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USING FACEBOOK AS A RESILIENCE STRATEGY BY FRENCH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, Facebook has become a crucial tool for learning during the pandemic, serving as a platform for communication and collaboration between students and teachers. With the transition to distance learning, Facebook has helped maintain significant social and academic interactions. The social network has offered opportunities for collaborative and constructivist learning, where students can share resources, discuss concepts, and receive real-time educational support. This article explores how Facebook has played an essential role in the continuity of learning during the pandemic by facilitating dynamic and interactive learning environments. Through groups, pages, and online events, Facebook has allowed students from the French department of the University of Oum El Bouaghi to create virtual learning communities. These spaces provide crucial emotional and academic support for students facing isolation and uncertainty.

Introduction.

The rise of mobile technologies has become a ubiquitous phenomenon in our daily lives, profoundly changing the learning environment. Among these technologies, social media platforms occupy a central place, being widely used by students and teenagers for a variety of reasons, including to meet social needs. Social media is defined as a web service that allows individuals to create a public or semi-public profile within a restricted system, to build up a list of other users with whom they are connected, and to view and explore their own connections and those of other users within the system. Through social media, students have the opportunity to collaborate and interact with their peers, whether by sharing, exchanging, commenting, discussing, or generating knowledge and information. With their varied functionalities, social media platforms are now emerging as valuable tools for teaching and learning, particularly in English language teaching.

The coronavirus pandemic has drastically altered the educational landscape worldwide, compelling institutions to adapt rapidly to new modes of instruction. In Algeria, this has necessitated significant changes within the Ministry of Higher Education, which has had to develop digital tele-teaching platforms to ensure the continuity of learning amidst the disruptions caused by the pandemic. Despite concerted efforts to digitise educational content and processes, Algerian universities need help providing their students with comprehensive virtual platforms that fully meet their academic and collaborative needs. While designed to meet institutional and pedagogical objectives, these platforms often need to improve in fostering dynamic interactions and robust telecollaboration among students. The platforms tend to emphasise teacher control and content monitoring, leaving students limited

opportunities for meaningful engagement and interaction with the course material. Consequently, students are often compelled to form their digital communities through social networks to facilitate collaboration and achieve specific educational goals.

One of the most notable social networks students have leveraged for this purpose is Facebook. Since Mark Zuckerberg was created in 2004, Facebook has become a trendy platform, particularly among young people. It is renowned for its capacity to facilitate online interactions and remains at the forefront of social networking sites frequented by the youth. Research by Beauné (2012) underscores Facebook's prominence among young users, while Diakhate and Akam (2015) highlight its effectiveness in promoting communication and content sharing among its subscribers, making it accessible to millions simultaneously. The platform's extensive communication tools and applications enhance students' communicative competencies, facilitating greater openness to knowledge and information sharing. This digital interconnectedness is crucial for today's learners, who increasingly rely on social networks to supplement their formal education.

The primary objective of this research is to explore the various academic and communicational uses of Facebook and to evaluate its impact on promoting telecollaboration among university students specialising in French as a Foreign Language (FLE). Additionally, the study seeks to shed light on the linguistic practices of these students as observed within a Facebook group context. As defined by Bouyssi (2009), telecollaboration involves placing learners from different, geographically dispersed institutions in a communication situation that may evolve into a collaborative endeavour, utilising digital communication tools for language and intercultural learning. This study aims to answer several key questions: How do the students perceive the academic use of Facebook? In what languages do future FLE educators interact within these virtual groups? What activities do students engage in through Facebook groups as part of their training? To what extent does Facebook serve as a potential tool for language learning?

This investigation is structured into three main sections. The first section outlines the theoretical and conceptual framework, emphasising the academic applications of Facebook within a university context and its contributions to learning. This involves thoroughly examining existing literature and theories on digital learning environments and social media's role in education. The second section describes the methodological approach adopted for the study, detailing the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques employed to examine the interactions and activities within the Facebook groups. The final section presents the analysis of the collected data, providing insights into the students' perceptions, language use, and the educational activities facilitated by Facebook. This analysis is followed by conclusions synthesising the findings and proposing future perspectives for integrating social networks into higher education to enhance telecollaboration and language learning.

