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Indonesia University of Education, Indonesia
Lianchun Dong,
Minzu University of China, China

*CORRESPONDENCE

Paula Villalobos Vergara
✉ paula.villalobos@umce.cl

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Teacher-student relationship as resilience strengthener in novice teachers before and during the pandemic

Paula Villalobos Vergara*, César Peña-Sandoval, Romina Díaz and Pamela Barría-Herrera

Departamento de Formación Pedagógica, Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación, Santiago, Chile

This article addresses the role of teacher-student relationship in novice teachers' resilience before (11 participants) and during the COVID-19 pandemic (14 participants). Employing a qualitative multi-case study, we conducted a total of 35 semi-structured interviews with these 25 novice teachers working in highly vulnerable schools in the Metropolitan Region of Chile. Drawing upon the literature on teacher resilience and the teacher-student relationship, we carried out a comparative analysis of the two groups. The findings reveal two significant connections and one tension: a positive connection between the student figure and the resilient novice teachers' identity; another positive connection between professional identity and the pedagogical relationship prioritized by resilient teachers; and a tension between the pedagogical relationship prioritized by resilient novice teachers and school leadership teams' definition of pedagogical work. These findings show how the teacher-student relationship represents the driving force of novice teachers' pedagogical work and resilience, an essential element that persists despite the abrupt changes generated by the pandemic. Implications highlight the significance of conducting further research on relational aspects of novice teachers' resilience and strengthening it through institutional support systems.

KEYWORDS

novice teachers, resilience, teacher-student relationship, COVID-19, professional identity

1 Introduction

Novice teachers are defined by their initiation to teaching, i.e., the transitional period set between the initial teacher education and the beginning of the professional career. It is a differentiated stage in the professional trajectory where there are tensions and intensive learning; there is also a process of adaptation to the educational institution and sociocultural environments, shared habits and meanings (Vera, 2013).

Currently, literature on novice teachers highlights the importance of conditions that favor their retention in the education system as a fundamental condition for quality education (Sabina et al., 2023). This is crucial when high levels of attrition do not promote the creation of sustained knowledge in educational organizations and, instead, promote that students in vulnerable contexts are constantly with novice teachers, who do not have the opportunity to fully deploy their potential (Ávalos and Valenzuela, 2016).

Regarding Latin America and Chile, various studies have shown high rates of teacher attrition during the first few years of practice (Ayala Arancibia, 2014; Gaete Silva et al., 2017; González-Escobar et al., 2020), an increasing phenomenon similar to other international contexts. This phenomenon continued to grow during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the complexities of remote education. While the context in which teaching occurs is multifaceted, dynamic, and constantly changing (Hascher et al., 2021), this became even more evident during the health emergency. These changes involved the disruption of educational systems worldwide, with the suspension of face-to-face classes. As a result, there was an abrupt implementation of emergency remote learning systems, leading to significant changes in teaching and learning strategies (Ribeiro et al., 2020; Kowitartwatee and Limphaibool, 2022).

This way, teachers had to face the challenge of teaching without necessary resources and infrastructure, as they struggled to find physical and mental space to separate their family and work responsibilities (Hurtubia Toro et al., 2021; Ramakrishna and Singh, 2022). The pandemic not only affected the implementation of pedagogical measures and the quality of educational systems, but also had a negative impact on the wellbeing of teachers and students (Kowitartwatee and Limphaibool, 2022). Nonetheless, some studies refer to protective factors displayed by teachers, as they strengthened their sense of belonging to the school, recognized the complexity and difficulty of the situation, or redefined it as an opportunity for personal and institutional learning and growth (Hurtubia Toro et al., 2021).

A consensus exists in considering the teacher-student relationship as a central aspect in education (Albornoz Muñoz and Cornejo Chávez, 2017; Zheng et al., 2024) given that the teacher-student bond is a source of satisfaction and a reason to continue teaching, despite adverse conditions (Longobardi et al., 2022). Such a relationship is an aspect that gives meaning to the teacher's work (Albornoz Muñoz and Cornejo Chávez, 2017). In that line of argumentation, Farhah et al. (2021) affirm that a solid teacher-student relationship contributes to teachers' wellbeing as it fosters a positive atmosphere in the classroom, reduces stress and improves teachers' job satisfaction.

Interested in these protective factors, we sought to explore them in the Chilean context, investigating this topic by comparing two groups of novice teachers in the metropolitan region of Santiago, Chile. Although there is some literature that addresses the teacher-student relationship and the benefits to the education process, there are limited studies that directly address this relationship with teacher resilience, particularly in novice teachers. On this basis, we sought to explore the importance of students as a constituent element of novice teacher resilience. Our guiding question was: How did the teacher-student relationship influence the resilience of novice teachers in pre-pandemic and pandemic contexts?

