

Dealing with Emergency Remote Teaching: The Case of Pre-service English Language Teachers in Turkey

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Education has been offered in the form of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) worldwide since March 2020 due to the spread of Covid-19. This compulsory transition has often been marked by disregard of the technological infrastructure of educational institutions, digital literacy skills of teachers and students, and their access to technology. A growing body of research discusses challenges faced in ERT; however, further studies are needed to arrive at validated conclusions to inform formal language teaching and learning. Against this backdrop, this qualitative study aimed at adding context-dependent knowledge to the literature by reporting on the case of university students majoring in language teaching. For this reason, the perceptions of a group of 67 pre-service English language teachers on ERT practices at a Turkish state university were explored. Data were collected through an interview form developed by the researchers and a focus group interview. The data were analysed inductively using content analysis. Half of the participants reported that specific skills were conducive to doing tasks in an ERT environment. They not only reported a variety of challenges related to the perceived ineffectiveness of learning, technical insufficiency, and inappropriateness of the learning environment, but also acknowledged contributions to their personal and academic development. That is, they found ERT flexible, time-saving, and favourable for learners who felt more confident in virtual classrooms, and some considered ERT as an opportunity for self-actualisation. Nonetheless, the majority favoured face-to-face education over ERT appreciating the enhanced effectiveness of in-class education. In sum, the study emphasises the need to support learners and teachers by providing instructions and strategies on how to organise learning and teaching. Moreover, schools, policy makers, and governmental authorities may need to provide ERT-tailored programmes and an infrastructure in terms of technical equipment to meet the requirements of education delivered in ERT and to realise effective language learning in virtual environments. Broadening the knowledge base concerning ERT in language teacher education, this study advises to address drawbacks of ERT and to take advantage of its opportunities.

Keywords: Covid-19, English language teaching, emergency remote teaching, online learning, pre-service teachers

Introduction

The Covid-19 outbreak not only raised health concerns globally (WHO, 2020, March 11), but also forced education to be run behind computer screens in a remote way (Crawford et al., 2020). Due to the uniqueness of this unprecedented educational shift, the term ‘emergency remote teaching’ (henceforth, ERT) was introduced, and gained popularity in research even though the concepts of virtual teaching and remote education have long been on the agenda. Although the terms are often used interchangeably in the relevant literature, ERT, virtual teaching, remote education, distance education, and online learning have been distinguished from one another in different sources. Bilton-Ward (1997), for instance, identified virtual teaching as the utilisation of videoconferencing tools when teachers and learners are in different locations. Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) distinguished between distance education and remote education by stressing that the former refers to a spatial and temporal distance between learners and teachers or learning resources, while the latter applies to a special distance exclusively. According to Gedik et al. (2013), online learning is a form of education in which courses are delivered partially or completely online either synchronously or asynchronously. Of relevance for the context of this study is the introduction of the term ERT, which denotes a form of remote teaching when—as in

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the case of the Covid-19 pandemic—the cancellation of in-class teaching is the only option available (Hodges et al., 2020). A growing body of research has examined ERT practices exploring stakeholders' perspectives encompassing teachers, learners, school administrators, and policy makers. Technological and pedagogical challenges were identified at different levels ranging from governmental and institutional domains to classrooms with teachers and learners and their individual needs (Hazaea et al., 2021). Nonetheless, due to the novelty of ERT, there is still a need for more studies from various contexts exploring affordances and challenges to inform programme designers, material developers, and teachers assigned to deliver remote education. Reasonably, current research needs to consider a variety of significant factors including but not limited to the technological infrastructure provided by and for educational institutions or the digital literacy of teachers and students.

In their literature review of online teaching and learning practices with a focus on teacher education, Carrillo and Flores (2020) highlighted the need to arrive at new pedagogical conceptualisations that appreciate the integration of technology in general and the implementation of online tools in particular as an opportunity to enrich instructional practices. To this end, the authors advise to investigate teachers' and learners' previous experiences and their emerging dispositions towards online teaching and learning. Given the complexity of delivering and receiving instruction using online tools, teachers and learners should be given opportunities to experience and make sense of this new mode, and to develop roles and identities that differ from the roles and identities they have established as participants in classroom teaching. They propose that contextual factors with an impact on the quality of the experiences such as limited access to technology and internet should not be ignored to minimise factors contributing to exclusion and inequalities (e.g., limited access to technological means). Additionally, they advocate the significance of maximising students' participation in their learning process through useful pedagogical approaches including clear goal-setting, coherent and flexible designs, consistent, and clear monitoring, and evaluation. Finally, they emphasise the need to consider pre-service teachers' and teacher educators' roles and responsibilities in online education to draw implications for learning under the conditions of ERT.

