

The Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on  
Teaching and Learning at Pre-school Education

by

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## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic has instigated teachers and students to abandon their physical classroom and move to online settings, also known as emergency remote teaching (ERT). Therefore, maintaining the quality of education has become a challenge during this temporary lockdown period, especially for teachers of young EFL learners. This study examines EFL teachers' challenges towards implementing online teaching and learning during the lockdown period, particularly in pre-school education. To this end, a mixed-method approach was used to analyse the data collected from 11 EFL teachers. Both descriptive statistics and interpretative phenomenological analysis were used to analyse the data. The findings reveal that online teaching and learning is not suitable for pre-school education because class activities, group works, contents and materials could not be successfully implemented in an online setting. Also, the results show that speaking and writing skills were the most affected skills compared to listening and reading skills.

*Keywords:* pre-school education, emergency remote teaching (ERT), online education, English language skills

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## **1. Introduction**

The field of Foreign Language Acquisition or English Language Teaching (ELT) and Learning has evolved in many aspects, such as changes in teaching materials, technological developments, alternative assessment methods, etc., which has modified how the English language is taught to EFL learners at different ages. Likewise, the literature based on applying technology to ELT has dramatically influenced the education sector because its usefulness to help students acquire language skills has been widely studied (Duhaney, 2001; Edwards, 2012; Hashim, 2018).

In the same way, the emergence of robotic technologies and the Internet in classrooms has prompted many universities or other educational institutions, including pre-schools, primary-elementary schools, and secondary-high schools, to conduct their education online. This transition from traditional classroom learning to online learning has generated different challenges for both teachers and students. Thus, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers ought to have an adequate or a good amount of knowledge about online education to cater for student's academic needs. Besides this, ICT competence will enable teachers to perform effectively in this environment.

Technologically competent teachers are important because technology-based instruction has marked a considerable difference compared to the traditional educational methods. In relation to this, different studies deal with teacher's technological competence. Such is the case of the study written by Instefjord and Munthe (2016), which focuses on preparing pre-service teachers to integrate technology into their educational curricula. Another study that pays attention to both teachers' and early childhood technological competence is the study conducted by Gimbert and Cristol (2004). This study offers support and encouragement on developing and enhancing technology

competency of young children and early childhood educators' professional development as they learn to teach with technology.

Regardless of the debate about the effectiveness of technology in teaching, the pandemic crisis of COVID-19 has affected all educational institutions such as schools, colleges, universities, and the education system worldwide, making e-learning a mandatory component for all teachers and learners. The outbreak of this virus has forced educational institutions to shut down to control the spread of this virus (Radha, Mahalakshmi, Kumar & Saravanakumar, 2020). Nobody could foresee such a dramatic change in the educational system at all levels of education. Teachers, practitioners, organisations and school management have had to provide alternative teaching methods during the lockdown period, which has led to improvisation.

As a result, web-based learning, e-learning or online learning have surpassed traditional classroom instruction since this appears to be the only way students can continue their education without interruption. This change can affect all learners differently. Moving to distance education is particularly challenging at the pre-school level because pre-schoolers are in the preoperational stage of intelligence, where they learn by experiencing with concrete materials such as objects, pictures, stories, and videos (Morrison, 2003), and these activities cannot be carried out effectively through online platforms or resources.

## **1.1 Significance of the Study**

The rapid growth of distance education courses offered by institutions has allowed students to take online education while using online learning resources, including blended learning, mobile learning, game-based learning, and social networking. While there has been much research on online learning and teaching in general (Bernard et al., 2004;

Cavanaugh, 2001; Cavanaugh, Gillan, Kromrey, Hess, & Blomeyer, 2004; Shachar & Neumann, 2003; Ungerleider & Burns, 2003), none has explicitly focused on how young learners could benefit from online education.

The education system, both nationally and internationally, has proven unprepared and vulnerable to external threats and challenges that can affect learners' academic development. Although online emergency remote teaching (ERT) has been put into practice, it is unclear to what extent this global educational crisis directly affects pre-school education. To fully understand the impact of COVID-19 prevention measures, it is crucial to gain a complete picture of the damages caused by the lockdown period at the pre-school level.

This study will help to find out teachers' attitudes and practices towards education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research is conducted to help teachers and researchers to gain additional information regarding the roles and the impact of online distance English language instruction at the pre-school level during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

## **1.2 Objectives**

### **1.2.1 General Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to examine and shed more light on the effects of COVID-19 in pre-school education and to study the challenges encountered when teaching English during the lockdown period.

