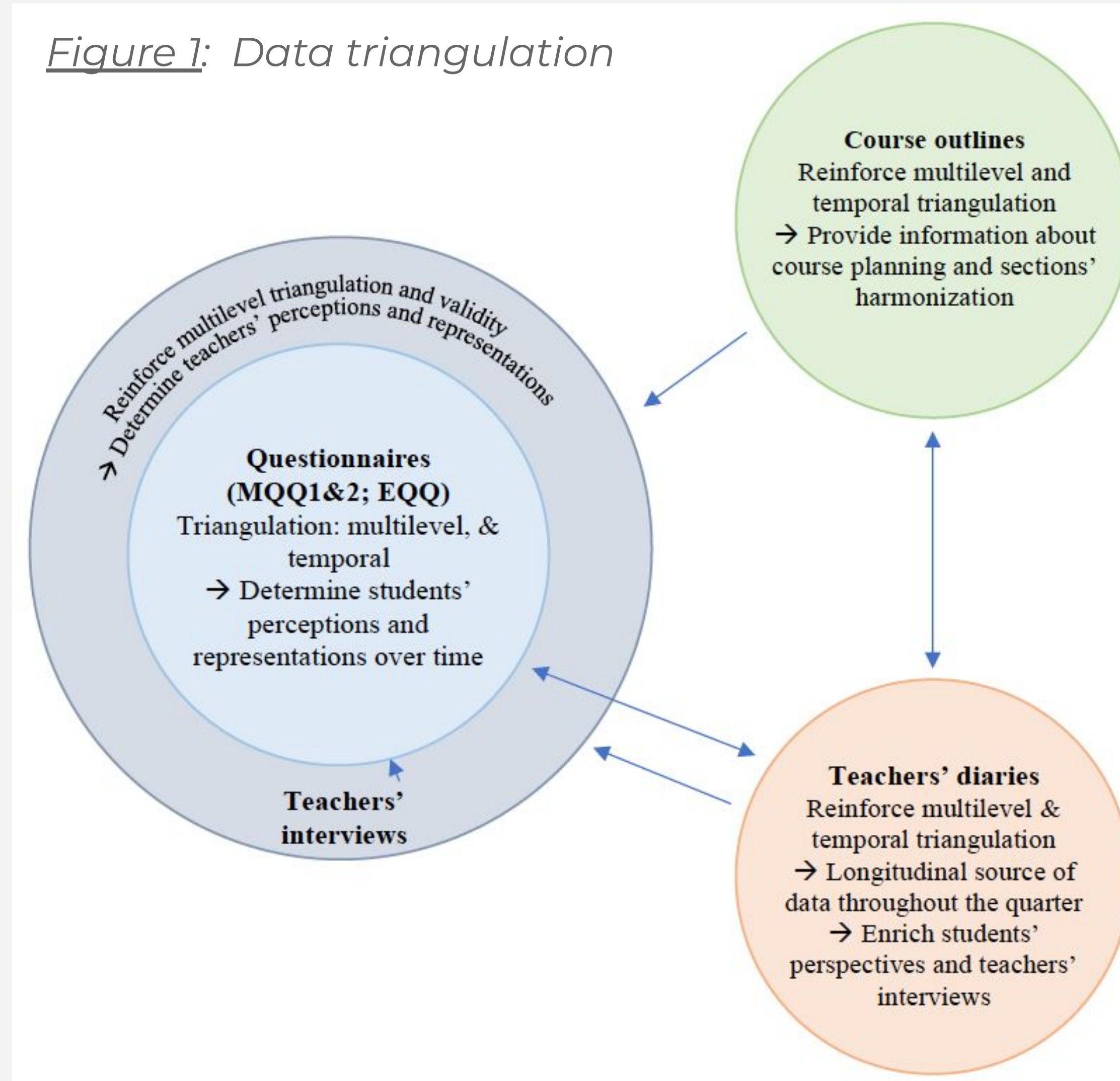
➡ To document this EOT transition, we conducted a **mixed-method study involving 210 learners enrolled in Spanish classes (beginner and intermediate levels), as well as their 14 teachers.** The two overarching questions that lead this exploratory study are:

RQ1: What were participants' overall perceptions of their teaching/learning experience, and adaptation process, in the context of this EOT?