The review of the existing literature on ERT practices in teaching other languages has shown that most of the studies were published in the form of reports that contained solutions to the problems likely to occur in remote teaching of foreign or second languages (Guillén, et al., 2020; Ross & DiSalvo, 2020; Yi & Jang, 2020) and that a limited number of studies explored the views of teachers, students, and administrators on remote teaching practices mostly at the tertiary level (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Ghounane, 2020; Masterson, 2020; Svalina & Ivić, 2020; Syahrin & Salih, 2020). These studies conducted on ERT practices from the perspective of tertiary level students were mostly designed to cover the views and experiences of non-English major students studying subjects other than foreign or second language teaching (Alahmadi & Alraddadi, 2020; Doncheva et al., 2020; Gacs, et al., 2020; Huang, et al., 2020; Hristakieva, 2020; Shahzad et al., 2020; Torun, 2020). Some of these studies revealed that students appreciated ERT practices and virtual classrooms (Alahmadi & Alraddadi, 2020; Doncheva et al., 2020; Shahzad et al., 2020), while others indicated that students preferred traditional classrooms over virtual learning environments due to the challenges put forth by ERT (Al-Nofaie, 2020; Ghounane, 2020).

Investigating Thai pre-service English as a foreign language teachers' (PSEFLT's) competency and perceptions towards remote English language teaching, Inpeng and Nomnian (2020) reported that the participants were not confident in conducting online classes and needed support from their trainers due to a lack of experience. Based on their findings, the researchers concluded that the utilization of social media and online learning technology needed to be explored more fully to effectively benefit from them in teaching and learning irrespective of whether they were implemented under unprecedented conditions such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Conducting a case study on digital learning in foreign language teacher training, Carlon (2020) scrutinized PSEFLT perceptions of the effectiveness of emergency remote education in a blended undergraduate course. He reported that participants acknowledged the effectiveness of teaching when opportunities for social interaction and cognitive involvement were implemented in the course. In the Turkish context, Öztürk-Karataş and Tuncer (2020) explored the impact of ERT on language skills development of PSEFLT's and concluded that it was most advantageous for their writing skills and least advantageous for their speaking skills noting that writing had become the new mode of communication replacing speaking. The researchers attributed this finding to the tendency to nurture writing skills through constant use of homework, assignments, and projects.

In sum, the pertinent literature does not seem to provide evidence on an extensive exploration of perceptions of ERT held by PSEFLT. Additionally, the studies conducted so far have focused on aspects different from the current study. Inpeng and Nomnian (2020), for example, primarily investigated the integration of Facebook into a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) program to promote pre-service EFL teachers' English language literacy, pedagogical knowledge, and ICT skills. Carlon (2020), on the other hand, investigated students' perceptions on the effectiveness of emergency remote education implemented in a graduate course developed within the Community of Inquiry framework. The current study did not focus on an integration of social media platforms or methodological frameworks into ELT programmes, but was carried out with Turkish pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language at a Turkish state university where course attendance was not compulsory during the pandemic.

In order to generate more context-dependent knowledge and to arrive at more valid generalisations, the current study set out to analyse the perceptions of a group of PSEFLT on ERT practices. More specifically, it aimed to reveal whether and to what extent the participants appreciated ERT practices and what challenges they encountered during their studies delivered through ERT, and to develop practical implications based on the findings. In line with the research aim, the following research questions were posed:

1. What available competencies and support to engage in remote learning do the participants report?
2. How do the participants perceive ERT?

Materials and Methods

Study Design

To address the research interest, this study was planned and conducted as a qualitative inquiry following a case study design. Given that there is considerable disagreement on what case studies actually are (Patton, 2015), the researchers were interested in how ERT was experienced by a specific group of PSEFLT while being exposed to ERT. Restricted through the circumstances of the pandemic which suggested the application of remote data collection tools and excluded, for example, observations, it was decided to employ written and spoken interviews to find out what meanings the participants attached to their experiences and to take their narrations as proxies for reality (Seidman, 2006). This study was descriptive in nature aiming at both detecting general patterns in the participants' reports as well as documenting specific perceptions not shared by the majority of the participants (Yin, 2003).