### **1.2.2 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of this study are the following:

1. To compare online teaching and the lockdown period with traditional classroom teaching.
2. To identify the extent to which the lockdown period has affected pre-school students English language skills.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The main objective of this study is to explore issues and challenges caused by COVID-19 to answer the following two research questions:

1. How effective has online English language teaching been during the lockdown period compared to traditional classroom teaching?
2. To what extent has the lockdown period affected pre-school students English language skills?

### **1.4 Hypotheses**

The hypotheses raised are the following:

1. Online ELT at the pre-school level will be less effective than traditional face-to-face classroom instruction.
2. Speaking and listening are the skills that will mostly be affected during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

### **1.5 Overview**

Following this introductory chapter, the literature review section critically presents significant theories and studies relevant to this study. This section also summarises studies that contribute to the challenges posed by COVID in ELT. The methodology section will provide a detailed description of the issues examined in this study and how the research questions were addressed. The analysis section will illustrate the findings on the teacher's perception of the issue. The discussion section includes some interpretations

of the findings and their implications. Finally, the last section summarises the study, answers the research questions, and provides recommendations for further research.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section attempts to review theories on online learning and teaching. It is followed by views on continuing online education through emergency remote teaching (ERT). Also, the challenges related to online teaching at the pre-school level are explored. Finally, a theoretical framework is presented.

### **2.1 Online Learning and Teaching**

Watson, Winograd, and Kalmon (2004) offered a simplified definition of what online learning is. They define *online learning* as “an education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily via the Internet” (Watson, Winograd & Kalmon, 2004: 95). However, Gemin and Pape (2016) provided a more detailed definition of online learning. They viewed *online learning* as a teacher-led education through the Internet, where teachers and students are separated geographically, using a web-based delivery system that provides a structured learning environment. Conversely, the term *online language learning* (OLL) refers to several learning arrangements that involve web-facilitated class, blended or hybrid course, or an entirely virtual or online course. Hockly (2015) stated that *online language learning* is language learning that occurs fully online, via the Internet without a face-to-face component.

Based on these definitions, there are two basic types of online language teaching and learning. On the one hand, stand-alone online courses strive to operate as virtual classrooms (Felix, 2003). In this case, the technology acts as both tutor and tool, such as Cyberitalian, Global English, Interdeutsch (Felix, 2003:8). On the other hand, there are

“add-on activities to classroom teaching or distance education courses in which technology is used primarily as a tool and a communication device” (Felix, 2003:8).

Either way, online learning is an excellent alternative to face-to-face language learning and teaching. Online learning has spread rapidly in the education sector and is seen as a tool for educational reform. It is used to enhance student learning while providing “some element of control over time, place, path and pace” (Collins, 2010:5). Under these circumstances, online learning represents the convergence of technology, content delivered digitally, and specific pedagogical tools and strategies. In general, an online learning environment includes synchronous or asynchronous communication, web-based learning content, online resources, and technical support (Huang, 2002).

Regardless of the development of online learning, the question of whether technology and online instruction should be used in the elementary classroom has been widely addressed by various authors (Clark & Fukuya, 2001; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010; Kartal & Simsek, 2017). These authors concluded that online learning is one of the fastest-growing trends for students and teachers. They also mention that the use of technology can impact equipment availability, instructional time schedules and curricula.

Nevertheless, most studies on the overall effectiveness of distance education still target high school students or higher level of education such as university students (Bernard et al., 2004; Cavanaugh, 2001; Cavanaugh, Gillan, Kromrey, Hess, & Blomeyer, 2004; Shachar & Neumann, 2003; Ungerleider & Burns, 2003). On this note, several researchers believe that teaching online provides learners with a rich and authentic language learning environment because it has proven to be effective for promoting social

presence and students engagement as well as interactivity, collaboration, and online learning community (Beauvois, 1997; Pelletieri, 2000; Lee, Kim, Lee, & Liu, 2005; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996).

For example, Chun and Plass (2000) attested that “unique attributes of multimedia environments, such as the capacities of synchronous and asynchronous communication, collaborative work, and the use of multiple modes and forms of presenting information, make this medium a strong candidate for use in language learning and acquisition” (p. 152). In other words, the use of a networked multimedia environment can provide opportunities for practising the different skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as enhancing communicative and pragmatic competence (Chun and Plass, 2000:157). Additionally, Relan and Gillani (1997) affirm that “multimedia and telecommunications technologies continue to evolve and advance, with promises of providing the learner with a richer and more meaningful education relevant for the future workplace and learning environments” (p. 41).

However, other authors question the effectiveness of online learning systems and the significance of web-based learning at all educational levels (Heafner, 2014; Nguyen, 2015; Wallace, 2003). This has led some educators and parents to worry that the increase of online learning trends will degrade the educational quality of standard traditional face-to-face instruction. Their concerns can be related to student’s motivation and maturity levels, study habits and organisational skills, and academic preparedness. Irrespective of these concerns, the decision to embrace online learning has been made, and the vast majority of schools are moving forward with online programs and looking to expand them in the future.

