Research Article

"Unmute, please!": Tertiary Lecturers' Perceptions on Emergency Remote English Language Teaching During COVID-19 Pandemics

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ABSTRACT

The disruption of the education system caused by the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has altered teaching processes forever, thus transforming the existing teaching/learning contexts and their relevance. Given that instructors are key bearers of the educational process, the perception of their teaching experience during the pandemic is vital to understanding the challenges that emerged throughout the process. This paper reports on the experiences of English as a foreign language (EFL) higher education lecturer (n=89) of their emergency remote English language teaching (ERELT) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective of the research was to investigate how EFL lecturers assess their own instruction and relationship with students within their ERELT, and how much their teaching in ERELT differed from regular teaching conditions. Under the computer-mediated communication theory framework, the study has adopted a mix-methods research design and the data were collected through a questionnaire. The results imply that the use of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) significantly surged in the ERELT as compared to regular teaching conditions. The teaching process was assessed as a dynamic, resourceful, and stressful process, which, judging by the communicational goals, appeared to be less interactive than more traditional face-to-face instruction, causing the relationship between students and instructors to worsen to a certain extent.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, emergency remote English language teaching, tertiary education, COVID-19; computer-assisted language learning, mix-method

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic declared by World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020 (WHO, 2020) resulted in immediate universities closure worldwide. In a quick response to the COVID-19 outbreak, universities had to decide whether to go fully online or keep a hybrid teaching instruction so that the learning outcomes are achieved, and the continuity of education is preserved in unprecedented circumstances. To mark "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances" a new term in relevant literature was coined–emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Hodges et al., 2020). Unlike other online courses which are initially designed as online instruction, ERT is an urgent shift to a fully virtual learning context not previously methodologically designed or planned, and which differs from other non-emergency online delivery (Hodges et al., 2020; Mohmmed et al., 2020). In other words, ERT emerges as a "re-engineered distance education" (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020, p. iv), "hastily redesigned and adapted to new modes of communication" (Bondarenko, 2021, p. 390), or it can be defined as a flexible, quick solution in a virtual educational setting in crisis or threat circumstances

when other approaches to teaching appear inadequate or unavailable. Once the crisis ends, the need for ERT implementation stops and face-to-face instruction can be established again.

Globally, ongoing interruptions of education normally affected English language teaching (ELT), which makes a big proportion of classes in the general student population due to its growing share in education. Curricula-wise, English is a mandatory subject/course in 142 countries in the world, as per national mandates, whereas, additionally, another 41 countries offer English as an elective subject to students (GEEP, 2021). Across Europe, 91% of primary and secondary school students learn English (Devlin, 2020) out of the 24 languages offered. In tertiary education, similarly, almost all students all over the world are required to take English course(s) in their first or second year of study no matter what the core subject. This implies that almost every second student in the world faced ERT of an English course at a certain point during the academic year 2020 or 2021.

The pandemic has caused abrupt scientific advances and even influenced the emergence of new terminological entries. Teaching English in the pandemic context within ERT has been denoted as emergency remote English language teaching (ERELT) (Hazaea et al.,

2021), and based on the scientific and critical attention it receives in both practical and theoretical research, it will surely become a growing academic field of its own. A plethora of studies have been conducted that investigate various aspects of ERELT–ranging from studies on theoretical framework or emerging challenges (Bolkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hazaea et al., 2021; Mohmmed et al., 2020), to studies reporting on students' attitudes (AlAdwani & AlFadley, 2022; Bondarenko, 2021; Huang et al., 2020; Juárez-Díaz & Perales, 2021; Maican & Cocoradă, 2021; Peňalver & Laborda, 2021), teachers' perceptions (Alves et al., 2020; Erarslan, 2021; Hazaea et al., 2021; Juárez-Díaz & Perales, 2021; Kohnke & Jarvis, 2021; Mousavi et al., 2021; Narqvi & Zehra 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020; Sundarwati & Pahlevi, 2021; Wulandari 2021), assessment (Abduh, 2021), or best practices (Mandasari & Wulandari, 2021). Interestingly, whatever the context in terms of how technically advanced the tertiary institutions are, the said studies all highlighted two key issues of ERELT being the most worrisome; poor technical resources of at least one party involved in the trilateral teaching chain (faculty facilities, teachers, students) on the one hand, and the inadequate digital literacy of teachers on the other.

As lecturers emerge as key bearers of teaching activities, and their attitudes can significantly redirect and reshape the teaching process, a number of recent studies has questioned English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors' perceptions of their past or ongoing ERELT experiences. Chinese university instructors reported difficulties in communication with students, feedback issues, and problems in monitoring learning (Kohke & Jarvis, 2021). The main hindrance arising from their ERELT experience was the impersonal nature of the online learning in which most students were reluctant to turn on their cameras. Iranian EFL instructors described their ERELT experience as an inefficient process with "less interaction-more distraction", in which some students were even taking a nap during the teaching sessions (Monjezi et al., 2021). Similarly, Arab lecturers pinpointed a lack of interaction as the most prominent downside of ERELT, which resulted in the teaching/learning experience missing the emotional dimension, so a sense of bonding was difficult to develop (Naqvis & Zehra, 2020). The study also revealed that the teachers were confident in providing online feedback, yet they all missed the traditional learning situation to some extent, as they found the ERELT significantly more demanding than the F-2-F approach.