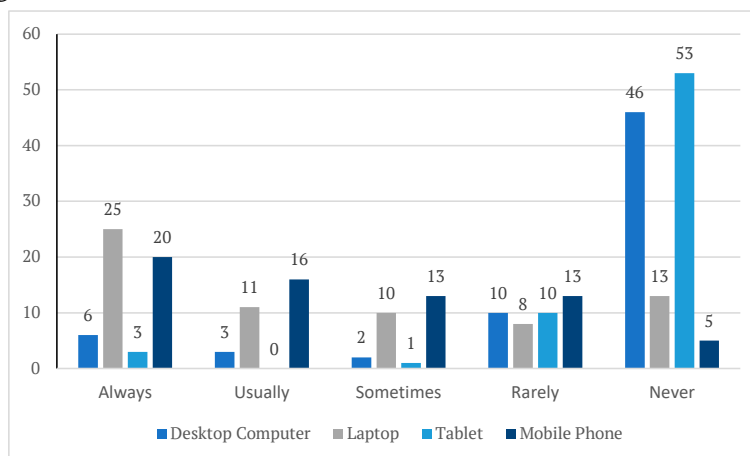
Participants and Context

Sixty-seven PSEFLT attending a Turkish state university participated in this qualitative research. Pursuant to the research objectives, they were chosen through purposive sampling, "a random selection of sampling units within the segment of the population with the most information on the characteristic of interest" (Guarte & Barrios, 2007, p. 277). They were young adults whose ages ranged from 18 to 32 with an age average of 19.8. 72% of them were female ($n = 48$) and 28% were male students ($n = 19$). Of these participants, two thirds were freshmen ($n = 44$), while the rest were sophomores ($n = 23$). Thirty-seven participants reported they had unlimited access to the internet and thirty participants reported limited access. They used desktop computers, laptops, tablets, and mobile phones to connect to the online platform of the university. Figure 1 documents the participant's device preferences showing how often they used certain devices during ERT.

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Figure 1

Frequency of device usage



While the results shown on Figure 1 may be attributed to personal preferences or the availability of devices, they show that all learners had access to the virtual courses offered in the programme, which were completely delivered using remote teaching. The university allowed the academic teachers to deliver lessons either synchronously or asynchronously. According to the university's regulations, there was no compulsory attendance.

Data Collection Procedures

Informed by the emerging body of literature on ERT (cf. Mae-Toquero, 2021), an electronically accessible interview form was developed by the researchers to elicit demographic information about the participants and explore their views on ERT practices. The form was comprised of open-ended questions allowing the participants to report their perceptions of the assumed complex issue without being guided by pre-established response choices (Cohen et al., 2007, p.5). Considering the fact that the participants were still learners of English despite their achieved proficiency, the form was prepared in Turkish and they were requested to respond in Turkish to elicit as much and as precise data as possible. The first draft of the data collection tool was revised by three faculty members with in-depth specialization in English language teaching, Turkish language teaching, and curriculum and instruction. Subsequently, it was piloted with three ELT students who would not participate in the study. As a result of the piloting, one of the items was excluded from the interview form as the interviewees reported comprehension difficulty. Finally, ethical approval was obtained from the research ethics committee of the university. Table 1 shows the relation of the research questions to the survey questions.

Table 1

Implementation matrix

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Survey Questions</i>
1. What available competencies and support to engage in remote learning do the participants report?	What do you feel strong about in remote education practices? Do you get help from others/other sources to solve the problems you encounter in the remote education process? If so, please explain.
2. How do the participants perceive emergency remote teaching (ERT)?	What are your thoughts on the suitability of your learning environment in the remote education process? What kind of skills do you think remote education enables you to gain? How do you think remote education affects you (psychologically, socially, financially, etc.)? If you were asked to choose between face-to-face education and remote education after the pandemic, what would you choose? Why? What are the difficulties/challenges you encounter in remote education?

The interview forms were filled out in online sessions which lasted approximately two hours each with the researchers who provided guidance in case of need. Subsequent to the data collection through the interview forms, two of the researchers conducted a focus group interview with ten participants in order to get deeper insights into their ERT experiences. The sessions were held online and lasted approximately for two hours. Rather than asking questions during the online sessions, the researchers used prompts, generated based on a preliminary analysis of the survey data, to engage the participants in a natural conversation that allowed the participants to express their perceptions of remote education while negotiating their experiences with their peers. To avoid pressure, the focus group interview was not recorded, but the researchers took notes and wrote down illustrative quotes to document reported perceptions.

Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data were inductively analysed using initial codes out of which coding categories were developed. At early stages of the data analysis, all three researchers engaged in initial coding of a part of the data; then the initial codes were discussed and aggregated to coding categories with explanatory power (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) through debriefing (McMahon & Winch, 2018). The involvement of all three researchers aimed at attaining consistency between the codes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). After establishing the coding categories, the whole data were re-coded by two researchers based on the established coding categories. In debriefing sessions, the coding results were compared and consensus was reached. Then about 20 percent of the data were coded by the third researcher, and inter-rater reliability was tested using the formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 64). The inter-rater reliability was found to be high (.83) as it exceeded the proposed consistency rate of .70.