Embedded in this main research question, there are also inquiries about the student figure linked to: the identity of resilient novice teachers; the pedagogical relationship prioritized by resilient novice teachers; and, the institutional definition of pedagogical work. By answering these questions, we hope to contribute to the efforts of teachers' retention in Chilean and elsewhere. In the following section we present a theoretical framework composed of the concept of resilience and its connection to the concept of the teacher-student relationship.

2 Theoretical framework

At a general level, *resilience* refers to the capacity for recovery in the face of adversity, the ability to manage stress, and the resistance to physical or psychological pressures without significant negative impact on the individual in question (Schelvis et al., 2014). It encompasses the ability to progress and achieve personally meaningful goals (Day et al., 2007). Early studies conceived resilience as an individual capacity and focused on risks and protective factors for its enhancement. Since the 1980s, studies have incorporated contextual elements that, in interaction with personal traits, promote resilience (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019; Hascher et al., 2021).

2.1 Teacher resilience

Now, referring to teacher resilience implies understanding it as the capacity of teachers to sustain their educational purposes and manage the inherent uncertainty in their professional lives (Gu, 2018). Thus, it is conceived as a capacity associated with a dynamic, multidimensional process within a social circuit and a system of interrelationships, influenced by sociocultural factors that can both strengthen and weaken it (Gu and Day, 2013; Gu and Li, 2013; Day and Gu, 2014; Johnson et al., 2015, 2016). Based on this, resilience is conceived as a capacity that emerges from the dynamic and complex interaction among individual, relational, and contextual conditions that enable or limit the power and agency of teachers. This model is an attempt to interpret how social, cultural, and political forces impact the work and lives of teachers and, at the same time, generate new possibilities for action (Johnson et al., 2016).

This complex understanding of teacher resilience can contribute to a critical awareness that provides novice teachers with the opportunity to comprehend how their individual challenges are public interest issues in the form of broader historical and structural patterns and movements in the social world. Consequently, individuals can frame the challenges they face in terms of historical transformation and institutional contradictions, rather than personal deficits. From this standpoint, the concept of teacher resilience is valuable as it considers both contextual and personal circumstances of teachers, particularly in the case of teachers working in economically disadvantaged communities (Johnson et al., 2016).

Teacher resilience, within this sociocultural approach, encompasses three dimensions: individual, relational, and institutional. Firstly, the individual dimension focuses on the personal and professional qualities of teachers that suggest a higher level of resilience (Johnson et al., 2016). Its components include teacher identity, understood as an evolutionary process that involves the interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences throughout life to answer the question, what do I want to become? It contributes to the perception of self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, and job satisfaction (Marcelo-García, 2010). Research in this area establishes that teachers who have a personal commitment to the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching are more likely to succeed in forming a satisfying professional identity (Paptraianou and Le Cornu, 2014; Johnson et al., 2016).

Secondly, the relational dimension corresponds to the positive relationships that teachers build with various stakeholders within the educational community (Johnson et al., 2016). through a network of relationships among teachers, students, and teacher-leaders (Ramakrishna and Singh, 2022). Therefore, support from others becomes important in the process of positive adaptation (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019). In this dimension, the relationship that teachers build with their students is highly relevant since positive interactions significantly promote academic achievement and contribute to teachers' sense of accomplishment. Thus, the emotional context of teaching and the progress and growth of students would constantly nourish teachers' satisfaction and motivation (Johnson et al., 2016). On this basis, teachers can deal with negative experiences if they also have positive experiences in their schools and with their students.

Lastly, the institutional dimension is related to how elements of school organization are formally articulated, which is determined by prevailing educational policies and the interpretation of those who implement them. It encompasses a set of rules that introduces order to educational institutions and conditions certain organizational practices which, in turn, regulate teaching practices (Johnson et al., 2016). Regarding this dimension, efforts have been made to establish characteristics of school culture, instructional leadership, and organizational conditions of teaching work that improve teacher resilience (Day and Gu, 2014). Consistent with this conceptualization, it is crucial to promote political changes, given their impact on the lives of new teachers. These changes involve improving job offers and working conditions, and ensuring support for novice teachers once they have secured employment, including induction, mentoring, and professional development opportunities (Johnson et al., 2016).

2.2 Teacher-student relationship: deepening the relational dimension of resilience

In general, when the teacher-student relationship is defined, it is usually done in terms of the impact on students' behavior or academic achievement (e.g., Roorda et al., 2017; Mosley et al., 2021). Martinez and Wighting (2023), for instance, argue the importance of building teacher-student relationships to facilitate positive student behavior and create a positive classroom environment. Additionally, solid teacher-student relationships positively influence students' learning; thus, it plays a critical role for students' academic achievement, positive affect, motivation, and traits (Bai et al., 2022).