In essence, the research seeks to understand the dual role of Facebook as a social and educational tool, examining its efficacy in bridging gaps left by institutional digital platforms and fostering a more interactive and collaborative learning environment for FLE students. The study's findings are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on digital education, offering valuable insights into integrating social media in academic settings and its potential to enrich language learning experiences through enhanced communication and collaboration.

1.1. Theoretical and conceptual framework.
1.1.1. Use of Facebook at university.

Algeria, among other countries with limited progress in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and slower internet connections, is confronted with the significant challenge of maintaining continuous education during the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns. The urgency of this situation has emphasized the need for alternative educational forums to complement official channels. As a result, many academic departments have opted to utilize Facebook, establishing numerous specialized groups and pages dedicated to distributing courses and tutorials.

These Facebook groups have become vital hubs where students can access educational materials, engage in discussions, and collaborate with their peers. They serve as interactive platforms where learning transcends traditional classroom boundaries, allowing students to participate actively despite physical distancing measures. Through these channels, students not only receive academic support but also build a sense of community, sharing resources and supporting each other's learning journeys.

Facebook can be used to enhance face-to-face, blended, or online courses ; however, using this type of social media in the classroom carries certain risks related to the security and privacy of instructors and students. According to authors Muñoz and Towner (2009), these privacy concerns can be mitigated by creating a dedicated Facebook page exclusively for the course. This class page should be set to "Private", restricting access to only invited class members.

Numerous academics have emphasised the favourable elements of using Facebook in educational environments. Millerand, Proulx, and Rueff (2010) argue that Facebook promotes the growth of "participatory cultures" and "contributory cultures." These cultures are distinguished by their cooperative involvement and dynamic contribution to generating and disseminating material, enhancing the educational experience. Students may actively and energetically connect with the content and their peers, resulting in a more interactive and adaptable learning environment in contrast to conventional institutional platforms.

Nevertheless, some oppose the use of Facebook for educational objectives. Some educators are concerned about merging social and academic connections (Schwartz, 2009). They contend that the casual character of social networks may result in ambiguity, undermining the professional and organised atmosphere required for academic rigour. Furthermore, incorporating educational tasks into a platform mostly linked to individual and social aspects gives rise to apprehensions about privacy and the possibility of encroaching on personal domains. Facebook's widespread integration into the personal lives of students and instructors raises the possibility that using it for educational reasons might unintentionally reveal elements of their private lives, leading to unease and even ethical quandaries.

Moreover, Facebook's perception as a site mainly used for pleasure and enjoyment hinders its recognition as a credible academic tool. Facebook's reputation as a "fun thing" (Schwartz, 2009) might undermine its legitimacy in an educational setting, causing doubt about its effectiveness in assisting severe intellectual pursuits. This attitude toward enjoyment may also impact the degree of involvement and seriousness with which students undertake academic activities on the platform.

Notwithstanding these worries, incorporating Facebook into the instructional framework during the pandemic has shown its potential as a helpful adjunctive tool. The platform's broad accessibility and widespread use among students make it a very successful tool for sustaining educational engagement during times of interruption. The crucial aspect is to achieve an equilibrium that optimises the advantages of social media's interactive features while acknowledging the valid apprehensions about professionalism, privacy, and the unique characteristics of academic relationships. Amidst the obstacles brought about by the epidemic, educational institutions may benefit from their experiences with platforms like Facebook to create more advanced and adaptable digital learning environments that effectively meet the demands of both students and instructors.

1.1.2. Facebook: space for telecollaboration and communications.

With the advent of Web 2.0, the digital landscape has been transformed by creating numerous social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms have become highly accessible and offer various social interaction tools, enabling users to seamlessly create, upload, index content, and share information. Students, in particular, were among the first adopters of these sites, leveraging their features for various purposes, including socialising and, increasingly, for educational uses. This evolution in usage has opened up new avenues for learning, particularly in enhancing collaborative efforts among peers.

Integrating Facebook to promote telecollaboration and interaction in educational settings involves establishing a dedicated space for the class on the network. This virtual digital space reinforces the academic relationship between teachers and their face-to-face students. Facebook, thus, can be effectively utilised alongside institutional platforms such as Moodle, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), and SPOCs (Small Private Online Courses) to create a rich, collaborative learning environment. Lampe et al. (2008) emphasise that students can build a genuine learning community through this approach, facilitating the achievement of specific educational objectives. This integration supports a blended learning model where formal and informal learning intersect, fostering an environment conducive to telecollaborative learning.