Frequencies of codes were determined by examining how many participants mentioned a particular code in the survey data. Frequency calculation was not adopted for the focus group interview because this data collection tool aimed at revealing a deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions not explicitly stated in the survey responses with no interest in representativeness of the data. To additionally support the validity of the coding categories, direct quotations have been included in the presentation of the data in the results section. As an outcome of the data analysis, one participant's responses were excluded from the data set because they were irrelevant or opaque.

Results

This section reports on the results of the study and is organised following the order of the research questions. The participants' competencies and support were presented first (RQ1: What available competencies and support to engage in remote learning do the participants report?). Then the participants' perceptions were reported (RQ2: How do the participants perceive ERT?). This subsection was divided into three subthemes (*affordances, constraints, preferred education*) to report the specific perceptions. It should be noted that all the data collected through the data collection tools has been integrated in this section. However, the participants did not always answer questions asked and provided other information. For this reason, the reported numbers of responses do not always match with the number of participants.

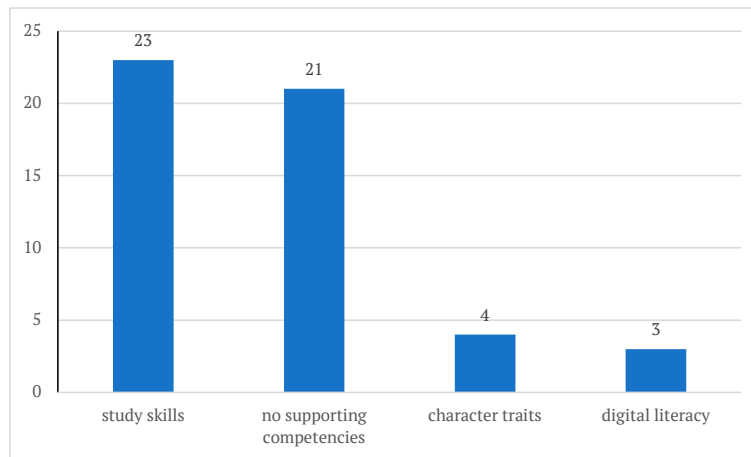
Reported Competencies and Support

The pre-service EFL teachers reported three different sources that allowed them to deal with the challenges of ERT. A remarkable number of participants stated that they did not have supporting traits conducive to studying under ERT conditions. Fifteen participants did not provide information about available competencies in their responses. The results have been summarised in Figure 2.

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Figure 2

Reported Competencies

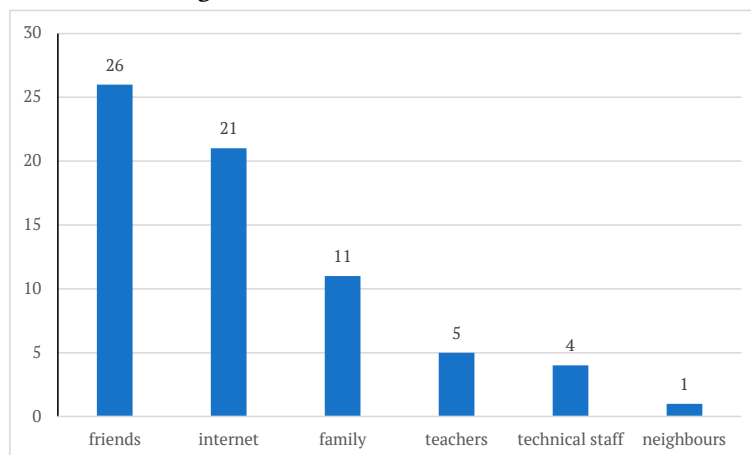


As shown in Figure 2, about a third of the participants pointed to their study skills including constructs of commitment, awareness of responsibilities or research, time management, and linguistic skills as the main support for their online education. Four participants attributed their capability to adapt to ERT with character traits such as patience, empathy, and confidence. Despite the expected relationship between the participants' age group and information technology, only three pre-service teachers stressed their digital literacy. Twenty-one participants stated that no competencies helped them during remote learning.

Another source for addressing the challenges of ERT was the support received from outside. Figure 3 displays the participants' responses.

Figure 3

Support Received to Address ERT Challenges



The participants apparently preferred support from the expertise offered by their friends or the internet. One pre-service teacher stated:

It is more than enough because if you can use the internet properly, it turns into an unlimited pool of information and I think I use the internet correctly. (P31)

The academic teachers were not the first to be contacted in case of problems:

It is enough because my family has 12 members and I can reach them whenever I want. When I can't reach them, I ask the class groups. If I do not get enough answers, I report the problem to my advisor. (P9)

Twenty-four out of 40 participants found the received support adequate, 10 found it inadequate, and 5 somewhat adequate, while one participant did not express a preference.