However, it is also important to address the impact of the teacher-student relationship on teachers, precisely because of the relational dimension of resilience. Indeed, from a sociocultural stance, the teacher-student relationship involves perceptions of one another, affecting interactions over time, and affecting teachers' decision to continue teaching in schools. In novice teachers, this can be seen in the bonds they build with different actors in the educational community and outside it, which strengthens their resilience (Rizqi, 2017). This relational aspect of resilience is built thanks to aspects associated with caring relationships (Wilcox and Lawson, 2018;

Arcelay-Rojas, 2019; Guo et al., 2020; Kangas-Dick and O'Shaughnessy, 2020; Fu et al., 2023). Resilience-enhancing qualities, such as support, affection, support, empathy, listening, humor, trust have been endorsed in recent international and local studies (Hurtubia Toro et al., 2021; Villalobos Vergara et al., 2022).

From a relational-cultural perspective, resilience does not reside in the individual but in his or her ability to connect with others (Villalobos and Assael, 2018). Consequently, the teacher-student relationship plays a central role, given that those teachers who enjoy positive relationships with their students report a sustained sense of resilience and engagement. Not only do these teachers have the conviction of being facilitators of student learning and development (Taxer et al., 2019; Ramakrishna and Singh, 2022), but the teacher-student relationship where there is support (Drew and Sosnowski, 2019), empathy and reciprocity (Arcelay-Rojas, 2019) allows them to feel a greater sense of accomplishment and satisfaction (Villalobos Vergara et al., 2022).

International literature highlights the importance of cultivating resilience at various stages of the teaching career (Mansfield, 2021). Likewise, some studies in poor school contexts show that teachers decide to continue teaching in these schools because they feel a high social commitment and the conviction that their work benefits students (Gu, 2014). This resilience and its relational dimension (teacher-student) is endorsed by studies conducted in Chile, pointing out that for teachers it is vital to be certain that their work achieves learning in students (Ávalos and Valenzuela, 2016; García Huidobro, 2016; Villalobos Vergara et al., 2022). So, despite many pressures and difficulties, research on these teachers consistently shows that many, around the world, maintain their commitment and passion, largely because of the bond with their students.

Resilient teachers demonstrate high commitment to students, as expressed through their interest in promoting academic achievement, their decision to remain in disadvantaged educational contexts, and their moral conviction that students deserve the opportunity to be taught by committed teachers (Gu and Day, 2013; Gu and Li, 2013; Day and Gu, 2014). This is consistent with imbuing their work with a moral purpose and sensitivity toward social justice. Their motivation to continue teaching is grounded in the desire to contribute to changing students' lives (Johnson et al., 2015). Furthermore, the emotional bonds between teachers and students serve as a primary source of resilience in their careers. Similarly, teachers who enjoy positive teacher-student relationships are more likely to report a sustained sense of resilience and commitment, as well as making a difference in students' learning and development (Johnson et al., 2015).

In sum, solid teacher-student relationships become a primary motivation to stay teaching in the classroom, where a central aspect of this bond corresponds to reciprocity. This attribute arises from a deliberate process and effort on the part of the teacher to connect with and understand their students, building relational trust (Johnson et al., 2015).

3 Methodology

This study used a qualitative method and was guided by an interpretive approach (Durán, 2012). The research design was a

TABLE 1 Characterization of participants.

Characteristic	Stage 1 (2017–2018)	Stage 2 (2020)
Gender		
Female	6	8
Male	5	6
Total	11	14
Teacher education program		
Spanish Language	5	3
Science	1	1
English foreign language	2	2
History and geography	2	6
Philosophy	1	2
Total	11	14

multiple case study (Stake, 1999), as it sought to explore the experiences of two different groups of novice teachers, in two different contexts. The research involved a detailed and systematic analysis of the data, allowing us to delve deeply into the information (Urra Medina et al., 2014). It is key to recall that the first data collection (first group) was conducted before the pandemic; then, with the advent of the COVID-19 and its consequences, we collected data from a second group, judging it pertinent to examine and compare data in both stages.

3.1 Participants

Thus, in two different moments, a purposive sampling (Otzen and Manterola, 2017) was used by contacting 25 novice teachers in their second year of professional practice: 11 were interviewed before the pandemic and 14 during that context. They were working in public secondary schools (municipal or subsidized semi-private schools) in the Metropolitan Region, Santiago, Chile. Importantly, these teachers served a student population with a vulnerability index equal to or higher than 50%. This index is an indicator of the level of vulnerability of students attending a given school; its value ranges from 0 to 100%, where aspects such as the parents' schooling years and the student's family income are considered.

This methodological choice presupposed that teacher resilience is displayed in complex performance settings similar to those present in these schools.

