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Challenges in Foreign Language Teaching: Insights from German Teachers in Greek Secondary Education

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Abstract

This article presents the findings of a qualitative case study exploring the views of eleven German language teachers in secondary education in Greece regarding the challenges they face in their teaching practice. The data reveal that educators confront multiple difficulties, including classroom management issues, low student motivation, heterogeneity in student abilities, lack of infrastructure and professional development opportunities, as well as interpersonal tensions with students, parents, and colleagues. Institutional and organizational challenges are also highlighted, such as fragmented teaching assignments across multiple schools and discrepancies between curriculum content and available instructional time. Despite these obstacles, teachers employ coping strategies such as collaboration with colleagues, differentiated instruction, participation in training programs, and efforts to strengthen relationships with students and parents. The study underscores the need for systemic interventions aimed at improving working conditions, enhancing teachers' professional growth, and upgrading the quality of foreign language education in the public school system.

Keywords: Teaching German as a Foreign Language, Training needs, Educational policy

1. Introduction

The teaching of foreign languages in secondary education constitutes one of the key pillars of modern educational policy, as it significantly contributes to the development of language skills, the cultivation of intercultural understanding, and the enhancement of students' professional and personal prospects (Council of Europe, 2018; García & Wei, 2014).

Language education today is based on contemporary language teaching theories, with the communicative approach being the most prominent. This approach emphasizes the use of language in authentic communicative contexts. Learning is no longer seen as the mechanical memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules, but

rather as a dynamic process of acquiring functional skills that enable students to communicate effectively and confidently (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2021). At the same time, intercultural education is emerging as an integral part of foreign language teaching, enhancing understanding and respect for cultural diversity (Byram, 1997).

However, despite the theoretical foundation, the practical application of these language teaching principles in the classroom is not always seamless. In the Greek educational reality, German is often taught as a second or even third foreign language, which creates additional challenges in stimulating students' interest and motivation, as they rarely have the opportunity to use the language outside the school context (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2021). This underscores the need for innovative, multimodal, and communicative approaches that make teaching more engaging and relevant to students' actual needs.

The research literature highlights a range of challenges faced by foreign language teachers in secondary education. The most common include classroom management, student population heterogeneity, lack of sufficient technological infrastructure, and limited instructional time. Furthermore, the absence of targeted professional development that addresses the evolving demands of language teaching—combined with organizational and institutional constraints such as fragmented schedules or lack of pedagogical support—negatively affects teachers' work, increasing professional stress and limiting opportunities for instructional innovation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

A significant barrier to improving teaching quality is also the insufficient integration of digital technologies in foreign language education. The lack of technological equipment and appropriate teacher training leads to outdated practices that do not meet modern pedagogical needs and deprive students of valuable resources (Vandergriff, 2016). The development of skills in using digital media, differentiated instruction, and effective classroom management is imperative for adapting teaching methods to today's learning environment.

In this context, exploring the challenges that German language teachers face in secondary education is essential to understanding the factors that influence the quality of foreign language instruction. The reported problems and difficulties translate into professional development needs—explicit and conscious, but more often implicit or latent—the identification of which could lead to more effective and meaningful design of training programs. Understanding the everyday challenges of teachers can contribute to the development of more targeted support policies, the enhancement of teaching practices, and the creation of an educational environment that promotes effective learning and professional satisfaction for educators (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

2. The Concept of Training Needs

In order to identify the training needs of a given target population, it is essential first to clarify what is meant by the term "need" and its semantic content (Vergidis, 1999, pp. 22–37). The term is often confused with other similar concepts, such as:

- Necessity, which may lead either to the uncritical acceptance of certain "needs" as indisputable, or to the mistaken expectation that policies can be implemented without adequate and systematic preparation, as if these developments were naturally inevitable.
- Desire, which involves a strong personal element, relying on subjective projections.
- Demand, a concept from economic theory, which relates to the balance of supply and demand.

Thus, the concept of need is always defined within a theoretical framework and may therefore have different interpretations (Vergidis, 2003).

The investigation of needs mainly involves identifying goals and determining the gap between the current and the desired situation. This refers to the process of identifying the gap between "what is" and "what should be." A further distinction is made between gaps in terms of outcomes (such as skills or competences) and those

concerning resources or structures (Hunt, 1986). The "what should be" reflects the goals set and depends on the depth at which the needs analysis is approached (Vergidis, Katsigianni & Brinia, 2010).