In addition, Facebook can be used to enhance the learning process. According to Munoz and Towner (2009), Facebook is the most widely used social media among college students and colleges. The technological capabilities of Facebook are simpler and more advanced than their pedagogical

technology counterparts, WebCT or Blackboard. Students can upload videos, pictures, post to bulletin boards, and participate in communication via email and instant messaging. Munoz and Towner (2009) further suggest that:

"Facebook is a network that connects students with other students, indirectly creating a learning community – a vital component of student education. Facebook provides instructors opportunities and structures by which students can help and support one another by building their courses atop the community already established by the students themselves" (Munoz and Towner, 2009 : 5).

Numerous research studies have investigated the effectiveness of social networks, particularly Facebook, within educational or university contexts. For instance, Blattner and Lomicka (2012) conducted a survey utilising Facebook to facilitate a telecollaboration project between American and French students learning English. Their analysis revealed that participants appreciated using Facebook as an effective tool for more accessible and constraint-free exchanges, thereby overcoming communicative barriers typically encountered in classroom settings. This suggests that social media can be crucial in facilitating language practice and intercultural communication.

Moreover, the role of teacher self-disclosure on Facebook has been explored with positive outcomes. Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2007) demonstrated that when teachers share personal information on Facebook, it positively impacts learners' motivation and classroom engagement. This finding highlights the potential of social networks to enhance the teacher-student relationship, fostering a more engaging and supportive learning environment. Additionally, research by Blattner and Fiori (2009) and Kabilan, Ahmad, and Abidin (2010) addressed improvements in students' writing and sociopragmatic skills through Facebook. They found that the platform's informal communication style helps students practice and develop these skills in a real-world context, bridging the gap between academic learning and practical application.

2. Methodological approach.

To address the study inquiries, we first used the findings from an online questionnaire survey conducted among 68 students now enrolled in the French department at Larbi Ben M'hidi-Oum El Bouaghi University in Algeria. Furthermore, we examined the diverse applications of Facebook among the "Department of French All Promotions" group at the same institution. The organisation, established in 2017, now consists of 7,804 members. The members include students from various cohorts within the French department of the University of Oum El Bouaghi and other institutions in Algeria. They joined the club for diverse objectives: acquiring proficiency in French communication, sharing educational resources, and remaining informed about departmental updates.

3. Project progress and possible results.
3.1. Analysis of the Questionnaire.

The questionnaire we created consisted of two sections. The first phase included collecting data that described the demographic composition regarding gender, language competency, and skill in using digital technologies. The second section of the study examined the participants' use of Facebook and their perspectives on it as an alternative platform to institutional platforms, as well as its potential for enhancing their French language proficiency.

Profile of the Observed Sample.

Table 1. Age and sex.

Age	Sex	
	Women	Man
19 to 21 years old	12	7
21 to 23 years old	18	2
23 to 25 years old	17	5
Over 25 years old	6	1
Total	**53 (78%)**	**15 (22%)**

Based on the data provided in the table, most of the researched population comprises women, accounting for 78% of the total. The sample consists of 15 male students. Of the pupils, 12 are between 19 and 21, whilst just six are older than 25. The population has an average age of 22, with the oldest participant being 31 and the youngest 18.

Table 2. Level and specialty.

| Level | No. | F | Speciality | |
			Didactics	Literature
1st-year License	08	11.76%		
2nd-year License	23	33.82%		
3rd-year License	16	23.52%		
1st year Master	11	16.17%	7 (10.29%)	4 (5.88%)
2nd year Master	10	14.70%	5 (7.35%)	3 (4.41%)

Based on the data provided in the table, it is clear that most of the questioned students are now in their second and third years of the bachelor's degree program. Subsequently, the sample consists of 16.17% of first-year master's degree students and 14.70% of second-year master's degree students. The surveyed group consists of 11.76% of students enrolled in the first year of the bachelor's degree program.