All participants graduated from two well-regarded public universities with a history of teacher education, provided access to a database from which teachers were contacted via email. The sample was diverse since it included both men and women from various disciplinary fields. Table 1 shows the specific composition of the sample for both stages of data collection:

3.2 Data collection

The study employed semi-structured, critical incident interviews to explore significant events in teachers' work

(Gremler, 2004). An expert review was conducted to validate the interview protocol, ensuring their relevance and clarity. The protocol included flexible questions on key themes such as: challenges in teachers' job placement process; resources to face challenges in the teaching and learning process; perceptions of school leadership; interpersonal relational experiences (with students and other school community members); and personal and professional characteristics.

Next, in Table 2 we present the interview protocol, which was elaborated following the guidelines of Castillo-Montoya (2016) who suggests incorporating different types of questions: (1) introductory questions, (2) transition questions, (3) key questions and (4) final questions. Introductory questions help the researcher to start the interview with simple, non-threatening questions that seek narrative descriptions. Transitional questions allow moving toward key themes. Key questions, also called leading questions, tend to solicit the most valuable information. Finally, the closing questions seek to give the participant the opportunity to raise any unaddressed issues or to make a reflection or conclusion on the issues addressed.

In the first stage (11 participants), 35 interviews were conducted between December 2017 and December 2018. Nine teachers were interviewed three times while two teachers were interviewed four times; this variation (three or four interviews) responded to the need for an extra interview in some cases to explore key issues more deeply (qualitative nature of analysis). In the second stage (14 participants), each novice teacher was interviewed twice during the pandemic year 2020: first, at the end of the first semester (July), then at the end of the school year (December). Due to the context, the fieldwork was conducted remotely through video calls, which facilitated the development of synchronic interviews that closely resemble traditional research interviews conducted in real-time (Bolderston, 2012). Interviews lasted approximately 60 min, were digitally recorded and transcribed in their original Spanish. The English versions of the cited excerpts were translated by one of the authors of the article -who is bilingual- after analysis in Spanish.

3.3 Data analysis

The analysis of the interviews was conducted using a qualitative approach, focusing on the interpretation and in-depth understanding of novice teachers' experiences and perceptions.

Specifically, data underwent qualitative content analysis using the progressive approach (Simons, 2011), supported by the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS Ti Version 8.3.0. Given their textual nature, we analyzed the data by iterative reading, moving through a detailed coding process to identify salient themes and build categories. As shown in Table 3, the coding process comprised several phases: first, open coding was conducted to decompose the data into discrete parts and identify initial codes; next, axial coding was applied to organize these codes into categories based on their relationships and connections; finally, selective coding

TABLE 2 Interview protocol.

Question types and themes		Question / prompt (Q/P)
Introductory questions	Theme 1. Personal introduction	Q/P 1 To start, please introduce yourself and tell me what you want to tell me about yourself. Tell me about your current teaching job
Transition questions	Theme 2. Arrival at her/his current job 3. Duties performed	Q/P 2 How did you come to work at this place? What tasks and/or responsibilities do you currently have to assume in your job?
Key questions	Theme 4. Main difficulties faced 5. Personal impact of difficulties encountered 6. Individual dimension of resilience 7. Relational dimension of resilience 8. Institutional dimension of resilience 9. Elements that contribute to job satisfaction 10. Personal goals at the basis of being a teacher	Q/P 3 What have been the greatest difficulties you have faced in your teaching work? How have these difficulties affected you? Q/P 4 What personal characteristics of yours do you consider have helped you to face difficulties? What personal relationships have helped you to face difficulties? What are the characteristics of these relationships? What characteristics of your school have helped you to face difficulties? What advances have you experienced around your work? What effect has this had on student learning? What aspects of your work have contributed to your job satisfaction recently? Based on your work experience, what reflections do you have about why and for what purpose to be a teacher?
Final questions	Theme 11. Final reflections and conclusions	Are there any aspects you would like to add from the topic discussed that you have not been asked about?

was used to refine and integrate these categories into central themes.

Importantly, several members of the research team coded the data independently, after which collaborative meetings were held to contrast and refine the coding. To ensure rigorous and quality analysis, validation strategies such as contextualization (Álvarez and San Fabián, 2012), triangulation (Urrea Medina et al., 2014), reflexivity, and generalization (Simons, 2011) were considered. These strategies were implemented by incorporating different sources of information and triangulating among researchers during the analysis.

Importantly, the research team implemented several measures to ensure validity and reliability. Firstly, careful attention was paid to the study’s conceptualization which guided data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Urrea Medina et al., 2014). Member checking was conducted to validate findings with participants, and peer debriefing was used to minimize researcher bias and enhance the credibility of the analysis.