According to Scriven and Roth (1978), a need is the difference between the actual state and a satisfactory one. It is also noted that "need" ends where "want" begins—that is, when sufficiency is reached.

Needs may be conflicting or contradictory, as they are shaped at multiple levels (Vergidis, 1999, p. 36). Training needs include both objective dimensions (e.g., curriculum changes, technological developments) and subjective dimensions (e.g., personal awareness of lacking knowledge or skills) (Vergidis, 2007).

It is widely accepted that the effectiveness of adult education depends largely on how well the content is connected to the real needs and experiences of the participants (Vergidis, 1998; Kokkos, 2005, p. 94). Nevertheless, even when learners are fully aware of their needs, they often do not express them clearly, or do so only indirectly.

Needs assessment is a continuous process, influenced by broader economic, social, and political factors. It requires an understanding of the institutional environment and its impact on the target group (Scriven & Roth, 1978).

As previously mentioned, training needs may have:

- Subjective dimensions: e.g., personal awareness of deficiencies or the educator's role in a specific context,
- Objective/systemic dimensions: e.g., institutional or technological changes.

Generally, the former relate to individual perception and interpretation, while the latter concern the demands of the educational system.

Since these needs are tied to how consciously they are recognized by the educators themselves and are influenced by changes in their work or institutional context, we can categorize them as follows:

1. Conscious and explicitly stated needs
2. Conscious but not explicitly expressed needs
3. Latent (unconscious and implicit) needs (Vergidis, 2003; 2007)

Mezirow (2007, p. 57) offers an important insight on opinions, stating that they are expressions of habits of mind, that is, the deeper assumptions guiding learning choices. Therefore, teachers' opinions about their own needs reflect their general and orienting tendencies in how they carry out their work.

3. Training Needs of German-Language Teachers: Research in Greece

Over the past decade, the training needs of German language teachers in Greece have become a focus of growing scholarly interest, as their ongoing training is directly linked to improving the quality of foreign language education. The continual renewal of pedagogical and didactic approaches—together with the evolving sociocultural and technological demands of today's schools—makes targeted professional development imperative, tailored to the realities of a modern, multicultural, and digital learning environment.

One of the most recent and significant contributions to the field is the study by Gerovasileiou (2022) which focused on primary school teachers in Thessaloniki. Using a questionnaire administered to a sample of 150 teachers, the study recorded a strong need for training in innovative teaching practices, with particular emphasis on individualized instruction, method differentiation, and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). At the same time, participants reported obstacles to engaging in professional development programs—chiefly a lack of time, financial resources, and flexible training formats. These findings underscore the need to design programs that match the actual conditions of school life and teachers' professional realities.

Equally noteworthy is the doctoral dissertation of Tsakalidou (2020), which offers a specialized perspective on professional development related to teaching spelling to students with dyslexia. Employing a mixed methods design, the study highlights the absence of specialized knowledge and skills among teachers for supporting learners with learning difficulties—a gap that leads to unequal educational experiences and challenges in integrating these students into the language classroom. The development of targeted, specialized training interventions to bolster inclusion and differentiated instruction is therefore imperative.

A valuable complementary perspective comes from the empirical study by Sakkolulis and Vergidis (2017), which analyzed the professional development needs of specialist teachers—including foreign language teachers—in primary schools in Achaia. The research revealed the need to strengthen teachers' knowledge both in their subject area and in broader pedagogical and psychological dimensions of teaching, such as student motivation, differentiated instruction, and psychopedagogical classroom management. At the same time, the study pointed to a lack of institutional and administrative support that hampers teachers' efforts to engage in further training.

Taken together, these studies converge on the recognition of the multidimensional nature of German language teachers' professional development needs in Greece. It is clear that training cannot be fragmented; rather, it must form part of a coherent, continuous, and dynamically evolving framework that takes account of working conditions, student demographics, technological advances, and the need for pedagogical renewal. Specifically, there is a need for flexible, experiential programs that allow for personalization, employ contemporary methodologies, integrate ICT, and emphasize the empowerment of teachers both as professionals and as educators.