Contrary to it, teachers in an Indonesian setting felt that their poor digital literacy and unreadiness were the main causes of their slow feedback and lack of motivation to provide more interactive teaching (Nugroho et al., 2021). In another study, the absence of real teaching situations and authenticity as well as the drop in enthusiasm were mentioned as some of the main ERELT concerns of EFL instructors (Hazaea et al., 2021). Chilean teachers also mentioned the lack of "live" teaching experience and a lack of typical behavioural situations caused by the sudden change of setting as two predominant drawbacks of ERELT which caused anxiety and a drop in teaching motivation, thus significantly affecting the learning process (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). Other tertiary EFL lecturers emphasized that reduced or inadequate interactivity of students was more common in large classes (Sundarwati & Pahlevi, 2021) and that poor interaction led to assessment challenges, plagiarism and integrity issues (Abduh, 2021). Razkane et al. (2022) found that as many as 82.1% of instructors confessed to having low interaction with students within MS Teams

app. What is more, this research suggests that teachers who had a negative attitude to MS Teams also developed a higher level of anxiety.

Building upon these studies conducted in different learning contexts, this study seeks to address three RQs:

1. how different ERELT in the pandemic conditions was (has been) when compared to instructors' regular teaching routines, especially regarding the tools used and time management,

2. how EFL lecturers assess their own instruction and relationship with students within their ERELT, and

3. what were the main challenges instructors encountered during ERELT?

The increased prevalence of e-learning technology and its expansion in education have proven to be a handy, cohesive solution in pandemic circumstances. Hence, to help save economies and prevent precarity that may affect the general population across the globe in difficult times, it is of vital importance to conduct new research studies that would illuminate the field from many different perspectives. It is essential that we address the constraints of technology-integrated instruction delivered during the pandemic and try to learn from the evidence and the experience gathered. The next step would be to incorporate those major findings into new integrative, innovative approaches and good practices, as there is an assumption that times of crisis are likely to repeat or get prolonged. The abovementioned studies in the ERELT brought remarkable results and observations, however, they were founded on limited scopes, and mainly dealt with a specific teaching context or were focused on ERELT in one school/country. To add to their findings, this research aims at examining ERELT from the perspectives of tertiary education English instructors from across the world, whose insights will help us gain a deeper understanding of the uprising global phenomenon.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Computer-mediated communication theory (CMCT) framework informs this research as "[c]omputer-mediated communication (CMC) systems, in a variety of forms, have become integral to the initiation, development, and maintenance of interpersonal relationships" (Walther, 2011, p. 443). Theories and studies within the context of CMC explain how human communication is realized as a set of social and collaborative activities across various forms of human communication through networked computers (Shah, 2017). CMC includes both synchronous and asynchronous communication by facilitating collaboration using different communication media (video, chat, audio, text exchange etc.). One of the earliest theories within the framework is social presence theory (SPT), which posits that "presence is considered an integral part of mediated environments" (Shah, 2017, p. 165), which leads to learner satisfaction.

Unlike face-to-face instruction which features the highest level of social presence and supports warmth and involvement (Walther, 2011), CMC has a considerably lower level of social presence, hence, instructors must put in additional effort to compensate for the lack of it. Within CMCT, media richness theory (MRT) suggests that computer-based instruction is not as rich in providing excessive information (such as feedback) in as face-to-face instruction (Shah, 2017), so the choice of media (text, audio, video, etc.) must be carefully matched to the teaching activity for the optimal results. The richer the

distance education environment, the higher the reported satisfaction with the distance course/program (Shepherd & Martz, 2006). The greater the equivocality of a message situation, the greater media richness is required (Walther, 2011, p. 448).

Finally, hyperpersonal communication model (HCM) suggests that socio-emotional involvement takes time depending on the communication channel used, as CMC allows users to exchange ideas or provide responses under greater control, due to many activities acting as delayed responses (emails, chat messages, written feedback), thus allowing learners to "press pause". This model suggests that there are four key components that relate to message construction and reception: effects due to receiver processes, effects among message senders, attributes of the channel, and feedback effects (Walther, 2011, p. 460). In that sense, the impact of technological media on human behaviour as rationalized within the CMC theoretical framework and investigated in numerous related studies can help gain a better understanding of the attitudes of instructors towards ERELT. To conclude, this research is theoretically underpinned by the CMCT, i.e., SPT, MRT, and HCM.

METHOD

The research was conducted in November 2021. The study has adopted a mix-methods research design to investigate the perceptions of EFL educators of their instruction during the pandemic. The researcher developed an original questionnaire, which was designed and written in English using Google Forms tool. The instrument was then reviewed by two experienced college lecturers of English, to ensure its validity and reliability. Finally, the questionnaire was distributed online on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, via special interest groups of EFL teachers and lecturers who teach in tertiary education.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections with a total of 16 questions, both closed ended (15) and open-ended (one). The first section deals with demography (seven questions). The next section (eight questions) focuses on regular learning conditions versus ERT, and the third section consists of one open-ended question designed to explore the respondents' overall assessment of their ERELT. The data of the first two sections were processed by the SPSS software. The responses to an open-ended question were analyzed using a method of thematic analysis (TA), used for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

Participants

The sample consisted of 89 instructors and lecturers who teach EFL in tertiary education. They were selected based on several criteria:

1. they teach in higher education (college or university);
2. they teach EFL or related courses; and
3. they all had to transit to online teaching during the pandemic and deliver content exclusively online.