Regarding ethical considerations, these studies were approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee. Moreover, Kvale (2011) recommendations were followed to safeguard confidentiality,

information about procedures (consents), and the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

4 Results

To address our research, results were organized around four key themes: (a) Main challenges encountered; (b) the relationship between the teacher-student relationship and the resilient teacher identity; (c) the connection between the student figure and the pedagogical relationship prioritized by resilient teachers; and, (d) the link between the student figure and the institutional definition of pedagogical work.

4.1 Main challenges encountered

The resilience of teachers is expressed when facing the challenges of their work. Accordingly, below we present the main challenges of both the novice teachers who were studied in the first stage of the study (pre-pandemic) and those who faced their work in the pandemic context.

TABLE 3 Coding process.

Open codes	Axial codes	Selective codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low level of student learning • Low motivation • Use of social networks as a teaching tool 	Pedagogical innovation based on students' positive vision and commitment to learning	(a) Main challenges encountered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to virtual classes • Work outside working hours 	Institutional disorganization	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising student awareness • Improving students' lives • Learning as an act of justice • Social commitment • Education as a right • Education as an integral formation 	Purpose of education	(b) The teacher-student relationship and resilient teacher identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group cohesion • Positive academic performance • Capacity for reflection • Motivation to learn 	Sense of achievement from learning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closeness • Trustworthiness • Demands and limits • Methodological diversity • Permanent daily interaction 	Characteristics of the teacher-student bond	(c) The connection between the student figure and the pedagogical relationship prioritized by resilient novice teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarian stances • Good conduct in the classroom understood as passivity of students • Task overload • Disorientation about work • Lack of coordination • Poor participation in decision making 	Differences between administrators and teachers on pedagogical work	(d) The connection between the figure of the student and the institutional definition of pedagogical work

Novice teachers who started their careers before COVID-19 expressed that their greatest challenge was their students' poor level of learning and low motivation for school work. This challenge led these teachers to innovate in their teaching preparation to respond to the needs observed in their students. For example, a female Spanish Language teacher noted in the interview that: "The vocabulary issue [is serious], because they don't understand their context; they won't even be able to understand a person who speaks in a formal educated register."

However, despite the challenges, these teachers expressed a positive view of their students' potential, which drives them to promote pedagogical innovations. For example, the Spanish Language teacher created different opportunities for her students to give their opinions and express themselves orally, as she highly values their ability to reflect. Although her formal language has great challenges, she noted that her students enriched the class with their interventions. She

points out that: "They are very intelligent, they are very reflective. When they are interested in the class, they contribute a lot."

For the second group, the challenges are closely related to the impact of the pandemic on the educational process. Unlike the first group, here the need arose to migrate teaching to virtual environments, which brought with it technological difficulties. For example, teachers had to meet the learning needs of students who did not have the material conditions to access and actively participate in online classes. Thus, the challenge of providing continuity to the educational process occurred in a scenario of changes in the organization of teaching work. Teachers described this process as "confusing and disorganized" (Male—Science). This novice teacher pointed out in his interview that: "What annoyed me was the sudden change in the working methods. We had to work out of hours in order to accomplish everything that was asked of us by the school leaders."

According to the interviewees, much of the pandemic teaching did not use specialized platforms such as Zoom, but was done through social networks such as WhatsApp because they were more accessible and lower cost for students and their families. In this context, teachers regretted the low participation of students during online classes, due to access and connectivity difficulties or simply because they did not have computers.

"Because of connectivity, we try to come up with new strategies. I talked to my boss and told him 'you know there are problems connecting for most students: 40 or 30% have stable Internet connection and the rest depend on dad's cell phone, because there is only one device in the house'" (Male—History).

Then, from the data, we can evidence that both groups of teachers share a commitment to student learning and a willingness to innovate in their practices, even though the nature of the difficulties varied.

4.2 Positive link between the teacher-student relationship and the resilient teacher identity

Teacher identity is experienced as a process of interpretation and reinterpretation of the experiences related to pedagogical work (Day, 2018). It involves, on the one hand, the meanings of teaching and, on the other hand, the search for the purpose behind the daily activities of teachers.

From a continuity review perspective (prior to and during the pandemic), the participating novice teachers expressed a strong political vision regarding the purpose of education. An example of this vision was conceptualized by one teacher as:

My ideological stance means being rationally against how things are currently being experienced, and seeing the conditions in which the students live, at least those who attend this high school, that are degrading, and they are unaware because it is a way of life that is too normalized for them and, in my opinion,

is not good for us. For me, it involves teaching consciousness (Female—Spanish Language).

From this perspective, teacher identity appeals to a macrosocial level, as it adopts a critical stance toward societal norms and considers education as a means for generating awareness and bringing about change. This vision is connected to the commitment to educational transformation, particularly in creating conditions for improving their students' lives. A teacher put it this way:

One achieves noticeable changes in their lives, changes that were generated solely through a bond, by a little bit of trust, by listening to a problem. When I see those transformations, it gives me a strong motivation to continue. It is a very strong social issue (Male—Spanish Language).