Ownership of social media accounts and frequency of login.
The question "Do you own one or more accounts on social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.?" was designed to evaluate the student's digital literacy level and tendency to retain several social media accounts. The collected replies indicated that most students (52%) have numerous accounts. More precisely, 38% of students said they only own a Facebook account, whilst 10% acknowledged that they do not possess any social media accounts. \
The poll revealed that 58% of students spend an average of 3 to 5 hours linked to digital social networks. In addition, 28% of the participants said they spend around 2 hours each day, while 24% reported spending over 5 hours on these platforms.
Regarding Question No. 5, its purpose was to determine if students had used the university's Moodle site throughout detention. Out of the participants, 19 students said they had never established a connection due to different factors, such as technical difficulties or difficulties accessing their accounts. In contrast, 31 students said they often used the university's E-learning portal to download course materials and engage in assignments and discussion forums. In addition, eight students reported inconsistent access to Moodle, mainly owing to inadequate connectivity.

Virtual contact for educational purposes.
To evaluate whether students stay in contact with their classmates or teachers during confinement, we asked the following question: "Which technological tools are you utilising to engage in remote communication with your classmates/teachers for your courses during this period of confinement?"

Table 3. Use of communication tools between peers and teachers.

Communication tools	Teachers	Comrades
Email	1	3
Facebook/Messenger	3	1
Skype	5	5
University Moodle platform	2	2
Zoom	4	4
None	6	6

An analysis of the data in the table above reveals the diverse use of communication channels among instructors and students. Facebook is the primary method of communication among students, with the Moodle platform and email being other options. Within teacher-student interactions, Facebook holds the third position, functioning as a supplementary platform for exchanging information and communicating, in addition to the institutional Moodle platform and email.

Facebook is often used by students daily, and it is also used for educational reasons in their university studies. This includes disseminating and exchanging material, coordinating collaborative efforts, and several other academic endeavours.

Representation of Learning via Facebook.

Our objective was to collect diverse student perspectives about using Facebook for educational purposes by posing the open-ended question, "What representations do you have of learning via Facebook?" Based on the gathered replies, it is clear that most students in the studied demographic have favourable opinions on this social network. Several words and terms were used, such as "course sharing and tutorials, support, beneficial, effective, rapid."

A student said their peers, namely their classmates, consistently share the lessons and tutorials with them. The individual who maintains communication with our professors assists us in comprehending the assigned tasks. This underscores how students use Facebook as a medium for exchanging educational materials and fostering cooperation with classmates and instructors. In addition, students see Facebook as a tool to enhance their French language skills outside regular class hours and to strengthen their learning.

Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that 16% of students voiced apprehensions about the security of Facebook and preferred using the university platform for communication.

Communication Languages Used via Facebook.

When asked about the languages students use for their studies on Facebook, it was seen that the predominant language utilized for communication, exchange, and commenting on group members' postings is a combination of Arabic dialect and French. Subsequently, French is used, followed by scholarly Arabic and, ultimately, English. The answers to this question highlight that students strongly prefer their native language, which is influenced by their high level of proficiency and the sense of linguistic safety it offers. A student said, "I often write in Arabic dialect due to the fear of making errors. Additionally, when we make mistakes, we are subjected to significant criticism and hostile remarks from other members." Students have been disturbed by severe criticism, leading them to use a blend of Arabic and French for efficient communication and to prevent misinterpretation.

Question No. 15 aimed to ascertain the different educational activities that students participate in on Facebook as part of their academics. Most students mentioned engaging in activities such as disseminating course information, reposting official notifications from their department, and requesting help with homework and presentations. Students recognise that Facebook has facilitated the creation of a community of practice consisting of people who engage with each other, form connections, and cultivate a feeling of belonging and shared dedication.

Using of Facebook and improvement of language skills in FLE.

Most students agree that using Facebook has improved their proficiency in French communication. 56% of the polled students saw Facebook as a tool enabling them to share information with their classmates without worrying about making linguistic mistakes. Facebook enables learners to communicate directly with peers with a high degree of skill in French. Specific apps on the site, such as quizzes, allow users to improve their understanding, track their network's general activity, leave comments, read comments, and learn new terms or phrases.

As per the survey participants, Facebook has positively impacted their writing abilities, as they show a commitment to their language competence while posting or commenting on content. Before submitting their remarks, they often go to dictionaries or use the internet for consultation. A student said that they usually watch their language use on Facebook. As master's students, they believe it is crucial to project a favourable picture of themselves and demonstrate their high level of language ability.