RQ2: What specific challenges were identified over the course of the quarter?

🛠 METHODS

Figure 1: Data triangulation

Data was mainly collected in Spring 2020, during an **11-week term**: all participants were asked to participate in an **end-of-quarter questionnaire (EQQ)** adapted to their respective profiles (student or teacher). Out of this pool, seven teachers accepted to participate in **follow-up interviews** carried out in Fall 2020. Also, all from two sections, 46 students completed two additional **mid-term questionnaires (MQQ)** (in weeks 3 and 7), and their two teachers wrote **weekly entries in a journal** throughout the term, providing deeper insights about the evolution of their perceptions over time. **Course outlines** were also collected at the beginning of the quarter in order to complement participants' data.

Using NVivo software, students' questionnaires and teachers' interviews were analyzed following a **Grounded Theory** approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), and the teachers' journals were interpreted following the **phenomenological approach** (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

🔍 FINDINGS

➡ Students' **self-reported stress levels decreased significantly** throughout the term and they did not associate their stress directly with the pandemic or with the "forced" use of technology.

Students who had a **good experience** showed **high awareness of the efforts and flexibility of the educators**, while the **less enthusiastic ones** suffered from **lower autonomy** and **lower time management skills**, and they were **missing the "sense of community"** provided in F2F learning settings.

🤔 *Interesting divergence:* Some students had the impression of not performing as well during the EOT term compared to a F2F setting, <u>a belief that their teachers do not corroborate</u> (➡ more research needed).

Figure 2: Evolution of students' mean levels of stress

	beginning of quarter	end of quarter
SPA 1	3.16	1.81
SPA 2	3.12	2.2
SPA 3	3.16	2.3

If qualitative analyses corroborate the general decrease in stress, they also provide precision on the specific challenges students and teachers faced during the EOT term. The following quotations illustrate the main categories identified in declarative data:

👩‍🏫 LEARNING MODALITY: FULLY ONLINE VS. F2F
Online learning can have some advantages such as learning at a pace which is comfortable for the student, but I believe it is best utilized in conjunction with face-to-face instruction. Face-to-face instruction is invaluable as it affords students the ability to interact with other people and speak the language. [EQQ-102]

👥 SENSE OF COMMUNITY: MORE INDIVIDUAL INTERACTIONS WITH TEACHERS, BUT LESS BETWEEN STUDENTS
While communicating with my professor was easy, I felt that I couldn't make real interactions with my fellow classmates, unfortunately. [EQQ-55]

🎭 EMOTIONAL RESPONSES: COPING STRATEGIES IN THE EOT CONTEXT
Some anxiety came from students missing "space and options for [them] to make sure [they were] on track" [EQQ-173]

🕐 TIME MANAGEMENT: DIFFERENT LEVELS OF AUTONOMY
'I wish students would be more prepared during the sessions so that the teacher doesn't waste time explaining things again that she already said'. [Teacher's journal]

✅ PERCEPTION OF PROVIDED FEEDBACK
My explicit feedback was increasing because I had never had this one-on-one time with students [...] I tried to make some adjustments in making sure that I was cutting back on the corrections, focusing more on fluency. [Teacher's interview]

💡 In this case, the **Emergency Online Transition was successful because of the culture of adaptation** and **digital tools** already implemented in the teaching team before the pandemic. Results also show the **critical importance of explicitness/transparency** about the subject matter, as well as about <u>organization</u>, <u>assignments</u>, and <u>services provided</u> to support students.

IMPLICATIONS
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➡ **The findings of this study stress the importance of a proactive institutional structuring to take into account students' and teachers' needs:**
- support <u>management skills, autonomy and self-regulation of students</u> (including tools to assess/acknowledge their progression);
- support <u>explicitness/transparency in various teaching practices</u> implemented within digital environments or multimodal settings;
- provide avenues for <u>unsupervised community building</u>, in order to balance the lack of interactions between students.