According to Jacobs (1994), computerised glossing is an effective means that aids L2 vocabulary acquisition because “the computer’s capacity permits learners to store more extensive glossing than a printed format” (Al Seghayer, 2001:204). In view of this, Kasteen (2014) stated that online instruction had become a prominent part of second language learning (SLL) because using technology in both the acquisition and teaching of a foreign language has proven to be more beneficial. For instance, “presenting information using multiple modalities, such as audio, flashcards, and dynamic videos in the field of SLA” (Al Seghayer, 2001:203). In addition, Kartal and Simsek (2017) also asserted that ELT requires implementing technology to adapt classroom activities and enhance language learning.

Therefore, these authors (Jacobs, 1994; Al Seghayer, 2001; Kasteen, 2014; Kartal & Simsek, 2017) coincide with the idea that exposing learners to various technological modalities creates a significant language learning environment, which has an impact on students learning. They support distance education and online delivery for K-12 academic learning as it is “an important prerequisite skill that young children need to learn” (Callaghan & Madelaine, 2012:20). Moreover, the integration of technology in ELT can also be advantageous for students learning process.

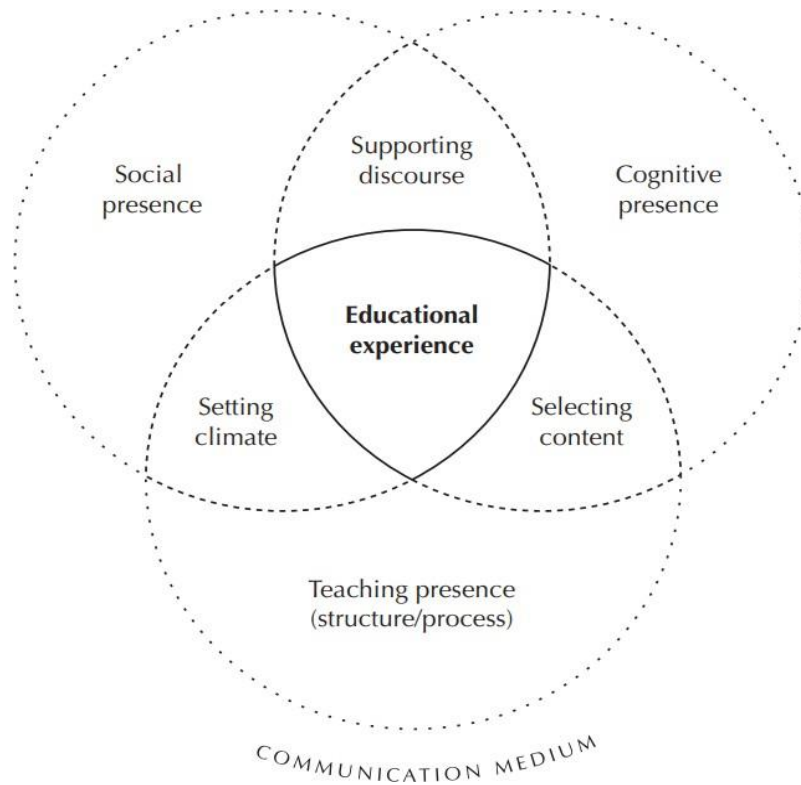
On the contrary, the more traditional researchers are convinced that face-to-face instruction is not only more preferred to online instruction but regarded as the only acceptable way to teach and learn (Angiello, 2010). However, different studies have compared online class to in-class formats. These studies concluded that distance courses were equally or more effective than traditional in-class formats (Lim, 2002; Neuhauser, 2002; Ngu, 2002). Therefore, it has been stated that distance education is at least as

effective as well-designed classroom instruction. Despite this fact, the role of the teacher when implementing an online program is fundamental since “teaching and learning in an online environment are comparable to teaching and learning in any other formal educational context: learner’s needs are assessed, content is negotiated or prescribed, learning activities are orchestrated, and learning is assessed” (Anderson, 2004: 343).

In light of this, Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) developed a theoretical model (see figure 1) referred to as the “community of inquiry” model. The online education community presents a model for an effective online education community, and it involves three elements: cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence (Anderson, 2004).