Similarly, when teaching -as a pedagogical act- is valued as the vehicle to guarantee a human right, it is perceived as an act of justice that asserts the right to education. For example:

At first, I wanted to become a teacher because in my school, which was very vulnerable, we were taught the bare minimum. I found it very unfair that we were given so little. I wanted to become a teacher so that people who wanted to pursue their dreams could do so, having all the tools that should have been provided to them (Female—Spanish Language).

From this perspective, teacher identities are not fixed or immutable; they transform according to the context. What becomes evident during the pandemic is that the boundaries are defined by social commitment. One teacher expressed:

I believe that in crises is where we can finally see how we are or who we are. I feel pedagogy as a support, a social change in some way. I am a teacher who is there to help the children, so that they know that I am with them and that learning can really be a point from which they can get out of where they are, because their situation is quite complex (Female—History).

Therefore, novice teachers' identities are redefined by virtue of social relevance. Despite the emergency context, they show a strong commitment to teaching, taking various actions that allow them to ensure the continuity of the educational process and access to education for their students. For instance,

I reinvent myself, I'm young so it is valuable to be able to do it, and I have the resources, Internet connection. Here, I use a virtual whiteboard, record myself, create video lessons, solve exercises—basically, I provide all possible facilities so that they can receive education, which is a right, not a favor (Male—Science).

Continuing with the commitment to guarantee education -even in a distant or virtual mode (pandemic), interviews revealed, on one hand, novice teachers' flexibility to fulfill this responsibility and,

on the other hand, their ability to evaluate and revise their identity when forced to rearrange their priorities.

In this situation, you start to realize that you are educating people on how to face life's problems. Maybe we do need to rethink that we are not educating people just to graduate, but rather to find the best way to carry out their lives (Male—Spanish Language).

Lastly, a key element that contributes to the resilient teachers' identity is the feedback from the students regarding the teaching-learning process. In other words, what teachers observe regarding their students' educational process reaffirms their identity in terms of beliefs, decisions, and sense of achievement.

One aspect of this is related to the motivation of the students that participant teachers observed in group cohesion. A teacher commented,

Those kinds of things motivated me to keep going. The group I received as a class was very divided, and they ended up being great classmates (...) you can see those achievements (Male—Spanish Language).

Similarly, another teacher mentioned,

I am happy that almost my whole class passed (...) and it was a class of repeaters, quite challenging. So, I am satisfied with my role as a homeroom teacher. The parents were also happy (Female—History).

Another aspect is how teachers become aware of the students' interest in learning, particularly during the period of confinement. On a cognitive-reflective level, a teacher commented:

When they face a problem or engage in a small philosophical reflection and they enjoy it, seeing that they were able to reflect, that they themselves realized that things are not as simple as they thought, and they proposed something, that brings me great satisfaction (Male—Science).

The learning results evidenced by the students are a source of gratification for the teachers. For example, by noticing students' interest in continuing to participate in the educational process and committing themselves to academic tasks, even when they did not always have the resources to participate in virtual classes on a regular basis:

With the students who were able to connect, even intermittently, there were certain assignments that left me satisfied. There were very good projects, such as in 9th grade where we worked on "Our Constitution," and in 10th grade, a kind of PBL on "Chile, a Poor Country," with remote teamwork and tutoring... There was one student who couldn't attend, but she was on the phone with another student who was connected and doing the work. I also had a student with excellent performance who could never connect because she did not have a good Internet connection (Female—History).

Similarly, another teacher referred to the experience with 11th grade students who achieved satisfactory learning levels and showed a permanent interest in the subjects addressed in the class:

I think it was a good experience for the students in 11th grade. I believe they learned the same as being in the classroom because the classes with them were very good. It was an elective course on understanding the present through history, and they were very interested in the topic. They were highly engaged, and their work was excellent (Female—Spanish Language).

In terms of lesson planning, the emergency context and the students' needs challenged teachers to create and innovate so that their work becomes relevant and situated. One teacher described a strategy during the pandemic:

I focused on oral skills, on oral language comprehension because it was their strength. And I found it very rewarding, especially since they enjoyed reading and doing home readings. Also, I didn't give written tests (...). So, I think that kept me happy, continuously creating instruments, and finding what was most suitable for the language aspect (Female—History).

Thus, in a virtuous circle between students and novice teachers, identity was redefined in a way that nourished and reinforced teacher resilience.

4.3 Positive link between professional identity and the pedagogical relationship prioritized by resilient novice teachers

According to participants, resilient teachers prioritize building strong, positive relationships with their students, considering it crucial for achieving learning outcomes. These relationships are based on three key elements: (1) closeness and trust in the connection; (2) demands and boundaries in the teacher-student relationship; and, (3) rich and diverse methodologies that strengthen teacher-student relationships.