4. Challenges in Foreign Language Teaching in Secondary Education

Foreign language teaching in secondary education is a particularly demanding field, where pedagogical, technological, and institutional challenges converge—affecting both teaching effectiveness and teachers' professional satisfaction. Problems often begin at the micro-level of the classroom, where issues of student discipline and behavior management constitute a major source of stress, especially when student populations are heterogeneous and characterized by low motivation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). The perception of foreign languages—especially German—as "secondary" subjects impacts student engagement and, consequently, the overall dynamic of instruction (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2021). In this context, fostering positive teacher-student relationships can help create a safe and supportive learning environment (Sharples et al., 2010).

At the same time, integrating technology into language teaching is recognized as a critical factor for enriching the learning experience, as it enables the use of interactive tools and exposure to authentic language material (Bahari, Han & Strzelecki, 2025). However, the lack of modern technological infrastructure—such as interactive whiteboards, digital platforms, and appropriate software—limits the implementation of these possibilities in many schools (Redecker, 2017). Even where technological tools are available, the absence of adequate pedagogical training often prevents teachers from meaningfully incorporating them into their teaching practices (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Technical skills alone are not enough; educators must also be able to combine content knowledge with appropriate pedagogical methods and technological capabilities in a way that is functional and effective for learning.

The need for continuous professional development is pressing, as teachers must respond to ever-evolving pedagogical and societal demands. Targeted, experiential training programs have been shown to boost teachers' confidence and improve the quality of instructional interaction (Guskey, 2002). Nevertheless, available professional-development opportunities are often fragmented, overly theoretical, and disconnected from the real needs of the classroom, leading to professional isolation and low engagement (Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

In addition, institutional and organizational issues in the Greek public education system exacerbate the challenges faced by foreign language teachers. Frequent school changes (so-called "school hopping"), assignment of non-teaching duties, and excessive bureaucracy disrupt the continuity of pedagogical work and

heighten professional stress (Zee & Koomen, 2016). The instability of the working environment, combined with limited collaboration among colleagues, undermines the sharing of experience and best practices and restricts the development of professional learning communities (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Teaching German, in particular, presents additional challenges. Students often face a high level of linguistic difficulty and have few opportunities to use the language outside the school setting—factors that widen the learning gap and contribute to detachment from the subject (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2021; Pavlenko, 2014). Teachers are called upon to employ methods such as the communicative approach and multimodality (García & Wei, 2014) in order to make instruction more engaging and connected to students' lived experiences. Moreover, the intercultural dimension of language education is crucial for cultivating empathy and deconstructing cultural stereotypes—especially in the case of languages with limited presence in students' everyday lives. Developing intercultural competencies through the teaching of German contributes not only to a deeper understanding of the language, but also to the formation of culturally aware and active citizens (Byram, 1997; Cummins, 2000).

5. Method

This section presents the research methodology.

5.1 Research question

Our research question was: "What problems do the German language teachers in the sample face in carrying out their educational work?"

5.2 Research Method -Research Tool

The data collection method was qualitative, because the purpose of the research is to investigate and understand a central theme (Creswell, 2011). The research strategy followed is a case study (Robson, 2010), since it concerns 11 German language teachers during the school year 2024-2025. According to Mason (2003), the data collection technique or better the data production technique was the semi-structured interview, a tool that enables the sequence of questions to be modified (Cohen & Manion, 1994), the choice of emphasis in the most essential aspects of each respondent (Fylan, 2005; Robson, 2010), but requires critical communication skills from the interviewer (Galletta, 2013). Therefore, this tool has been chosen as the most appropriate to highlight the views of the participants.

5.3 Sample

The sample (convenience sampling) consists of 11 German language teachers. Among them, 9 are women and 2 are men. In terms of age group, 4 are between 51 and 60 years old, 4 are between 41 and 50 years old, and 2 are over 60 years old. Regarding teaching experience, it ranges from 10 to 36 years, with most teachers having over 20 years of experience in the field of education. As for their educational background, 6 teachers hold a university degree (Bachelor's), while 5 also possess a Master's degree. Undoubtedly, the participants in this survey do not represent the entire population of German language teachers in Greece, and consequently, the research results are not generalizable.

5.4 Data analysis method

For the analysis of the collected data, content analysis was used. This is a research method that employs a set of procedures, methods, and techniques to draw valid conclusions (Weber, 1990, p. 9). It is a research technique that systematically and objectively leads the researcher to verifiable and valid conclusions derived from written texts and the decoding of interviews (Krippendorf, 1989, p. 7-9). Furthermore, the thematic content analysis allows quantification of the results (Trowler, 1996; Vamvoukas, 2002), which was attempted in this research.

6. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the research.

6.1. Difficulties in the Teaching Practice of the German Language Course: Analysis of Teacher Interviews

The practice of teaching within Secondary Education, and specifically in the German language as a foreign language course, appears to be burdened by a set of factors ranging from the daily reality of the classroom to the structural pathologies of the education system. The responses of the eleven teachers who participated in the research highlight five main thematic categories: (a) classroom management and low student motivation, (b) heterogeneity of the student population and learning difficulties, (c) fragmentation of teaching work due to multiple schools, (d) mismatch between curriculum content and available time, and (e) lack of training and technical infrastructure.

(a) Classroom Management and Low Learning Motivation
Problematic discipline and lack of student engagement emerged as one of the most frequent obstacles. Teachers mention "classroom management, lack of concentration, use of mobile phones, poor performance" (T1), "disobedience, lack of interest" (T3), and also "lack of respect" (T11). These phenomena reflect an educational reality where the pedagogical climate is weakened and teachers struggle to maintain a learning pace that includes all students. Low learning interest — especially for the second foreign language — seems to have deeper causes. Students face German with reduced motivation, as indicated by the phrase "lack of participation in the educational process" (T3), while other references point to "lack of basic knowledge" (T11). Dörnyei's psycholinguistic approach (2020) highlights that perceived usefulness, self-efficacy, and authentic communication situations critically affect language motivation. When these factors are absent, participation in teaching dramatically decreases.

(b) Heterogeneity and Learning Difficulties
A recurring pattern in the responses concerns the heterogeneity of students. Teachers note "different cognitive levels of students" (T6), "level heterogeneity" (T8), as well as "children with learning or other difficulties" (T5). Special emphasis is given to the "ever-increasing number of students with learning difficulties" (T4). This heterogeneity makes it difficult to maintain a unified learning pace and requires differentiated instruction—a process demanding time, training, and technical support (Tomlinson, 2014). The inability to provide individualized support intensifies the phenomenon of learning disengagement, especially among students with low language backgrounds.

(c) Administrative and Organizational Barriers: Multiple Employment
The need for German teachers to work in many schools was repeatedly mentioned: "teaching in multiple schools to cover hours does not allow the teacher to get to know the school unit better" (T7), while another respondent notes working "in 5 different primary and special schools, some of which have no technological infrastructure" (T10). Constant movement and lack of a stable work environment hinder building trust relationships with students and colleagues. Additionally, alternating educational settings burden teachers' professional identity and contribute to professional burnout phenomena (Kalamara & Richardson, 2022).

(d) Mismatch between Curriculum Content and Available Time
Several teachers report that the volume of the teaching material is incompatible with the available teaching time: "the curriculum is larger than the lesson hours" (T5). This problem affects both teaching quality and students' psychology, as the pressure to cover material may lead to rapid pace and insufficient consolidation. This phenomenon is especially intense in foreign languages, where communicative competence requires systematic repetition and practice.

(e) Shortcomings in Training and Infrastructure
Finally, the lack of systematic training is emphasized: "lack of training" (T2), as well as limited technological support: "no technological infrastructure at all" (T10). This situation creates a gap between modern pedagogical demands and the actual possibilities for implementing innovative practices. It is worth noting that, according to

studies, many foreign language teachers in Greece express a positive attitude towards the use of ICT, but its application remains limited due to insufficient technical and institutional support (Varsamidou, 2024). Even when teachers possess pedagogical knowledge of technology (TPACK), lack of resources makes its implementation difficult (Koehler & Mishra, 2009).

As shown by the preceding analysis, the challenges faced by German language teachers are not simple technical difficulties but manifestations of deeper institutional, pedagogical, and social variables. Addressing them requires a coherent and multi-level framework of interventions including:

- systematic and targeted training,
- reduction of fragmentation through stable placement in school units,
- enhancement of technical infrastructure,
- revision of the curriculum based on realism and the needs of mixed-ability classrooms.

Only through such a multifactorial approach can the teaching of German be strengthened and the quality of foreign language education in Greek public education be substantially supported.

6.2. Problems in Interpersonal Relationships in the School Environment

The formation of a positive pedagogical climate is an integral part of effective teaching. The responses of the teachers participating in this research indicate that beyond purely instructional challenges, particularly significant obstacles arise at the level of interpersonal relationships within the school community. These problems mainly concern: (a) peer relationships, (b) student–teacher relationships, and (c) teacher–parent/guardian relationships.