Firstly, cognitive presence offers content learning in a setting that supports the development and growth of critical thinking skills (McPeck,1990; Garrison, 1991). The second, social presence, relates to creating a supportive environment where students feel comfortable and safe to express their opinions in a collaborative context. The absence of this presence leads to student’s incapacity to express disagreements, share points of view, explore differences, accept support and confirmation from peers and teachers. Lastly, the teacher presence delineates three roles as this presence is critical when creating effective online teaching. The teacher has to:

1. organise the learning experience that takes place before and during the online learning,
2. plan activities that will encourage communication between the teacher and the students and between the students, and
3. moderate student’s learning experiences.



*Figure 1. Community of Inquiry*

Teachers are integral to student's education success since they are directly connected to students and their learning process (Cunningham, 2015; DiPietro, Ferdig, Black, & Preston, 2008; Journell, 2008). The more visible teachers are, the greater the chance that students will be successful (Journell, 2015, p. 88). However, in certain circumstances, such as the coronavirus pandemic, it becomes very problematic to conduct online teaching and learning activities when EFL teachers are not prepared to engage in online classes. The implementation of online classes requires teacher and practitioners to consider the nature of the learners since online learning will greatly influence the effectiveness of classroom instruction.

In a secondary and higher education setting, the usage of technology as a learning tool has already been addressed (Gulbahar, 2008; Shute & Rahimi, 2017). However, with younger learners, there is a natural learning curve required for operating computers

successfully (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007). In this case, a study carried out by three authors called Hartman, Dziuban, and Moskal (2000) surveyed 32 online instructors and found that 90% of the instructors believe online courses were more challenging to teach. Besides this, most instructors also noted that this was due to the increase in workloads since interaction with students was increased. As Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia and Jones (2010) claimed, online instruction is a new version of distance learning, which is why guidance for materials used in distance learning could be helpful. Schnitz and Azbell (2004:165) propose the following:

*Online materials must be visual and dynamic, downloadable and printer-friendly, randomly accessible and manipulable, conducive to production/interaction, documented to model appropriate permissions and copyright alignments, instructionally aware of and prepared for remote use, aware of the audience, assessable and accountable, and easily updatable.*

Moreover, effective online teaching aims to support learners instructionally and deliver content that can be quick and inexpensive. Therefore, it requires an investment of time and effort to engage students with the content while using communications technologies and guided observations, mentoring in K-12 online courses, and designing virtual course materials (Davis & Roblyer, 2005). Teachers must have the ability to combine pedagogical knowledge of learning theory and student learning styles or needs with the available technology in order to select the correct application and align it with their learning objectives.

Nonetheless, online learning creates unique challenges such as isolation, lack of motivation, time-consuming resources, etc., that may affect student's academic success.

Although some authors have a positive attitude towards this issue, teachers cannot compensate for instructional practices that fail to meet learner's individual needs (Pifarré, Guijosa & Argelagós, 2014). As stated above, these instructional practices include building eCommunity, clarifying online course expectations and objectives, identifying and employing the best online tools for interaction, promoting an exchange of ideas in an online classroom, providing relevant feedback and creating a student-centred environment (Poll, Widen & Weller, 2014).

## **2.2 Continuing Education through Online Teaching and Learning**

Before moving on to the various challenges EFL teachers face in language teaching, it is paramount to examine how COVID-19 has affected the education system. Crises like the coronavirus pandemic maximise the usage of available technological tools and skills. As a consequence, the use of technology in EFL sessions has grown significantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The current situation of COVID-19 has required new and extended technological skills, which teachers may not be aware of since they are used to face-to-face classroom settings. Online distance education and emergency remote teaching (ERT) should not be considered the same as they relatively differ in meaning.

Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) characterised *distance education* by the distance in time and/or space between learners and learning resources. Meanwhile, *emergence remote education* (ERT) refers to the spatial distance in which different parties and through other channels interact and engage learners in their learning process (Moore, 1989; Riggs, 2020). According to Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond (2020), *Emergency remote teaching* is defined as a sudden interim shift of instructional delivery to an online delivery mode due to an immense catastrophe. Contrary to this, online courses are initially planned and designed to be delivered virtually. In relation to