Regarding closeness and trust in the connection, both attitudes are exemplified in different ways, both before and during the pandemic. Prior to COVID-19, one teacher mentioned:

I'm one of those teachers who spends breaks in the courtyard with them, and the kids start discussing more personal topics. The kids appreciate it, and it even becomes evident in their reception of classes (Male—Spanish Language).

Similarly, in the context of the pandemic, teachers maintain close contact with their students in a virtual space, taking advantage of social networks, which became a relevant means to provide information and provided space for informal exchanges:

I believe that being in the WhatsApp group helps a lot because I read their daily communications, and I'm there to provide them with information. Communication with them has been very

smooth. They send memes, and I send memes (...) that have helped us become closer (Male—History).

This information is noteworthy beyond the scope of learning, as it is valued by teachers as a protective mechanism for students facing adversities during the health crisis, such as school dropout. One teacher explains it as follows:

The connection is fundamental, especially in more complex contexts, where you are concerned about students dropping out. You must build that trust bond with students to know what is happening at home and provide solutions (Female—History).

In relation to demands and boundaries in the teacher-student relationship, teachers are clear in defining their position and how it is valued by students:

They tell me I'm strict, so strict-empathetic. I reprehend them quite a bit, and I try to ensure they are disciplined, but during breaks, I have ten children who come to talk to me and share things (Male—Science).

Based on the observations, it is not enough to be friendly and close; setting boundaries establishes a relationship of care and necessary protection for learning. One teacher explains:

I think that's the challenge because you always must set boundaries. That's when you realize that you're the adult and they are not. You realize that they are still developing. It's like marking the boundaries and, when they cross them, trying to have a conversation (Male—Science).

Thirdly, regarding rich and diverse methodologies, teachers highlight its role to strengthen the teacher-student relationship as this approach enhances students' engagement. In other words,

They liked my teaching style; they found the class fun. They told me they were never bored (...) that there was always something new in class. One day we would see something, another day we would listen, another day we would read, another day we would write (Female—Spanish Language).

All the above elements contribute to the resilience of teachers because they allow the recognition of the teaching work by the students. Therefore, it is a reciprocal relationship built upon mutual appreciation.

4.4 Tension between the pedagogical relationship prioritized by the resilient teachers and the institutional definition of pedagogical work

From the statements made by the participants, it can be inferred that the relationship between teachers and their superiors has been strained both before and during the health emergency. Prior to COVID-19, tensions were noticeable, firstly in their imaginary

of the students and how to build a relationship with them. For example:

The School Principal believes that students function in a militarized fashion, and that there is no way to relate to them than through discipline (Male—History).

Similarly, these differences in perspectives were reflected in the classroom regarding how students should behave to achieve learning outcomes. One teacher explains it as follows:

[The principal] talks to me about mastering the curriculum, which is quite institutional, and I know that I'm part of an institution and there may be rules that I have to comply with out of obligation, but for me, a silent classroom where children just listen is not effective (Female—Spanish Language).

The comment made by the teacher is crucial for understanding how the institution is built for pedagogical work. While she acknowledges being a member of it, her superiors systematically send signals that reinforce power asymmetries and increased criticism regarding how to run a school. This dynamic intensified during the period of confinement as the forced reorganization of work was required in a period of uncertainty and unfamiliarity with distance learning.

One example of the criticisms directed at school management teams is the following:

What bothered me was the sudden change in work requirements... we had to work outside of regular hours with colleagues to fulfill all the demands, and there was a moment when we really exploded and told the school leaders, "We are not capable of delivering everything you're asking for" (Male—Science).

The work overload, combined with a lack of guidance regarding the tasks, increased the stress and the feeling of uncertainty, putting the resilient capacities of teachers under strain. One of the teachers explained,

At the school, they didn't say anything about how to work, how to support the students and, in the end, we took charge of our own classes and tried to figure out how to actually support them. Creating lessons has been quite chaotic... We hadn't had any department meetings or teachers' council meetings since March (Female—History).

From the teachers' voices, during the lockdown, leadership and institutional management faded away, disappearing from pedagogical actions, and becoming counterproductive to the daily teaching work and how to address the crisis through the work itself. Similarly, the decisions that were made by the superiors lacked transparency and democratic processes, reinforcing the notion that leadership was not pertinent to the circumstances. One teacher gives an example by saying:

When there were changes in schedules or prioritization of subjects, they were not discussed with the teachers. Nothing. The decisions have always been made behind closed doors by the administrators (Female—EFL).

In conclusion, institutional guidelines represent a source of difficulties for most teachers, negatively affecting the work carried out with students. This originates from different perspectives on pedagogical work due to their power asymmetry.