(a) Peer Relationships and Aggressiveness
One of the most frequently mentioned problems concerns relationships among students. Teachers describe phenomena of aggressive behavior, lack of cooperation, and insulting comments: "the relationships between students are sometimes offensive" (T11), "often the relationships between students are particularly aggressive, negatively affecting the smooth functioning of the school" (T7), while others simply note "student relationships" (T2), implying tensions or conflicts. The existence of "tensions among students" (T1) supports this finding. These tensions are often linked to a lack of social skills and worsen when there are no structured conflict management strategies in the school (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Research shows that verbal and physical violence incidents in schools have increased, affecting the psychological safety and academic performance of all involved (Espelage & Swearer, 2010).

(b) Aggressiveness and Rudeness Towards Teachers
The findings concerning student behavior toward teachers are alarming. As one teacher states: "verbal and physical violence (aggressiveness) by students, disobedience, stubbornness, rudeness, lack of respect" (T6). Similarly, "frequent episodes of rude student behavior toward teachers" are recorded (T4). Such relationships reveal not only a disturbed pedagogical climate but also a lack of institutional support for teachers, especially foreign language teachers, whose subjects do not have the institutional weight of other disciplines. Teacher professional burnout is directly linked to such situations. Teachers experiencing aggressive behavior from students report increased stress levels, feelings of frustration, and reduced commitment to teaching duties (Aloe et al., 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

(c) Interference and Difficulties in Relationships with Parents
The problem of intrusive or even hostile attitudes from parents is particularly evident. Teachers report: "interference in teaching work" (T1), "intervention by some parents in the educational work" (T3), "excessive parental interference in the educational work" (T4), "interference from parents" (T9), while one very pertinent observation notes that "parents sometimes express excessive demands and show arrogant behavior towards teachers" (T10). These relationships are often characterized by lack of trust and questioning of the teacher's pedagogical role.

Parental interference is often associated with overprotective or competitive attitudes stemming from broader social pressures or fear for the child's academic progress (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). However, school-family collaboration is considered a key factor for successful educational intervention and social integration of the child — something that requires conscious cultivation of trust and role boundaries.

(d) Effects of Family Dysfunctions on Daily School Life

Some teachers refer to out-of-school factors influencing student behavior: "many family problems of students affect their behavior in school" (T3). Family environments characterized by domestic violence, neglect, or dysfunction significantly impact the emotional state and behavior of children at school (Kitzmann et al., 2003). These phenomena often manifest as aggression, withdrawal, or provocative attitudes toward adults.

(e) Absence of Problems: Differing Perceptions

Interestingly, two of the eleven teachers stated "I have no observations" (T5, T8). This indicates either a genuine absence of significant problems or different interpretations of school reality. This confirms that perceptions of interpersonal relationships at school are not homogeneous and may be influenced by the school unit, social context, and the professional experience of each teacher.

It appears, therefore, that problems in interpersonal relationships within the school are not isolated incidents but indicators of a complex network of social and institutional tensions. The presence of aggression among students, rude behavior toward teachers, and intrusive parental attitudes creates an environment that significantly burdens daily school life and obstructs the smooth conduct of pedagogical work.

Addressing these phenomena requires:
- implementation of programs to enhance students' social skills,
- establishment of rules for dialogue between school and parents,
- systematic teacher training on crisis management and communication,
- strengthening school psychological support through hiring social workers and psychologists.

6.3. Additional Difficulties in the Educational Work

In the third interview question, teachers were asked to mention any additional difficulties they face in carrying out their teaching duties that had not been previously addressed. The answers fall into two main categories: (a) those teachers who do not indicate further problems, and (b) those who identify new dimensions of difficulties related to institutional and logistical shortcomings, pedagogical issues, and extracurricular obligations.

(a) Lack of Additional Comments – Possible Differentiation of Perceptions
Six out of eleven teachers explicitly stated that they "have nothing further to observe" (T1, T2, T5, T6, T8, T11). The absence of additional comments could be interpreted in two ways: either as an indication that the main problems have already been adequately recorded in the previous questions, or as a sign of a differentiated attitude toward the evaluation of daily life, possibly due to habituation or acceptance of difficulties as a "natural" part of the profession (Hargreaves, 2000). However, this phenomenon may also conceal a mechanism of adaptive silence, stemming from emotional fatigue or low expectations for systemic change (Day & Gu, 2009).