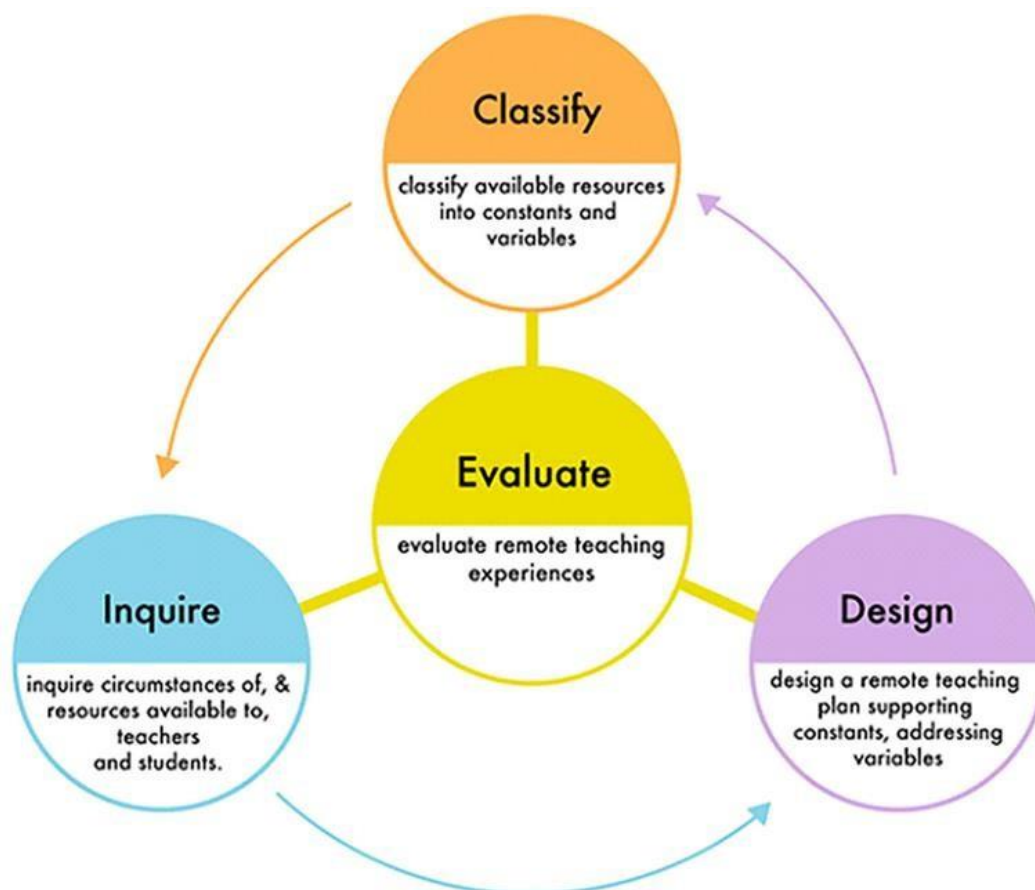
this, Whittle, Tiwari, Yan and Williams (2020) proposed the term *Emergency Remote Teaching Environment* (ERTE) to highlight how crises can lead to sudden and widespread variation in the education context.

Due to this terminology, the ERTE framework was proposed as a conceptual framework through which teachers can plan and researchers can conceptualise learning in the emergent environment. ERTE serves for understanding and supporting learning in emergent crises. The ERTE framework (figure 2) comprises three stages: inquiry, classification and design. The first stage involves inquiring about circumstances and resources available to teachers and students. Also, it requires teachers to reflect on their familiarity with technologies and check students health, safety and access to technologies. By initiating an inquiry, teachers ensured that the pedagogies they put into place were actionable and based on available means (Whittle et al., 2020). According to these authors, teachers who revisited this inquiry and stayed aware of available resources find themselves performing effectively during emergency remote teaching.

The second stage involves classifying available resources identified in the inquiry stage into constants and variables. *Constants* refer to all the resources that are shared both by the students and teachers, e.g. when a district moves to 1:1 computing, providing a device to each of the students (Lee, Newton & Glass, 2021). *Variables* are factors shared only by some students and teachers. For example, some of these factors could be “social variables like food, access to the Internet or technical devices that only some students would have access to during a crisis” (Lee, Newton & Glass, 2021).

The third stage proposes eight dimensions of course design for ERTE and educational experiences (Means et al., 2010). The eight dimensions include critical learning goals, a ratio of teachers to students, communication method, building agency,

assessments, the social role of the instructor, pedagogy and the student social role, and feedback. Therefore, as emergency remote teaching (ERT) aims to quickly adopt online teaching and learning to achieve normalisation (Hodges et al., 2020), these eight dimensions provide a progressive strategy for teachers to design a plan using this framework as a foundation for maximising student’s individual learning.



*Figure 2. Emergency Remote Teaching Environment Framework*

Many types of research have been carried out, quantitatively and qualitatively, to investigate the effectiveness of online learning (Lockee, Moore & Burton, 2001; Gonzalez & Louis, 2018). These studies have linked online learning to traditional classroom teaching, claiming that less emphasis should be placed on comparing these approaches. Instead, they believe more attention should be drawn on “content to be learned, the role of the learner and the effectiveness of instructional design decisions,

rather than on the instructional quality of a specific medium (Lockee, Moore & Burton, 2001: p. 61).