Figure 1. Screenshot of the observed FB group.

3.2. Analysis of Student Interactions via Facebook.

This section analyses the interactions inside the group known as the "French Department for All Promotions". The club above was established on August 11, 2017, by a student affiliated with the French department of Larbi Ben M'hidi University. It has provided a virtual platform for communication among the "students-teachers-administration" group for the last three years. The group maintains connections among its members and facilitates the sharing of fresh information and respectful mutual assistance. Certain constraints bind publications and interactions inside the group and must adhere to the administrators' norms and charter. If a violation occurs, the administrator will remove the reported interaction, which might be a post or a comment. The member who made the post will be notified, and their access will be restricted, depending on the severity of the infraction.

Types and number of contributions within the group.

The corpus comprises about three months of communications, spanning from April 15 to June 13, 2020. The composition consists of 120 messages that have been submitted by 58 individuals that are currently active. From April 15, 2020, to May 1, 2020, the group had its highest level of donations. Based on students' accounts during the lockdown, the notable level of interaction may be attributed to the participants' need to cooperate via Facebook to share lessons streamed on Moodle and engage in activities provided by instructors. Below is a comprehensive summary of the corpus:

Table 4. Type and number of contributions.

Type of contribution	Number
Publication	57
Questions	22
Videos	9
Pictures	7
Files	25
Total	120

Types of speech present in the Facebook group.

The data presented in the table indicates that informational and didactic content types are the most prevalent within the group. Questionnaires or surveys rank second in publications, followed by

cultural posts. Comedy holds a significant position, constituting 22% of all interactions. Lastly, promotional messages from various firms or associations aimed at enticing students to use their services are also observed.

These findings suggest that students' use of Facebook within the group is not primarily associated with learning, as corroborated by several studies. Research conducted by Hew (2011), Sheldon (2008), and Selwyn (2009) indicates that students perceive Facebook as a non-serious tool, with entertainment being one of the primary motivations for its use.

Table 5. Types of discourse present in the FB group.

Type of speech	Number	Percentage
Informative	39	32.50%
Didactics	28	23.33%
Questions/Survey	25	20.83
Cultural	13	10.83
Humorous	9	7.50%
Advertising	6	5.00%
Total	120	100%

Figure 2. Examples of courses exchanged in the FB group observed.

Due to the lockdown, the Facebook network served as a vital platform for students to share educational materials that were inaccessible through traditional means. Additionally, students used Facebook's features to form local groups where they could exchange and discuss course content using Messenger. This enabled them to overcome the challenges posed by the lockdown and continue their academic pursuits effectively.

*Figure 3. Notes displayed via the observed FB group.*

In this publication, a student presents a letter to Master 2 students regarding extending the deadline for submitting their master's thesis. A total of 35 comments were documented, expressing support for politicians who would advocate for measures addressing the specific circumstances associated with the transmission of COVID-19. Additionally, other individuals raised inquiries about the specifics of defensive mechanisms, as the author Ka Ya questioned: "Will it be terminated, correct?"

Furthermore, group members contributed cultural items, such as poetry and excerpts from books, similar to the content often shared by Wahid Ziadi.

Figure 4. Cultural productions posted in the FB group observed.