(b) Insufficient Parental Cooperation and Extracurricular Workload
One significant difficulty identified by a teacher is the "lack of cooperation from some guardians with the school to improve their children's behavior" (T3), an issue also highlighted in the previous question. This problem relates to the difficulty of creating a united front between family and school to manage student behavior, reinforcing the teacher's sense of isolation. At the same time, the "workload due to extracurricular tasks" (T3) is emphasized, a problem noted in international literature as it affects preparation time, teachers' mental resilience, and the quality of teaching (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006). Administrative duties and multiple extracurricular responsibilities intensify professional burnout.

(c) Problems Related to Teaching Material and Curriculum

The quality and timeliness of teaching materials are clearly criticized by one participant: "the renewal of teaching materials is necessary to meet the contemporary needs of students" (T7). This observation reflects the need for differentiated, modern, and digitally enriched materials that respond to the interests and learning needs of adolescents (Tomlinson, 2014). At the same time, it is noted that "the texts are poorly structured" (T4), implying deficiencies in the pedagogical and linguistic design of the educational content. Such problems suggest that the material used may not be sufficiently attractive or suitably structured for secondary education students, resulting in less effective language teaching.

(d) Issues of Timetable and Course Assignment

One teacher points out that "the teaching hours for the second foreign language are insufficient" (T9), raising issues of both quantity and quality of language instruction. The limited exposure of students to the foreign language makes achieving teaching goals more difficult, as language proficiency requires systematic and repeated engagement (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Simultaneously, another teacher mentions that "to cover the timetable, I am also forced to teach the Skills Workshops course" (T10). The assignment of unrelated courses burdens the teacher, especially when there is no appropriate training or support. This not only alters the teacher's professional identity but also reduces teaching effectiveness (Sachs, 2001).

The teachers' answers to the third question confirm that, despite the reporting of significant problems in previous sections, other often overlooked aspects of teaching difficulties continue to emerge. The main thematic areas that arise concern:

- the overload of extracurricular obligations,
- the lack of updated teaching material,
- the inadequate duration of the second foreign language course,
- and the heterogeneous assignment of duties.

It is worth noting that these difficulties are not exclusively related to the school unit but constitute systemic issues requiring institutional interventions and restructuring of policies at the level of planning, training, and support of the educational work.

6.4. Coping with Professional Difficulties: Strategies and Supportive Factors

The fourth question focuses on how teachers attempt to manage the difficulties they face in their educational practice, as well as the factors that support overcoming these obstacles. Five main coping strategies emerge from the responses: (a) professional collaboration, (b) training and personal development, (c) pedagogical differentiation practices, (d) leveraging experience and support from school administration, and (e) strengthening relationships with students and parents.

(a) Collaboration among Teachers and School Staff

The most frequently mentioned strategy is collaboration with colleagues, which constitutes a central axis of support and empowerment. As one participant states, "discussion with colleagues" is an essential means of managing difficulties (T1), while another emphasizes "exchange of opinions and good practices with other subject teachers" (T5). Similarly, "exchange of views with colleagues, seeking information online" (T6) shows that the professional community functions as a support network and a space for co-constructing practices. Collaboration with other professional groups within the school is also positively mentioned, as in the case of T3: "collaboration with colleagues and the administration, cooperation with school psychologists," reinforcing the idea of a holistic and interdisciplinary approach in everyday educational life. The effectiveness of professional collaboration is supported by recent studies indicating that collective work, when institutionally reinforced, improves teaching and teachers' psychological resilience (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

(*b) Continuous Training and Professional Development*

Several participants recognize the need for lifelong learning as a mechanism for empowerment and renewal of teaching identity. As T2 notes, "I participate in and attend training courses," while T5 adds: "attending seminars, personal effort, and reading."

T8's mention of "desired characteristics of a training program" indicates an interest in professional development activities that respond to the real needs of the classroom, a priority also confirmed by the literature. According to Sims & Fletcher-Wood (2022), targeted professional development based on teachers' empirical needs leads to meaningful changes in teaching practice.