To summarize the results, we affirm that both research stages show elements of continuity in the teacher-student bond, which is strongly associated with aspects of professional identity. Based on this, the categories that organize the results answer the central question of the study. Thus, it can be affirmed that, from the construction of a positive bond between teachers and students, conditions are created for students to achieve meaningful learning. The bond generates disposition toward learning and produces concrete advances in social and cognitive development. This is clearly perceived by teachers; they express their satisfaction as they feel they have contributed to such progress. This strengthens the sense of achievement and thus the teachers' resilience.

5 Discussion and conclusion

This study compared the pedagogical work carried out by novice teachers in public educational institutions during periods of significant transformations triggered by the transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to virtual education. Although there were differing scenarios of teaching work, results show that the constitutive elements of resilience in novice teachers tend to persist, as they are closely linked to identity-related aspects. This is where students play a key role in giving meaning to the pedagogical work and endowing it with a moral purpose (Johnson et al., 2016).

Both groups of novice teachers demonstrated remarkable resilience in working in disadvantaged contexts and being committed to improving their students' learning. This task was especially complicated during the pandemic by the additional difficulties of online teaching. Accounts showed that resilience, strengthened by a strong bond with their students, motivated them to innovate in their pedagogy; innovation proved to be an effective approach to promote student motivation and learning.

Consequently, it can be concluded that the driving force behind pedagogical work and resilience of teachers is their relationship with students. In other words, despite changes in means, teaching design, and evaluation methods, resilience is preserved and even deepened because essential aspects of teacher identity are reinterpreted and consolidated through the teacher-student bond.

Similarly, it can be asserted that the commitment of teachers to student learning is what mobilizes their efforts. By fostering progress in their students, teachers nurture their sense of achievement and resilience capacity, which is consistent with recent empirical evidence (Villalobos Vergara et al., 2022).

However, it is established that the student figure, while remaining at the center of pedagogical work during the pandemic, presents a paradox in terms of the particularly adverse conditions triggered by the pandemic, which imposed the suspension of the usual functioning of the educational system. This provided teachers

with an opportunity to exercise professional autonomy and innovation, allowing for a focus on issues that seem relevant and urgent in supporting students, based on their caring and wellbeing.

Considering this situation, and in line with studies conducted by [Lizana and Lera \(2022\)](#), it is worth noting the significant human costs of teacher resilience being carried out in isolation and not being strengthened through contextual conditions during the health, social, and economic crisis. These authors also highlight that the pandemic exacerbated issues related to emotional exhaustion and deteriorated the mental health of teachers. Therefore, it is essential to establish that teachers' resilience can and should be strengthened through institutional support systems.

In accordance with [UNESCO \(2020\)](#) report "Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education" (2022), the health crisis intensified contradictions and tensions in the organization of educational work. The report puts forward the need for a paradigm shift that establishes boundaries and meaning in administrative work and allows for the development of a pedagogy that is comprehensive and based on socially relevant issues.

In this regard, this study's findings have important implications when considering ways to strengthen the resilience of practicing teachers, especially novice teachers, and thereby contribute to the transformation of the entire educational system.

From the evidence obtained, we identified some implications for initial and in-service teacher education, in the sense that it should be a space for reflection on professional identity. It is key to examine how this identity is expressed both in pedagogical practice and in the relationships built with students, involving deep convictions about the meaning of education and the everyday work of teachers.

We also believe it is necessary to delve deeper into the characteristics of a pedagogical relationship that favors student learning and development. As a consequence, personal resources and interpersonal skills are favored in pre-service and novice, in-service teachers. This allows them to build a bond that is a condition of possibility for learning, and then gives a sense of accomplishment and strengthens resilience in teachers.

At the institutional level (the school), we believe it is necessary to provide more opportunities to exercise professional autonomy, allowing for innovation and not mere compliance with instructions. Autonomy allows teachers to develop an empowered work, more coherent with their professional identity. This study shows that the identity of resilient teachers is connected to a concern for the wellbeing of students. This work of high personal value requires support from school authorities, providing the necessary material and human resources to address the diverse and complex needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Among other benefits, this avoids putting teachers' mental health at risk.

Finally, it is necessary to generate knowledge that encompasses diverse contexts, as in this study, which focuses on institutions of high social vulnerability. Based on this diversity, the challenge is to identify critical contextual conditions for teacher resilience. Once identified, it would be desirable to propose interventions and evaluate their impact on strengthening resilience at different stages of teachers' professional trajectories. This would be a valuable contribution to counteract the increasing rate of teacher attrition in such contexts, which has been warned by recent studies ([Fathi et al., 2020](#)) and could seriously compromise educational quality.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the Comité de Ética de la Universidad de Santiago de Chile, CEI-USACH. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

PV: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. CP-S: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. RD: Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. PB-H: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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