Perceptions

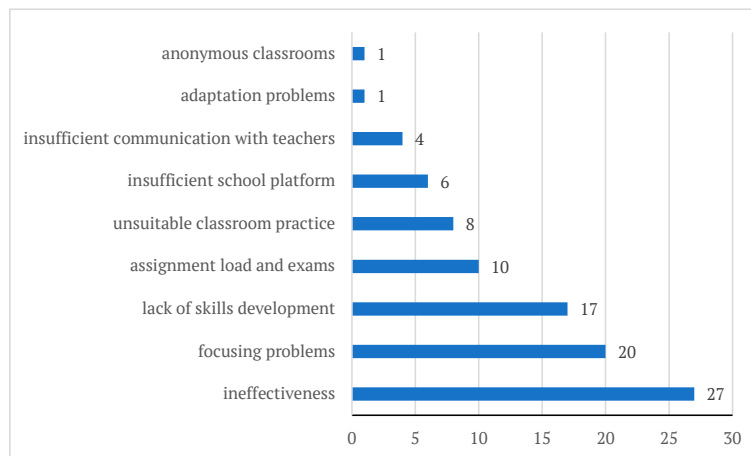
The results concerning the pre-service teachers' perceptions have been presented in two sections reporting constraints and affordances. Within these sections, the emerging themes (learning and instructional practice, learning environment and infrastructure/tools, learner psychology, and wider aspects for constraints; learning and instructional practice, learning environment, and new opportunities for affordances) served as the organising principle to show the results.

Constraints

A variety of negative views on ERT were related to the perceived insufficiency of this form of teaching and learning. The participants mentioned the aspects shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Perceived ERT Constraints on Learning and Instruction



The most frequently expressed concern was that ERT was ineffective without further explications. The other perceptions accentuated different aspects that contributed to the perceived ineffectiveness. Some pre-service teachers remarked that the ineffectiveness was due to a combination of enhanced assignment load and missing feedback due to the inaccessibility of teachers:

We have to study more in the ERT modality because we have to follow tasks every week but they don't contribute to our learning because we don't get feedback. (Focus Group Interview)

Teachers think that we have a lot of time and give nearly twice as much homework and make exams more difficult. (P37)

A further negative effect was exerted by the opportunity offered to the teachers to deliver lessons asynchronously by recording videos in which only the teacher's voice was heard:

There should be both voice and vision even in the asynchronous classes because some teachers only show presentations. (Focus Group Interview)

Also live lessons delivered over videoconferencing tools were perceived insufficient in terms of interaction and exposure to the unnatural experience of observing oneself while communicating:

In remote education, classes are less interactive in terms of both student-teacher interaction and student-student interaction. (P41)

I find it weird because I both see myself in the camera and talk at the same time but in the face-to-face classroom I don't see myself, I just talk. (Focus Group Interview)

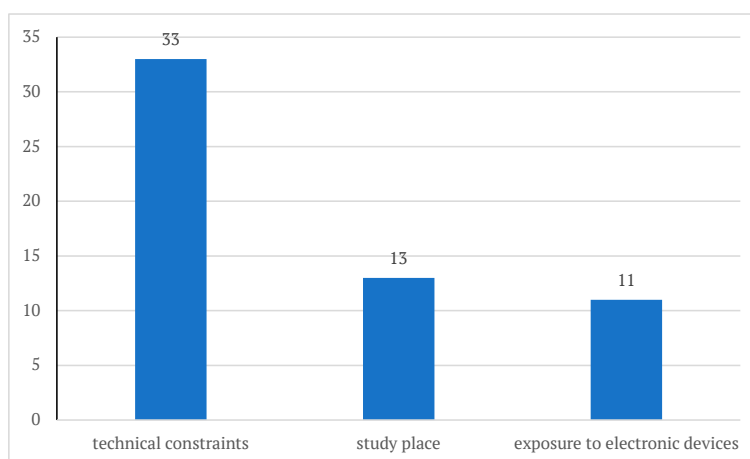
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The learning management system of the university (called ALMS) was another factor shaping the students' perceptions due to its limited capacities leading to system crashes and impractical features such as complicated mute-unmute procedures encouraging academic teachers to use alternative videoconferencing tools, instead. It can be assumed that these factors were distracting and made it difficult for the students to focus on lessons, a perception that was shared by 20 participants.

The students' learning environment (usually their homes) and the technical side of ERT were further factors contributing to the participants' perceptions. Figure 5 displays the results.