The questionnaire was administered to the participants who volunteered for this study and were assured about the confidentiality of their responses. Questions regarding personal information were eliminated.

As for demography, 27% of the respondents identified as male and 73% as female. As many as 23% of them belong to the 'younger than 35'

age group, whereas 36-45-year-olds and 46-55-year-olds make 34% of the respondents, respectively. Only 9% of the sample belong to the 55-65 age group, and there were no 'over 65' respondents at all. The majority of respondents teach English at a university (73%), whereas 27% teach at a college. As for years of experience in teaching English at a tertiary level, 35% of the respondents have 10-20 years of service, 24% have worked 'over 20' years now, 22% of educators have already worked for '5-10 years', and 19% reported to have worked 'less than 5' years.

Respondents come from 40 countries in the world, with 22.1% of them teaching in Serbia (19 respondents), 5.8% in Pakistan (five respondents), 4.7% in Mexico, and 3.5% in Greece, Philippines, UK, Italy, and Indonesia, respectively (three respondents each country). All other countries are represented by two or one respondents in the survey. As many as 93.1% of the respondents reported to had been in the lockdown for COVID-19 for some time, while 6.9% had not. As for a teaching load in regular teaching conditions, 46% of educators confessed to teaching three-five courses in a semester, 38% teach less than three courses, and 16% of respondents teach more than five courses per semester.

Data Collection and Analysis

As the questionnaire was distributed online on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, the participants filled in the online questionnaire, and the researcher processed the collected data using the SPSS statistical computer programme to collect results. In analyzing data, descriptive statistics (mean) was used to interpret the findings. For the open-ended question, the reflections of respondents were coded by the researcher and the major themes (based on the frequency of occurrence) were identified and categorized, using the method of TA.

The Scale

For the purposes of this research, the researcher developed their own scale, due to the fact that we have not found an adequate scale that measures respondents' perceptions of ERELT experience. The scale was piloted with four respondents beforehand and reviewed by two independent experienced EFL researchers. To assess the frequency of the computer-assisted language learning (CALL) use in ERELT (questions 8 and 9) a multiple-choice question was designed (everyday/two-three times a week/sometimes/hardly ever/never). Similarly, to assess the frequency of the CALL use in regular vs. pandemic conditions (questions 10 and 11) a multiple-choice question was used with five options offered for each of the 13 statements (never/rarely/sometimes/often/on a regular basis). Questions 12-17 had three-five offered options each.

A five-point Likert scale was used in question 17 ('disagree/somewhat disagree/neither agree nor disagree/agree/totally agree'). The following range of means with their descriptions was used: 1.00-1.79 (very low); 1.80-2.59 (low); 2.60-3.39 (moderate); 3.40-4.19 (high); 4.20-5.00 (very high). The reliability of the scale for question 17 was determined by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with a result of 0.86, which indicates significant consistency.

For all the questions (except for the open-ended one), the SPSS software processed the data and descriptive statistics were used to generate the results. For the open-ended question, the 59 answers were collected and grouped into the three most prevailing themes. The percentage of the themes in the responses was then calculated based on the criteria of frequency.

Table 1. CALL frequency of use in regular teaching conditions

(8) How often do you use a computer-assisted language learning approach in regular teaching conditions?	Valid %
*Everyday	27.1
*Two-three times a week	34.1
*Sometimes	27.1
*Hardly ever	7
*Never	4.7

Table 2. CALL frequency of use in regular pandemic conditions

(9) How often did you use computer-assisted language learning approach in lockdown/pandemic teaching conditions?	Valid %
*Everyday	74.7
*Two-three times a week	15.7
*Sometimes	6
*Hardly ever	2.4
*Never	1.2

Table 3. Use of CALL in regular teaching conditions

(10) In regular teaching conditions I have used:	1 - never	2-rarely	3-sometimes	4-often	5-on a regular basis	M	SD
Institution website	22.1	18.2	14.3	19.5	26	3.09	1.523
Platforms for remote teaching (such as Moodle)	31.6	15.2	21.5	15.2	16.5	2.70	1.471
Messaging apps (Whatsapp, Messenger, etc.)	38.8	16.3	17.5	13.8	13.8	2.48	1.467
Online platforms related to the textbook I use	27.5	18.8	23.8	15	15	2.71	1.407
Virtual classrooms (Google, Easyclass, etc.)	50.6	20.3	8.9	8.9	11.4	2.10	1.411
On-line video sharing platforms (YouTube, Vimeo, etc.)	13.6	6.2	32.1	28.4	19.8	3.35	1.257
Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)	42.3	15.4	20.5	14.1	7.7	2.29	1.349
TV channels	64.9	13.5	13.5	5.4	2.7	1.68	1.074
Language learning apps (Duolingo, Babbel)	68.8	11.7	9.1	7.8	2.6	1.64	1.099
Video conferencing (Zoom, Google Meet)	62.8	11.5	5.1	5.1	15.4	1.99	1.516
Online exercises and games (Kahoot, Quizizz, etc.)	33.3	20.5	17.9	19.2	9.0	2.50	1.365
Virtual reality platforms (Second Life, Edmondo)	72.4	11.8	9.2	3.9	2.6	1.53	1.00
Interactive tests (Google Forms, LiveWorkSheets)	34.6	19.2	28.2	7.7	10.3	2.40	1.313