Nevertheless, research on online language learning or teaching with young learners has been limited—especially during the COVID-19 pandemic period. More research has focused on online language learning at the tertiary education level (Chin–Hsi Lin & Warschauer, 2015). Before COVID-19, there was already notable growth in the use and adoption of technology in language education, whether through language apps, virtual learning, video conferencing tools, online learning, etc. Despite this use of technological tools and mediums, there has been a significant increase in its usage since COVID-19 emerged.

Unfortunately, this pandemic caused temporal cessation of traditional classroom and amplified a sudden and utterly unprepared situation of online language learning at all level of education. Giannini and Lewis (2020) specified measures taken to prevent the spread of the epidemic. These measures included school closure, staying at home, stopping domestic and international departures. This has led many educators to deliver quality education through various online platforms.

Online learning and distance education have become a relief and solution for this sudden change in education (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021), promoting the usage of online platforms (such as Google Classroom, Skillshare, Teachable, etc.) and the use of technology. Undoubtedly, this transition from traditional face-to-face learning to online learning has prompted the education system and educators to adopt emergency remote teaching (ERT). This instructional shift occurred without pre-planned resources or infrastructure. In response to this, authors suggest that the education system should not

forget the experiences gained during the ERT period and an evaluation is needed to be better prepared for future needs (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021; Hodges et al., 2020).

### **2.3 Challenges in Online Teaching and Learning**

Owing to the fact that there is little literature related to the effect of COVID-19 on pre-school education, the following passages will present literature concerning K-12 education, from kindergarten (5-6 years old) to grade 12 (17-18 years old). Phan and Dang (2017) highlighted major distance learning factors that affect online teaching and learning. These factors include training, attitude, technical competence, time constraints, pedagogy, and methodology. Apart from this, these factors are associated with the availability of educational technology at the K-12 level (Curtis & Werth, 2015); capacity to facilitate modern skills (Rice, 2021); tailored learning and singular mentoring for students (Cavanaugh et al., 2013); and possible potential benefits to creating diverse groups of students in an online environment (Spitler, 2013).

Although recent advances in K-12 online learning technology provide solutions to critical and perplexing issues in K-12 education today (Cavanaugh & Clark, 2007; Boboc, 2019), both educators and students face recurrent setbacks when using online tools. As a result, the rapid growth of online education at the K-12 levels, due to circumstances such as COVID-19, demand more examination of issues that influences the academic experiences of both teachers and students. One of the main challenges with e-learning is accessibility, affordability and flexibility. A well-designed e-learning system must provide learner-centred, engaging, affordable, easily accessible and flexible to facilitate a meaningful learning environment. As Rupande and Nyenya (2014) pointed out,

“accessibility; affordability and flexibility are all linked to the importance of quality delivery and learner retention” (p. 25).

On this note, Doucet et al. (2020) attested that many teachers struggle with technological cultures among themselves and the access to technology as one of the challenges. According to Nord (2011), accessibility and the ability to reach a greater variety of students in different locations represent salient reasons for the recent promotion of online education and support of a flexible learning environment. Even though many students are digital natives, technology cannot be considered the same between adult learners and young learners.

In the case of young learners and such an emergent situation, parents, caretakers, or guidance must be involved and engaged in their children’s learning academically and economically. These emergency changes in the education system have not only caused parents to be concerned about their children’s education, but they also fear the physical and mental health damage this might evoke (Brooks et al., 2020).

In contrast, adult learners are more likely to be responsible for their learning process. However, the impact of COVID-19 may have a negative impact on higher education as well, such as reducing employment opportunities (Jena, 2020), student’s academic performance (Gonzalez et al., 2020), and social and emotional aspects (Alghamdi, 2021). Therefore, during this lockdown period, it has become essential for parents to increase their parental guidance for the continuity of their children’s education.

Another major challenge is the changes in the dynamics of the classroom. There is a chance that some motivated learners are unaffected in their learning due to the lockdown

since their personal abilities (such as dependability, adaptability, motivation, problem-solving, and analytical skills) enable them to continue learning. Besides this, online learning also allows physically challenged students to participate in learning in the virtual environment since it requires limited movement (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020).

On the other hand, distance education may pose a challenge for some vulnerable students and reduce their academic performance. School closures and containment measures have made more families rely on technology and digital solutions to keep children engaged in learning, entertained and connected to the outside world (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021) aside from the school curriculum.

Despite this contrast in view and teachers limited experience in distance education, teachers are still able to cope with the trends in distance learning (Ventayin, 2018). In the study, the teachers managed by integrating “ICT into every school curricula, develop programs, established infrastructure and came up with a system” (Ventayin, 2018:94). In a study conducted by Fedina et al. (2017) on distance education readiness, they found out that 90% of the total special education and pre-school teachers surveyed got motivated to implement distance education despite having diverse students and technical skills, knowledge and attitude in online education.