Figure 5

Perceived ERT Constraints Related to the Learning Environment and Infrastructure/Tools



A considerable number of participants experienced ERT-driven technical constraints referring mainly to malfunctions of devices. The participants specifically pointed to poor internet connection and power cuts. Additionally, they reported on unsuitable devices showing that not all students had their own computers but used other devices (e. g. their neighbours') instead. Along with the online platform provided by the university, the effects on the quality of the education were considered major:

Inadequate internet infrastructure in the country and the ALMS used by universities: I believe that remote education is not suitable unless both infrastructure and internet speed are raised above a certain level. (P38)

Eleven participants pointed to another specific constraint of online education. They said that exposure to digital devices, especially to small mobile phone screens, affected their health negatively by causing "neck and eye pain and headache because of the computer screen". (Focus Group Interview)

Some participants pointed out that their homes (usually their parents' homes, often shared with siblings) made studying difficult. For example, one participant reported:

Which ones shall I count? As if it's not enough that I'm always at home, I constantly either attend classes, watch videos of lessons I couldn't attend, or do homework. This is very tiring for me. Moreover, I do not have a computer that allows me to fully benefit from online classes. I have to use our neighbour's computer for some homework. (P54)

This excerpt is insightful as it indicates that ERT removes (or can remove) the study place-workplace distinction and therefore harms the work-life balance. This is also documented in the effects on the learner's psychology. Forty-five participants reported that they suffered from anxiety, boredom, desperation, and demotivation resulting in pessimistic views of their upcoming studies:

I am always at home and cannot go out and don't know when this will end but I feel anxious and bored. (Focus Group Interview)

Another effect on the learner's psychology was documented in the data coming from two participants. They felt that the modality of ERT, forcing students to attend a virtual classroom that is being recorded, exerted an additional stress to their self-perceived low proficiency or confidence so that they avoided attendance or oral participation:

Sometimes I do not attend classes because I have difficulty in explaining myself. I think that my teachers may have negative thoughts about me and I have anxiety about how effectively I can use the language in the future. (P3)

Besides these perceptions related to the immediate or broad school context, two wider aspects were explicitly addressed by the participants. Twenty-three participants mentioned the lack of social contact due to lockdown regulations and eight participants reported on financial drawbacks as they had to buy devices to follow online classes or could not benefit from scholarships. Indeed, the data clearly show that the students' perceptions were shaped in the complex interplay of different factors:

Although I am at home, I can't spend time with my family because I constantly do homework, cannot see my friends, and sometimes I have to do group work with people I don't know. (P21)

Remote education has affected me socially and financially. Nowadays, because everything is expensive, I can't afford a computer to catch up with classes, and I have a lot of trouble on the phone, I also have a lot of problems with the internet. (P9)

The modality of ERT affected the private domain, and the private domain affected the pre-service teachers' education since it had become part of the school domain. All perceptions were shaped by the limited opportunities to socialise and the dependence on electronic devices.

Affordances

The participants also saw affordances of ERT related to instruction and learning; they mentioned the aspects displayed in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Perceived ERT Affordances on Learning and Instruction

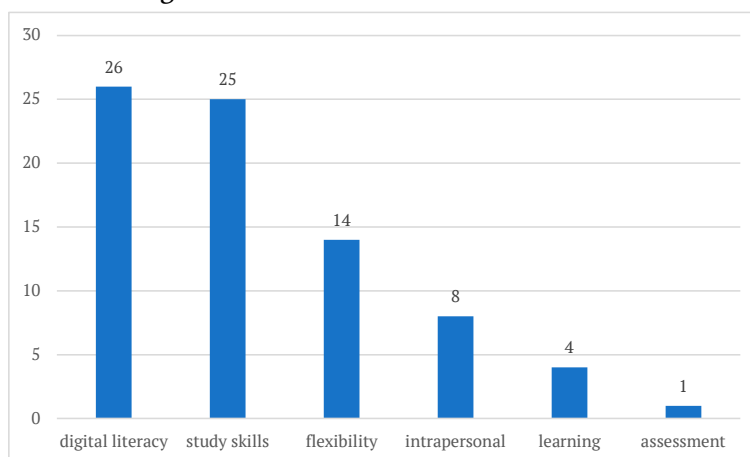


Figure 6 indicates that the participants most appreciated ERT for providing them with the opportunity to improve their digital literacy, which is not surprising given the digital nature of this form of education. A remarkable number also pointed to the positive effect on the development of study skills in terms of creativity, self-directed learning, engagement in activities, problem solving skills, and autonomy. Both digital literacy and study skills actually appeared to be connected in some participants' responses:

I use the digital devices for research purposes, which require us to find information, analyse it and then synthesize it using technology. (Focus Group Interview)

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Most of the assignments require us to do research. By doing so, I believe our research skills have improved and the knowledge we learn is long lasting. (Focus Group Interview)

A further advantage was the flexibility of ERT, which allowed students to view recorded lessons to the online platform and to organise their learning based on their own schedule:

We can watch the class videos more than once but in face-to-face education what we learn is limited to what we can note down. (Focus Group Interview)

I guess the advantage is being able to go back and listen to the points we miss or overlook. (P38)

I can sleep until noon and follow the classes at night. (Focus Group Interview)

ERT also seemed to favour the learning of students with strong intrapersonal intelligence such as those who prefer to study independently, or those who shy away from in-class education:

I prefer remote education. Taking my introvert personality into account, it relieves me from the feelings of sitting in a classroom in face-to-face education. (P36)

A rather low number of pre-service teachers appreciated ERT as conducive to learning. As shown in the following excerpt, the effectiveness seemed to depend on the actual instructional practice delivered by their teachers:

Two of our instructors encourage us a lot to follow their classes online. They run their classes in an environment full of energy and let our voices come through. We learn a lot from their classes. (Focus Group Interview)

Contrary to the negative comments on assignments and exams (see the section on *constraints*), one participant stated that the exams delivered in ERT were easier because students were given more time to answer exam assignments, and two participants appreciated ERT as completely unchallenging.

Related to their learning environments, nine students referred to the comfort of their homes despite some disadvantages:

I have an appropriate learning environment at home because my family attaches significance to our education, but I am faced with challenges when I need to stay in hospital due to my treatment. (P9)

I have a comfortable learning environment but sometimes there is distraction by noise. (P24)

Fourteen participants pointed to financial advantages provided in ERT, as exemplified in the following excerpts:

I don't pay for house utilities or food and drinks because I live with my family. (Focus Group Interview)

Online education is more advantageous for me because it is economically more comfortable. I also feel better psychologically because I love to be with my family, so I prefer online education. (P12)

Additionally, twelve students reported new opportunities created by ERT as it allowed them to have side jobs or self-actualise by improving their soft skills, uncover hidden sides of their personality, or explore new areas of interest. Finally, one student stated that ERT was preferable for health reasons in that they felt protected against a Covid-19 infection.

Preferred Education

The participants were asked about their preferred delivery of education irrespective of the pandemic. Forty-eight participants favoured face-to-face education (73%), 14 participants favoured remote education (21%), and three favoured a hybrid form, while one pre-service teacher remained undecided. This result mirrors the prevailing perception of ERT as afflicted by several drawbacks. Despite the acknowledged drawbacks, the pre-service teachers were aware of the benefits of ERT as evidenced in the responses to the fourth survey question:

Remote education is a more comfortable educational system, but I prefer face-to-face education because I believe it will be more efficient. (P23)

I don't think remote education has any advantage for me other than being comfortable attending and doing homework at home. I definitely prefer to take my lessons in face-to-face education. I cannot get the efficiency I get from face-to-face lessons in remote education. (P48)

I absolutely prefer face-to-face education. Yes, education is not a compulsory thing to be performed within the four walls; however, the fact that education is not conducted in the classroom environment with teacher-student and student-student interaction is again a major obstacle to the development of both teachers and students. It is a difficult process in terms of both social and academic development. (P49)

The following sections summarise the key findings in relation to the existing literature and offers practical implications for teachers and policy makers in the light of the reported findings as well as suggestions for further research.

Discussion

This study sought to explore ERT perceptions held by first- and second-year pre-service teachers in an English Language Teaching department at a Turkish state university. The results showed that ERT practices were evaluated critically in terms of effectiveness of learning, and the participants expressed concerns about aspects related to their learning environment as evidenced in the unsatisfactory technological infrastructure and home environments inappropriate as study places. Besides perceived negative psychological effects, the participants also pointed to some advantages of ERT as it allowed for improved digital literacy and study skills and offered opportunities to organise learning more flexibly. The perceived advantages, according to some students, created new opportunities in terms of self-actualisation.

The results of the present study are in line with those reported in studies which previously described similar challenges brought about by ERT such as inappropriate learning environments (Al-Nofaie, 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Spurrier et al., 2020; Uro, et al., 2020), students having limited access to technology and internet (Altavilla, 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Doncheva et al., 2020; Shahzad et al., 2020; Spurrier et al., 2020), and negative psychological effects of ERT and ineffectiveness of educational practices due to its modality (Alahmadi & Alraddadi, 2020; Al-Nofaie, 2020; Altavilla, 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Doncheva et al., 2020; Hristakieva, 2020; Russell, 2020; Shahzad et al., 2020; Svalina & Ivic, 2020; Syahrin & Salih, 2020; Uro et al., 2020).

A notable finding is that limited access to technology and internet was the most frequently cited ERT-driven challenge reported by the participants. This mirrors the findings in Carrillo and Flores' (2020) review of studies related to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on teacher education contexts. The present study also emphasises Hazaea et al.'s (2021) remark that ERT challenges are twofold as they point to technical and pedagogical constraints.