Note. M: Mean & SD: Standard deviation

Table 4. Use of CALL in COVID-19 teaching conditions

(11) In COVID-19 teaching conditions I have used:	1 - never	2-rarely	3-sometimes	4-often	5-on a regular basis	M	SD
Institution website	17.3	7.4	16	19.8	39.5	3.57	1.499
Platforms for remote teaching (such as Moodle)	19	6.3	7.6	22.8	44.3	3.67	1.55
Messaging apps (Whatsapp, Messenger, etc.)	26.3	10.0	15.0	20.0	28.8	3.15	1.584
Online platforms related to the textbook I use	26.9	11.5	19.2	17.9	24.4	3.01	1.542
Virtual classrooms (Google, Easyclass, etc.)	21.3	8.8	6.3	12.5	51.3	3.64	1.655
On-line video sharing platforms (YouTube, Vimeo, etc.)	7.8	6.5	18.2	24.7	42.9	3.88	1.256
Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)	42.9	10.4	16.9	10.4	19.5	2.53	1.586
TV channels	61.8	9.2	13.2	11.8	3.9	1.87	1.258
Language learning apps (Duolingo, Babbel)	61.3	13.3	8.0	12.0	5.3	1.87	1.288
Video conferencing (Zoom, Google Meet)	3.7	4.9	11.1	14.8	65.4	4.33	1.095
Online exercises and games (Kahoot, Quizizz, etc.)	29.5	12.8	16.7	16.7	24.4	2.94	1.574
Virtual reality platforms (Second Life, Edmondo)	63.2	10.5	6.6	7.9	11.8	1.95	1.450
Interactive tests (Google Forms, LiveWorkSheets)	25.6	9	12.8	26.9	25.6	3.18	1.552

Note. M: Mean & SD: Standard deviation

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Regular Learning Conditions Versus Emergency Remote Teaching

The second section (eight questions) of the questionnaire was designed to investigate how different ERELT in the pandemic conditions was (has been) when compared to educators' regular teaching routines.

The results in **Table 1** and **Table 2** imply that the frequency of CALL use significantly increased during the pandemic: whereas only 27.1% of instructors used to utilize CALL every day in regular teaching conditions, as many as 74.7% of instructors resorted to using CALL every day during the pandemic. In fact, the findings indicate that 90% of instructors reported having used the CALL approach at least three times a week or more often in pandemic conditions.

Questions 10 and 11 were designed to investigate which tools and platforms lecturers specifically used in regular teaching conditions and which ones in the ERELT.

As shown in **Table 3** and **Table 4**, the biggest difference is evident in the use of videoconferencing tools (Zoom, Google Meet); whereas conferencing was only rarely used in regular teaching conditions (M=1.99), its use significantly increased in ERELT (M=4.33). Interactive tests (Google Forms, LiveWorkSheets) were also used more often in ERELT (M=3.18), but not much more than in regular teaching conditions (M=2.40). The following tools and applications, as given in **Table 3** and **Table 4**, were slightly more often used in ERELT than in regular teaching conditions; platforms for remote teaching (Moodle), messaging apps (Whatsapp, Messanger), online platforms related to the textbook, and virtual classrooms (Google, Easyclass), as their means all increased from >2 to >3. Interestingly, TV channels, virtual reality platforms, online exercises, and games (Kahoot, Quizizz), social networks and language learning apps (Duolingo, Babbel) were used

Table 5. Teaching and preparation activities in ERELT

(12) Compared to before lockdown, do you feel your teaching (including teaching hours & lesson preparation) has been (was):	Valid %
Taking less work	3.8
Taking more work	86.1
Taking the same work as in regular conditions	10.1

Table 6. Preparation time vs. teaching time in ERELT

(13) Compared to before the lockdown, how much time did you spend on teaching itself and how much on apps and tools:	Valid %
I spent more time on teaching (video conferencing, communication, feedback, etc.)	38
I spent more time learning how to use tools, apps, and platforms and prepare them for teaching sessions.	43
It took me the same time to teach and prepare.	19

Table 7. Quality of relationship with students during the ERELT

(14) Compared to before the lockdown, do you find your relationship with students has...	Valid %
Improved a bit	19.0
Improved a lot	10.1
Worsened a bit	29.1
Worsened a lot	31.6
Remained the same	10.2

Table 8. Learning outputs in ERELT

(15) Compared to before the lockdown, do you find the learning outputs...	Valid %
Have been achieved	29.1
Have not been achieved	25.3
I cannot tell, it is difficult to assess	45.6