For this reason, developing a quality curriculum for the virtual environment is essential in making learning more accessible and engaging for students. Similarly, the papers such as the one written by Hill et al. (2020) viewed the pandemic “as an opportunity for school management to re-envision teacher education on distance learning” to ensure that teachers are well-prepared and equipped for distance teaching.

Therefore, the re-envision led to the reconceptualisation of how teachers are prepared for distance teaching.

Furthermore, it is also possible that some activities will be prioritised or adapted over other activities due to time restrictions and the nature of the activities students can perform online. In a traditional classroom setting, using Total Physical Response (TPR) is an effective way to teach English—especially with young learners as pre-schoolers (Asher, 1977). For instances, its effectiveness can be observed when using physical movements to react to verbal input when teaching language or vocabulary concepts. This teaching method has been said to limit students shyness and lowers stress.

However, TPR is likely to be different in an online classroom because there is limited physical space when teaching online. As a result, both the teacher and the students cannot move around the classroom. This may affect their learning process because the students are not provided with the opportunity to link language with physical movements. As Nunan (2000) stated, Total Physical Response is developed to create an instruction that requires ESL students to make physical responses.

Teaching children online can be problematic because young learners are easily distracted and have very short attention spans (Uysal & Yavuz, 2015). Therefore, Cameron (2001) stated four aspects teachers need to consider when teaching English to young learners besides knowledge and skills. First, teachers must be conscious of how students learn and think. Second, they should be able to find out what engages students and utilise it for language teaching. Next, they ought to be equipped to teach students macro skills in English. Finally, they should be able to recognise problems and difficulties

when teaching the language. Moreover, teachers may achieve all the educational outcomes by applying games, especially when teaching.

Accordingly, there should be various activities in which children make use of their “imagination and energy in games, songs, drawing pictures and puzzle-like activities” (Uysal & Yavuz, 2015: 20). As Moon (2000) asserted, if children create their own visuals and realia, they will probably engage and interested in the activities and take more responsibility for the materials used. At the same time, more research needs to be carried out on the effectiveness of K-12 online education since many studies focus on adult learners using online education to further their education.

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

This study has included an overview of the works on online education and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the lack of studies in this ELT regarding pre-school education, few studies have analysed the aspects this present study will examine. Although this study has presented two frameworks, it is guided by only Emergency Remote Teaching Environment (ERTE). Emergency Remote Teaching Environment (ERTE) serves as a guide in this current study in order to examine the impact of the emergency crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic on pre-school learners. This framework is developed to enhance an effective online education community, which may be helpful in the education system. Emergency Remote Teaching Environment (ERTE) highlights three steps: inquiry, classifying available resources into constants and variables and designing educational experiences (Whittle, Tiwari, Yan, & Williams, 2020:313). These elements can contribute to successful online teaching and learning as they provide a conceptual framework “through which teachers can plan, and researchers can

conceptualise learning in these emergent environments” (Whittle, Tiwari, Yan, & Williams, 2020:313). Also, these factors serve as a model to address teachers’ needs or solve problems regarding practice, instruction, or student learning during a difficult time. Therefore, to review whether EFL teachers’ have implemented these theories during the lockdown period, this study will examine the impact of the emergency crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic on pre-school learners.

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter presents an account of the study’s setting, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures employed in analysing the data (section 4.1) and (section 4.2).

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This research adopted a convergent mixed-methods approach to analyse the data in order to tackle the issues proposed in this study from different angles. This combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches complemented each other and allowed a complete investigation of the challenges faced by pre-school teachers during the lockdown period. One of the best ways to increase researchers confidence in their findings is to provide evidence of the validity of the results. Triangulation is the practice of doing that, which means drawing the same conclusion from more than one data set.

According to Nightingale (2020), triangulation is used for three main purposes: to enhance validity, create a more in-depth view of a research problem, and interrogate different ways of understanding a research problem. Thus, the quantitative data and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and used to triangulate the findings and answer the research questions. The results serve as complementarity for building a richer

picture of the research results because it allows the results (from different methods) to inform each other.

### **3.2 Participants**

In total, 11 EFL teachers consisting of primarily female teachers from different schools in the Tarragona province participated in the current study voluntarily. Although convenience sampling was used to identify participants, all the participants were on remote distance education due to the lockdown due to COVID-19. All participants gave their informed consent for inclusion before they took part in the study, and the researcher ensured their anonymity in the study. The study also received approval from the Ethics Committee of Universitat Rovira i Virgili (10/05/2020- CEIPSA-2021-TFG-0039).