(c) Teaching Differentiation and Pedagogical Innovations
Many teachers mention adapting and differentiating the lesson as a coping strategy. T1 describes: "persistence and patience in lesson preparation, enriched with digital material to spark interest," highlighting the connection between motivation and the integration of innovative tools.
More specifically, T10 says: "I try to use differentiated teaching approaches (songs, interactive and group games, projects, etc.)," which aligns with modern theories of student-centered and multimodal language teaching (Reinders & Chong, 2024). These practices enhance student engagement, support diverse learning profiles, and promote collaborative learning.

(d) Supportive Role of Experience and School Administration
One participant notes the value of professional experience: "long-standing experience is a means of managing and coping with difficulties" (T4). Experience here is recognized not merely as technical competence but as embodied pedagogical knowledge capable of interpreting and adapting teaching practice (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011).
Additionally, "school administration" (T4, T11) emerges as a factor of stability and support, confirming the critical importance of school leadership in developing professional ethos and positive school climate (Leithwood et al., 2020).

(e) Trusting Relationships with Students and Parents
Focusing on relationships with students and parents appears as a crucial support strategy. T1 refers to "interaction with students through programs and strengthening close bonds," while T10 emphasizes the importance of "maintaining good relationships with parents to find mutually acceptable solutions." Similarly, T7 acknowledges that "teacher–parent collaboration is necessary to overcome difficult situations."

These approaches reflect a school based on trust and mutual understanding. Literature supports that parental involvement and quality student-teacher relationships are linked to higher student engagement and success (Jeynes, 2022; Pianta et al., 2012).

The analysis of responses shows that teachers, even when faced with numerous systemic and practical difficulties, develop active and multidimensional coping strategies. Managing these challenges is based on:
- mutual support within the school community,
- continuous professional development,
- adapting teaching methodology,
- leveraging experience, and
- maintaining functional interpersonal relationships.

Highlighting these practices confirms the need to strengthen institutional policies that support professional autonomy, training, and supportive cultures within schools.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study highlighted that German language teachers in secondary education work within an environment where pedagogical, technological, and institutional demands accumulate and interact. The qualitative data

revealed a strong need for comprehensive training, a stable work framework, adequate infrastructure, collaborative cultures, and support for the socio-emotional skills of both students and teachers.

Comparing our findings with recent literature, several key conclusions emerge. First, professional well-being and resilience play a critical role, as fatigue related to high workload and low social status is a major factor in potential teacher attrition. A meta-analysis showed that high demands without corresponding support are linked to increased burnout (McCallum, Price & Shaping, 2024).

Second, collaborative professional capital enhances self-efficacy and facilitates the transfer of innovations into the classroom through learning communities and structured mentoring systems (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Third, the focus on the student-teacher relationship has proven especially important, as international studies document a strong correlation between positive interactions, increased school engagement, and reduced misconduct (Pianta, Hamre & Allen, 2012).

Fourth, the integration of digital innovation in language learning must be accompanied by targeted training in the "digital pedagogical capital" (Reinders & Chong, 2024).

Finally, leveraging parental capital through building positive school-family relationships directly affects students' learning expectations and behavior (Jeynes, 2022).

Regarding policy and practice recommendations, interventions are proposed at various levels. At the system and state level, it is advised to reduce "school-hopping" through more stable placements, fund local digital equipment centers and technical support, and institutionalize an annual right/obligation for medium-term training (e.g., 30 hours) with qualification recognition (Leithwood et al., 2020).

At the educational leadership level, creating "collaboration hubs" per Directorate for peer observation and microteaching is recommended, strengthening the role of education advisors as coaches, and implementing psychosocial support programs for teachers (Flores et al., 2025).

In training programs, the adoption of a blended model with 70% experiential classroom learning and coaching feedback is proposed, along with the use of micro-learning platforms and open digital resources (DigCompEdu), focusing on differentiation, interculturality, and classroom management with mobile-first strategies (Redecker, 2017).

Finally, in classroom practice, it is suggested to introduce projects based on authentic language tasks and open digital resources, systematic practice of self-regulation and metacognition strategies for students, and the establishment of social-emotional dialogue routines such as daily check-ins (García & Wei, 2014).

Strengthening German teaching—and second foreign language education more broadly—cannot be achieved through fragmented measures. It requires an ecosystem of interventions that connect training with daily practice, harness digital technology's potential, and foster collaborative relationships among teachers, students, parents, and administration. Only then can sustainable improvement in foreign language education quality be ensured, professional satisfaction among teachers be enhanced, and social inequalities within the school community be reduced.

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