Table 9. Teaching objectives in ERT

(16) Compared to before the lockdown, do you find the teaching objectives...	Valid %
Have been achieved	36.7
Have not been achieved	25.3
I cannot tell, it is difficult to assess	38.0

almost in the same frequency in ERELT as in regular teaching conditions. Institution/university website was also used with a similar frequency before and during the pandemic conditions. These results imply that to fully replace F-2-F teaching, the respondents massively utilized videoconferencing tools as the second richest medium based on MRT, and to make the CMC more efficient the lecturers deployed synchronous and asynchronous communication channels for additional teaching support. But, it is indicative that interactive activities like games and quizzes were used as much as in regular teaching conditions implying that teachers either hoped they might secure interactivity with videoconferencing tools only, or they were focused on delivering content, neglecting value of social dimension of language classes.

As for the preparation and teaching ratio before and during the pandemic conditions (**Table 5** and **Table 6**), 86.1% of the respondents confessed to having worked significantly more during the ERELT. As many as 38% of the teachers spent more time on teaching itself (videoconferencing, communication, feedback, etc.), whereas 43% reported having spent more time on learning how to use tools, apps and platforms and prepare for teaching sessions. This implies that the ERELT process required significantly more teacher engagement, especially for acquiring new skills for the application of CALL tools for teaching in the pandemic conditions.

The quality of the teacher-student relationship was investigated by question 14. The results (**Table 7**) suggest that 31.6% of teachers felt that their relationship and communication with students significantly worsened, while 29.1% of teachers felt their relationship worsened in moderation.

Overall, almost 60% of the teachers confessed that their relationship with students worsened to some extent during the ERELT. These findings comply with the CMCT, which argues that, due to a lack of Social Presence within the CMC, instructors need to find compensatory solutions and additionally nurture the social and emotional involvement of the learners by applying different strategies, which also takes additional time. As social presence is a strong predictor of satisfaction in the CMC environment (So & Brush, 2008; Tu, 2002), the teaching activities must be carefully designed so that they provide learners with a number of non-verbal cues that establish social presence. Within the framework of the HP model, which suggests that in the CMC a more mindful construction of desired messages is possible but that both parties develop better relationships over time, it is essential that teachers focus on improving the quality of the relationship, as the dynamics are slower than in F-2-F approach. "dehumanized cognitive interactions", as Bondarenko (2021, p. 393) aptly put it, is an overarching term denoting student interactions with a text, a test, or a video. If these interactions are overused, the quality of the relationship decreases.

The respondents' attitudes to achieving learning outcomes and teaching objectives (**Table 8** and **Table 9**) were explored by questions 15 and 16. As many as 45.6% of teachers reported that they could not assess whether the learning outputs were achieved, while 25.3% felt that the learning outputs were not achieved. Similarly, lecturers felt that the teaching objectives were only partially achieved; 38% of the teachers could not assess whether the objectives were achieved, while 25.3% reported they felt were not achieved.

These results (along with the results given in questions 12 and 13) suggest that the teachers found the process of ERELT inadequate (too demanding or time-consuming) to allow them to focus on learning outputs or teaching objectives. If the learning outputs as direct and immediate effects of the teaching process, student achievement, attitudes and skills could not be assessed, this indicates that the teachers' focus was only directed towards getting the teaching process going as the circumstances dictated. In line with the MRT within CMC discussed earlier, which posits that the choice of media used (text, audio, video etc.) must be carefully matched to the nature of the message so that any equivocality is avoided, we may conclude that in emergency situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the time to transit to online teaching was insufficient for teachers to perform optimal planning and preparation. This concurs with other research studies found that what affected the ERELT was the fact that educational systems were unprepared for the global crisis (Erarslan, 2021; Hazaea et al., 2021; Mousavi et al., 2021; Monjezi et al., 2021; Nugroho et al., 2021). Question 17 with 24 separate statements to be assessed by 5-point Likert scale (1 refers to 'totally disagree' and 5 to 'totally agree') was designed to investigate how teachers perceived their overall ERELT experience. The statements were constructed so that they rely on the HCM of the CMCT, i.e., they focus on the socio-emotional involvement of teachers during ERELT process. Reliability of scale was determined by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with a result of 0.86.