Some students seized the opportunity to initiate surveys via the group, focusing on the challenging situation they faced post-confinement and the inability to proceed with the practical component of their master's thesis. The survey prompts in French, and dialectal Arabic read: "M2 Didactics and Literature students, please answer this survey and indicate if you are in contact with your supervisors and what they have communicated to you.
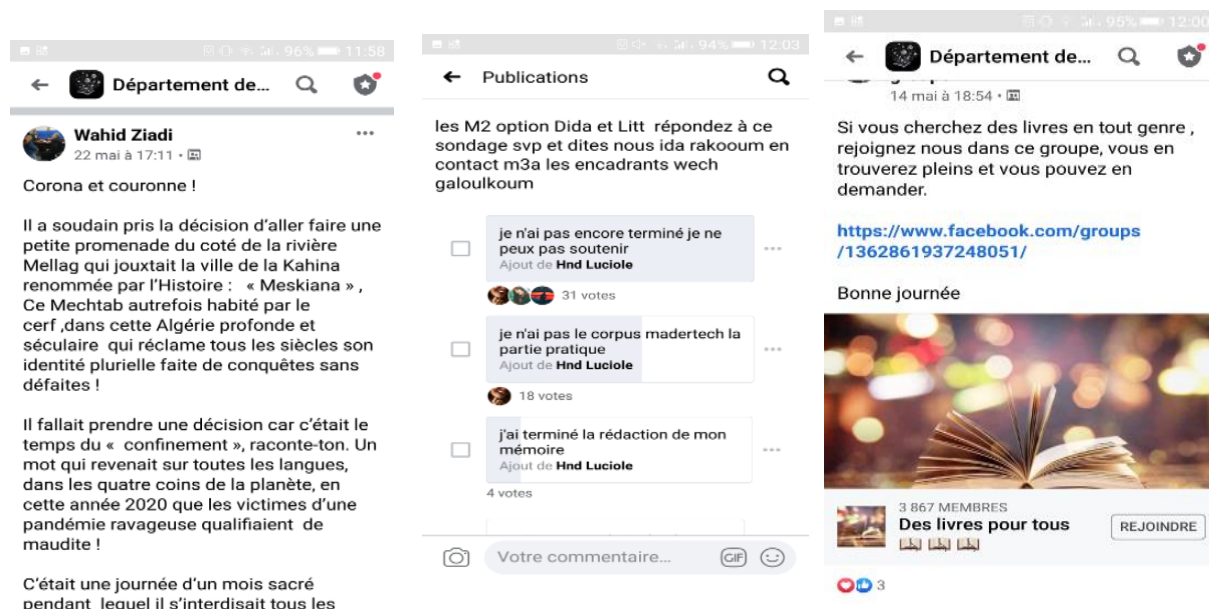
Figure 5. Practical information in the FB group observed.

3.2.1. Languages of publications and comments posted in the group.

A study was conducted to categorise the various languages learners use in their interactions on Facebook, aiming to investigate the language preferences of participants. Regarding publications, the data indicate that the French language prevails within the organisation, constituting 68% of all interactions. Occasionally, members use their mother tongue (22%) or a combination of both languages (10%) in the same conversation. Participants demonstrate a diligent and pronounced desire to actively engage in discussions in French. This outcome aligns with the group's objective, which is to apply and enhance their proficiency in the French language. It is common for many foreign language learners to leverage their knowledge of another language, such as Arabic, to compensate for their lack of proficiency in the desired language.

Figure 6. Languages used in the FB group observed.

Regarding the feedback from members on the publications within the virtual community, the most frequently used languages are Arabic, alternating with French, constituting 70% of interactions. French alone accounts for 26% of interactions, followed by English at 4%. During the questionnaire survey we conducted, students expressed a preference for communicating in French. They indicated a desire to avail themselves of options for corrections and verifications, highlighting the importance of using French for effective communication within the community.

Conclusion.

The closure of university establishments due to the spread of the coronavirus has led to a rapid adoption of digital technology in the teaching and learning process in Algeria. This unexpected shift caught many Algerian students and teachers unprepared, prompting them to turn to platforms like Facebook for communication and educational continuity.

Within this context, a study aimed to describe and analyse the representations and discursive practices of Algerian students enrolled in a Facebook group dedicated to the French department of Larbi Ben M'hidi University. The analysis of questionnaires administered to these students revealed a significant familiarity with Facebook, echoing findings from prior research. Evidently, students were receptive to the idea of utilising Facebook for educational purposes, viewing it as a viable alternative to institutional platforms. Many acknowledged that this social network had enhanced their language skills and attention to linguistic correctness.

Furthermore, an examination of the content shared within the group showcased a notable usig of the French language, indicating an active engagement with linguistic practices. Additionally, there was a discernible promotion of telecollaboration among students, underscoring the potential for online platforms like Facebook to facilitate collaborative learning experiences.

The findings of this study shed light on the adaptability of Algerian students to digital platforms for educational purposes, particularly in times of crisis. It underscores the importance of considering alternative modes of instruction and utilising existing digital resources to ensure continuity in education. Moreover, it highlights the potential of social media platforms like Facebook to serve as supplementary educational tools, fostering language acquisition and collaborative learning opportunities.

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