The results of this paper also coincide with previous research reporting on ERT-driven affordances such as its contribution to the improvement of learners' study skills such as creativity, self-directed learning, engagement in activities, problem-solving skills, and autonomy (Alahmadi & Alraddadi, 2020; Egbert, 2020; Ghounane, 2020; Masterson, 2020; Svalina & Ivić, 2020; Taguchi, 2020; Torun, 2020; Uro et al., 2020) and digital literacy skills were developed (Al-Nofaie, 2020). The acquisition of these skills is critical for pre-service teachers irrespective of their educational level and major. Pre-service teachers are expected to become role models for future generations as creative and autonomous teachers with advanced problem-solving skills are likely to teach their students how to employ creativity, autonomy, and problem-solving strategies to overcome learning challenges.

The data analysis revealed somewhat inconclusive results, which is to some extent expected because individual learners will always perceive instructional programmes and practices differently, and other studies on ERT are in line with the mixed perceptions reported in this paper (Ghounane, 2020; Doncheva et al., 2020; Hristakieva, 2020). This is also mirrored in the participants' overall perceptions according to which face-to-face education was regarded advantageous over remote education by the majority of the participants, especially because the latter was perceived as less effective for learning based on the modality of virtual classrooms with diminished interaction. However, there were also student voices supporting remote learning, and it is obvious that digital

literacy and study skills such as time management or problem-solving skills enabled learners to overcome the constraints of ERT and arrive at some kind of appreciation of remote teaching and learning. In sum, this study contributes to the emerging understanding of the impact of ERT on teaching and learning with its opportunities and drawbacks as it reports on a context different from comparable studies investigating tertiary level students' experiences of ERT (e.g., Alahmadi & Alraddadi, 2020; Doncheva et al., 2020; Gacs, et al., 2020; Hristakieva, 2020; Huanget al., 2020; Shahzad et al., 2020; Torun, 2020).

Conclusion

The findings of the current study showed that the participating pre-service English language teachers developed skills and traits to achieve tasks in an ERT environment while experiencing several challenges due to technical constraints, inconvenient learning environments, and perceived ineffectiveness of the instructions received. In spite of learner voices expressing satisfaction obtained from opportunities to personal and academic growth, the ERT modality was not favoured by most of the participants, who emphasized the merits of face-to-face education.

Drawing on the results evaluated in light of existing research on ERT, the current study emphasises the need to support students by offering instructional help to deal with ERT by, for instance, organising advising sessions (Ross & DiSalvo, 2020), student-led learning communities (Guillén et al, 2020), and self-access learning opportunities (Mideros, 2020). Specifically related to teacher education, opportunities should be created in which pre-service teachers can share and discuss their own experiences of ERT so that they can benefit from their “values, beliefs and knowledge as an integral part of the learning process” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 183) and are enabled to develop their personal beliefs about and approaches to remote education. In a similar vein, teachers need to receive professional development on how to plan and conduct lessons in virtual teaching environments by sequencing asynchronous and synchronous instructional units (Moorhouse & Beaumont, 2020), creating compelling tasks (Egbert, 2020), and giving efficient feedback (Guillén et al, 2020; Inpeng & Nomnian, 2020), an issue that was explicitly raised by some participants. Furthermore, ERT requires governmental authorities and school managers to provide a technical infrastructure (by providing learners and teachers with devices and learning management systems) and communication channels open to all stakeholders (Hazaea et al. 2021). Moreover, this study suggests that hybrid solutions for teaching and learning may be promising irrespective of the current threat exerted by the pandemic to enhance learner autonomy and to favour the special needs of learners with intrapersonal intelligence (Al-Nofaie, 2020).

This study has limitations regarding sampling and data collection procedures. First, the participants were comprised of a group of pre-service English language teachers at a state university in Turkey. Second, the data were self-reports collected through an interview form and a focus group interview. While these limitations advise against incautious generalisations, they indicate areas for further research. Similar studies in disciplines different from English Language Teaching and other geographical contexts may inform researchers and practitioners about how generalisable the results of this study are and will enhance knowledge of the affordances and constraints of ERT in teacher education. Additionally, observations and data collection tools that invite participants to self-reflect on concrete ERT experiences such as journals or stimulated recalls will reveal deeper insights on how students perceive learning through this modality. Finally, it is desirable to examine to what extent ERT-directed policy making suggested here and in other studies is beneficial to overcome the challenges of ERT.

To generate betterment in instruction delivered through ERT, it is crucial to rely on context-dependent knowledge. This was exactly the motivation for this case study, and the hope is that it contributes to broadening the knowledge base concerning ERT in language teacher education.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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