Table 10. Teachers' attitudes towards ERELT

(17) Do you agree with the following statements:	1 - never	2-rarely	3-sometimes	4-often	5-on a regular basis	M	SD
1. Remote teaching was stressful for me	12.5	32.5	15.0	27.5	12.5	2.95	1.272
2. I was prepared to switch to fully remote teaching quickly	17.3	22.2	23.5	21.0	16.0	2.96	1.336
3. I used a lot of my old materials	8.5	22.0	34.1	22.0	13.4	3.10	1.151
4. I have already had a lot of online material ready	16.3	21.3	28.8	20.0	13.8	2.94	1.276
5. It took me too long to prepare my lessons	13.4	30.5	29.3	14.6	12.2	2.82	1.208
6. I had to learn how to use certain apps for the first time	7.3	11.0	26.8	13.4	41.5	3.71	1.310
7. I had to adapt my teaching material	2.5	8.6	27.2	29.6	32.1	3.80	1.066
8. I had to adapt assignments and homework	4.9	7.3	26.8	23.2	37.8	3.82	1.167
9. I had to adapt my grading system and time frame	8.5	15.9	23.2	20.7	31.7	3.51	1.317
10.I shared my work with my colleagues to help them save time	11.3	16.3	25.0	26.3	21.3	3.30	1.287
11. I was worried for my weaker students	5.0	13.8	25.0	25.0	31.3	3.64	1.204
12. I was concerned about copyright issues	30	18.8	16.3	13.8	21.3	2.78	1.534
13. My students needed additional instruction (related to use of apps and procedures)	10	15	12.5	33.8	28.8	3.56	1.320
14. I enjoyed synchronous teaching (videoconferencing, instant messages)	7.7	20.5	30.8	15.4	25.6	3.31	1.272
15. I enjoyed asynchronous teaching (written materials uploaded, video lectures on YouTube)	10.1	25.3	27.8	16.5	20.3	3.11	1.281
16. I am going to continue using some newly discovered CALL tools	5.0	7.5	23.8	28.8	35.0	3.81	1.148
17. It was difficult to track my students' progress	15.2	17.7	19.0	29.1	19.0	3.19	1.350
18. My students were less engaged	8.9	15.2	36.7	26.6	12.7	3.19	1.122
19. Assessment of students' work was difficult to realize	16.5	19.0	24.1	29.1	11.4	3.00	1.271
20. The feedback from students was poor	18.2	23.4	33.8	15.6	9.1	2.74	1.197
21. Feedback I gave my students was time-consuming & stressful	17.5	13.8	28.8	25.0	15.0	3.06	1.306
22. I had to make some extra effort to realize remote teaching (buy a device, pay for an app, take an online course)	21.3	10.0	20.0	27.5	21.3	3.18	1.439
23. I am looking forward to getting back to regular teaching conditions	5.1	7.6	16.5	22.8	48.1	4.01	1.193
24. I feel I have improved my teaching skills with this experience	3.8	5.1	26.6	26.6	38.0	3.90	1.093

Note. M: Mean & SD: Standard deviation

The results (**Table 10**) indicate that the instructors highly enjoyed both synchronous and asynchronous teaching during the ERELT (both means over three), but that they also had worries about their weaker students (M=3.64). These findings are compliant with Mousavi et al. (2021) who found that 71% of lecturers described the ERELT teaching conditions as new and exciting, and used a combination of synch/asynchronous communication throughout the process. Similarly, Naqui and Zehra (2020) found that 38.3% of teachers found their ERELT neither easy nor difficult.

The three highest-scoring statements (very high) were 23 ('I am looking forward to getting back to regular teaching conditions') with M=4.01, then 24 ('I feel I have improved my teaching skills with this experience') with M=3.90, and statement 8 ('I had to adapt assignments and homework') (M=3.82). These data correlate with the data found in Bondarenko (2021) who found that EFL instructors expressed preference for F-2-F instruction; with Maican and Concorada (2021) who argued that more than 50% of instructors rejected the idea of using e-teaching in the post-pandemic period, confirming that they experience extensive workload; and with Juárez-Díaz and Perales (2021) who reported that 56% of teachers were firm proponents of F-2-F instruction.

The respondents in the present study also reported that it was difficult to track their students' progress (M=3.19) and that their students were less engaged (M=3.19), which is in line with the research studies of other researchers who also found that lecturers found it difficult to provide feedback or were unable to monitor students' progress, while students' engagement was poor (Kohnke & Jarvis, 2021; Nugroho et al., 2021; Sundarwati & Pahlevi, 2021). Statement 20 ('The

feedback from students was poor') falls within the moderate estimation range, with M=2.74, which implies that respondents felt their students provided feedback on their teaching to some extent, but it was insufficient or inadequate. Similarly, the teachers revealed that providing feedback to students was a time-consuming activity, in moderation (M=3.06). Overall, the results indicate that the teachers' experience of their ERELT had many challenges and concerns along the way (adapting materials, purchase of apps), but that they would like to use their improved CALL skills and tools in further teaching activities.

Overall Assessment of the ERELT

The final section of the questionnaire was an open-ended question, which reads (**Table 11**): "Overall, how to you assess the teaching process during the lockdown? Were there any unexpected or unusual issues you had to deal with? What was the bright side of the process? Please, share your impressions." The question was formulated based on the HCM mentioned earlier, aiming at exploring the quality of the socio-emotional involvement of instructors during the ERELT. The question was also to investigate which ERELT challenges the instructors would like to address that were not mentioned in the questionnaire sections 2 and 3. Of n=89 respondents, 59 wrote their impressions in a freestyle manner. Their answers were analyzed using the method of TA and grouped into three thematic groups:

1. ERELT challenges (equipment, tools, apps, infrastructure),

2. Students' performance and ERELT participation challenges, and

3. Teaching, preparation, and personal challenges.

Table 11. Selected answers to the open-ended question

ERELT challenges	Students' performance and ERELT participation challenges	Teaching, preparation, and personal challenges
- I have gained a wealth of experience teaching online which I will surely use when we get back to normal. - Online classroom is a 'necessary evil' as it kills the socializing among students. - It definitely provided a lot of ideas which I am using now during regular teaching. - Teachers were mostly left to their own devices. - It was the time-consuming nature of making video recordings of classes and especially of providing feedback on an individual level. - It added a new dimension to my teaching. - The virtual platform we use took 2 months to be fully functional. - Bad internet connections and lack of technological equipment were issues. - In our part of the world, network problems, disruption of electricity supply, lack of financial ability of students to buy devices etc. were big issues. -The best was the use of some useful apps for teaching and learning, the worst was the amount of time you have to spend in front of the PC or with the phone, including the money expenditure on buying data. - Many staff and students did not have the infrastructural support, in terms of consistent internet connectivity, digital devices, financials and even digital competencies to be able to commit to full time online learning and teaching.	- I found my students less willing to cooperate. - I miss the interaction we all have in a real classroom setting. - My connection with students was (during the lockdown) and has remained better - times were tough and we were there for each other (though virtually) every day. - Most of the students were not ready for the depth and extent of the commitment to online teaching and learning. - Computer-based assessment is not reliable and valid. - With time, students were increasingly not switching on their cameras which makes online synchronous lessons very difficult. - It makes me unhappy with how limited students' interaction with one another is. - The bright side was that students could use the recorded lessons for self-regulation for learning new things.	- I couldn't cope with teaching for more than a couple of hours (due to being with my children at home). - Assessing students progress and grading them was the second most challenging thing. - I received a lot of messages from WhatsApp, it stressed me but at the same time, I could see in my students their worries about teaching English. - There are too many platforms, apps, etc for teaching and learning with technology. Each has different features. Sometimes I felt stressed because if too many apps. - It's easier to make jokes and create an informal atmosphere if it's not mediated by technology. Spontaneous reactions from both the teacher and students are impossible because of signal delay and that can create a weird situation and make students refrain from any comments or questions. - The amount of synchronous teaching compared to asynchronous teaching was out of balance. - Bad signal and the unbearable noise. I felt mentally and physically exhausted after each class. - Emotion and anxiety among students and teachers. - It lacked human agency. - Students and teachers were unmotivated and tired. - It was sometimes time-consuming when giving feedback. - I am happy I had a chance to learn how to use all the online and virtual tools.

Table 12. Frequency of themes appearing in the comments

ERELT challenges	Students' performance and ERELT participation challenges	Teaching, preparation, and personal challenges
64	35	37

Interestingly, although the question was designed to assess the instructors' perceptions of ERELT including both positive and negative aspects, a high percentage of answers addressed mainly the negative aspects of the process. The frequency of mentioning ERELT challenges in the comments was 64% (of that number 72% are negative attitudes), Students' performance and participation challenges frequency of mention was 35% (of that number 84% are negative attitudes), whereas Teaching, preparation, and personal challenges frequency of mention was 37% (of that number 89% are negative attitudes).

These results (**Table 12**) imply that the instructors were mainly concerned with ERELT technicalities which significantly affected the teaching process (lack of equipment, bad internet connection, inadequate infrastructure, non-operating teaching platforms, personal costs for apps and tools etc.), which is in line with findings of current research studies (Erarslan, 2021; Hazaea et al., 2021; Mousavi et al., 2021; Sundarwati & Pahlevi, 2021) in ERELT. A small number of positive comments related to ERELT mainly focus on the rich possibilities of online-based instruction (variety of useful apps and tools) instructors were not familiar with beforehand.

Although they were frequently mentioned, the concerns related to students' performance and ERELT participation challenges were the least addressed out of the three. The respondents mainly listed the lack of social interaction during the ERELT, students' unwillingness to participate, and the difficulties in assessing students' progress. These findings are in line with the previous findings of research studies in

other tertiary education contexts (Hazaea et al., 2021; Kohnke & Jarvis, 2021; Narqvi & Zehra 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021; Sundarwati & Pahlevi, 2021;). Theme 3 comments related to teaching, preparation, and personal challenges were related to the socio-emotional difficulties the instructors faced during the ERELT (stress, worry, anxiety, mental and physical exhaustion, feeling of being out of balance due to time-consuming teaching activities). The frequency of mentions among the 3 themes suggests that ERELT(CALL) challenges were the most concerning for the instructors, whereas the students-related issues were of their least concern. To conclude, these findings infer that the radical format change of the instruction in the emergency circumstances brought about not only technical issues with CALL but also an additional deficit in communication interactivity and many personal and professional concerns which heavily impacted the teaching process.

Limitations and Future Research

This study faced several limitations. Firstly, the sample consists of 73% of female EFL instructors, so this discrepancy in gender might account for the respondents' more emphasized concerns related to students' emotions, and higher stress which is usually more commonly found in female teachers. Future research could investigate whether a significant difference exists between the attitudes of male and female teachers. Secondly, a prospective research study might explore which strategies EFL instructors use to increase engagement in e-learning

settings and to what extent those strategies ensure successful learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

The disruption of the education system caused by the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has altered teaching processes forever, thus transforming the existing teaching/learning contexts and their relevance. The present study investigated the instructors' perception of their ERELT during the pandemic. The sample consisted of 89 English language instructors from 40 countries, of whom 73% teach English at a university, whereas 27% teach at a college. From the tertiary lecturer's perspective, the ERELT was a dynamic, resourceful, and stressful process, which, judging by the communicational goals and learning outputs, appeared to be far less beneficial than more traditional face-to-face instruction. The lecturers reported that the ERELT was time-consuming and demanding, although there were teachers, who evidently enjoyed their upgraded digital literacy and newly acquired online-based teaching skills.

The findings of the study suggest that the frequency of CALL use in ERELT significantly surged as compared to teaching in regular conditions. The fact that 90% of instructors reported having used the CALL approach at least three times a week or more often in the pandemic conditions only confirms that if it had not been for the ERELT, a big number of courses could have never been held at all. Evidently, tools for synchronous communication replaced contact classes, so the use of the Video conferencing tools also increased, with platforms for remote teaching (Moodle), messaging apps, online platforms related to the textbook, and virtual classrooms all being used more frequently within the ERELT than in regular conditions. As for time management, the results suggest that lecturers spent significantly more time on the teaching itself, but also on learning how to use different apps and tools. In other words, the CALL approach with its abundance of technological possibilities enabled the teachers to deliver the content, more or less successfully, in the transformed environment and with considerably intensified efforts.

It is apparent that ERELT suffered from serious drawbacks as it hindered communication with students and decelerated interactivity in classes which additionally disrupted the teaching and affected general learning/teaching success. It is worrying that almost 60% of the teachers reported that their relationship with students worsened to some extent and that they constantly had concerns about their weaker students. Due to students' inactivity or unwillingness to participate, the level of overall interaction decreased. It is then predictable that with the lack of Social Presence or ineffective communication, the assessment of students' progress would be as equally difficult, so it is not surprising that almost 70% of instructors felt that the learning outputs were not achieved, or difficult to assess. For those reasons, as the results imply, instructors thought that getting back to F-2-F instruction would be desirable, as they would feel more in charge of the teaching process and would regain interactivity without breaks in communication.

As we may believe that CALL has by now become a handy, easily accessible addition to teaching, the findings of this study imply that in many parts of the world the online-based instruction, even in pandemic circumstances, is still an unaffordable and unreliable teaching approach which, in ERELT conditions, significantly disturbs the teaching process (due to lack of equipment, bad Internet connection, inadequate infrastructure, non-operating teaching platforms, personal costs for apps and tools etc.). Despite all the difficulties, the pandemic accelerated the use of online-based instruction and coerced the digital transformation of teaching, making it inevitable in delivering teaching content when in emergency circumstances. The study infers that, although teachers previously deployed CALL in their instruction, additional preparation of teachers to teach in ERELT conditions is highly desirable, with certain specific adjustments that would relate not only to the use of technology in times of crisis but also to the development of socio-emotional support for both teachers and students which would advance their communication and increase engagement and social presence.

The practical implications derived from the present study for consideration in the development of prospective EFL online learning in tertiary education could be the following:

1. Tertiary education institutions could introduce educational policies whereby 'mock' ERELT would be a pre-planned, mandatory activity, be it partially, be it delivered throughout a whole course. It is of vital importance that both students and instructors accommodate the idea that language courses can be successfully delivered exclusively online so that additional preparatory activities are undertaken to secure the course delivery. As people tend to distrust the media they are unfamiliar with and then consequently develop very strong attitudes about them, 'mock' ERELT might help overcome the mentioned shortcomings.

2. Upskilling of language EFL instructors in digital communication competences and their training in how to establish successful online learning communities appear as important as any other training in teacher pedagogy. Regular seminars or workshops aimed at increasing digital competences of teachers that address not only their technical readiness but the socio-emotional perspective of online teaching of might help fill the teaching gaps encountered by many EFL instructors.

3. Current research confirms that ERELT disclosed significant social deficits throughout the process. As students have been recognized as tech-savvy generation, accustomed to acquiring content through their phones and laptops, it is expected that the shift to ERELT did not cause any dramatic fall in their class attendance. Regardless, some students seem to participate in the e-education as *from a safe distance*, like TV viewers, applying many *e-filters* along the way which decrease the quality of communication and further impact their engagement. To help students remove the filters that pose barriers to a more engaged learning setting without equivocality of meaning, teachers must add cues to their teaching sessions (SPT), account for the time to let the long-term relationship establish (hyperpersonal theory), and mix the communication channels for instruction for better results as they all have different communication capacities (MRT).

To conclude, the findings of the study infer that the radical format change of the instruction in the emergency circumstances brought about not only technicality issues with CALL, but also an additional deficit in communication interactivity, and many personal and professional concerns with teachers which heavily impacted the teaching process. What could be suggested as a future research interest

in the ERELT field, is how to use these results to exploit the cutting-edge technology for language learning purposes without communication breaks, and thus assure more of the F-2-F instruction quality in teaching English at the tertiary level, so that the ERELT advances from a "hastily redesigned" approach (Bondarenko, 2021, p. 390), to a more intentional, flexible and operational solution.

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