### **3.3 Data Collection Method**

In investigating the EFL teachers' challenges related to online classrooms during the coronavirus pandemic, the researcher used a questionnaire survey and conducted interviews. Prior to writing a questionnaire, an unstructured interview was held with a pre-school EFL teacher who worked in a school located in Tarragona called Col·legi Mare de Déu del Carme. Not only was the outcome of this interview usable to construct a questionnaire (see Appendix A), but it also provided a clear notion of the impact of confinement on pre-school education. Because of the pandemic crisis, the researcher collected the responses through an online Google Forms questionnaire instead of interviewing each teacher.

The questionnaire contained four sections: Teacher's Demographic Profile, Selected Response Questions, Additional comments, and Open Questions. The first section included basic information such as name, pre-school level, time spent in normal English class per week and the time spent in an online class per week. The second section

covered 12 items with a 4-point Likert response format (i.e. strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree). In this section, a neutral point was not included in the Likert response because it does not add much value to the results. The third section is inserted for any additional comments on the previous section. Finally, the last section includes open-ended questions regarding the changes perceived before the lockdown and during distance education.

Therefore, the data collection instruments for this research included a combination of two techniques: interview and questionnaire survey. Using more than one technique was considered an appropriate way for ensuring reliable and valuable data to examine EFL teachers' challenges related to online classrooms. Even though this research aimed to receive as many pre-school teachers responses as possible, only 11 pre-school teachers responded to the questionnaire. While filling out the questionnaire, the participants were free to use English, Catalan or Spanish. However, nearly all of the participants preferred to present their answers in English.

### **3.4 Procedures**

In order to fulfil the purpose of the study, the following data collection procedures were conducted according to the subsequent stages.

Stage I. To gather the quantitative result of the study, the researchers asked the participants to answer the Teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic Questionnaire (in section 2) to address the two research questions. The prepared questionnaire in the Google Form platform was used to gather the data, which could be answered anonymously from a mobile device, computer or tablet. Likewise, the instructions and conditions for administering the questionnaire guarantee the confidentiality of the participant's responses.

Stage II. In order to answer the research questions, statements and open-ended questions were designed to address the concerns and perceptions of teachers in the integration of technologies during the lockdown period.

Stage III. After gathering the data from respondents, this study adopted a descriptive statistic approach to analyse and present a summary statistic that quantitatively describes or summarises features from the collection of information.

By this means, the received data from the questionnaire was analysed through SPSS to measure the central tendency (Mean, Median and Mode) and dispersion of the responses (Standard Deviation). The mean is an important measure to this study because it incorporates the score from every participant in this research study and illustrates the average of the sets of data. Therefore, it allows this research to compare the level of agreement or disagreement participants have on a particular statement.

As the data were arranged in numerical order (from 1=Strongly Disagree to 4=Strongly Agree), the median provided the value positioned in the middle of participants responses to each statement. Hence, the median refers to the physical middle point, whereas the mean can be considered the balance point. The mode presents the data value that is most frequently observed. In this study, the mode does not indicate all the values collected in the research as a whole; it does express the most repeated agreement or disagreement in each item.

On the other hand, as the standard deviation is calculated by subtraction between the highest and lowest values from the set of data, the results do not indicate whether the values based on each statement are evenly distributed, if these values are near to each other, or if there are missing data in the collection data. However, it does estimate the

degree to which the value in each item deviates from the mean, indicating how far the individual responses to a statement vary or deviate from the mean.

With regards to the qualitative data, the participants responded to open-ended questions. These questions were designed to assess participants personal view on the challenges of emergency distance teaching (ERT) in terms of class activities and groupings, content and materials, and the four macro skills of the English language.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

As this research is a mixed-method design, descriptive statistics have been used to analyse the quantitative data since part of the questionnaire included continuous type questions. For the qualitative data, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was considered an appropriate way to explore the responses from the participants. The aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to explore in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social world. The main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). That way, this study could draw some conclusions in a more interpretative manner on the responses.

## **4. Results**

According to this research, the study results are divided into two sections: quantitative and qualitative analyses. The quantitative analysis addresses the statistical approach towards the data, while the qualitative analysis complements the quantitative analysis, reviewing responses from participants in the online classrooms during the coronavirus pandemic. Both results addressed the research questions on whether the technology integration in education and online teaching were helpful during the coronavirus pandemic period.

## 4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Table 1. Time distribution of English classes per week

Pre-school level	Participants	Before Lockdown	During Lockdown
P3	1	2	1
P4-P5	1	2	1
P5	3	7	4
P3-P4-P5	6	31,5	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>42,5</b>	<b>7</b>

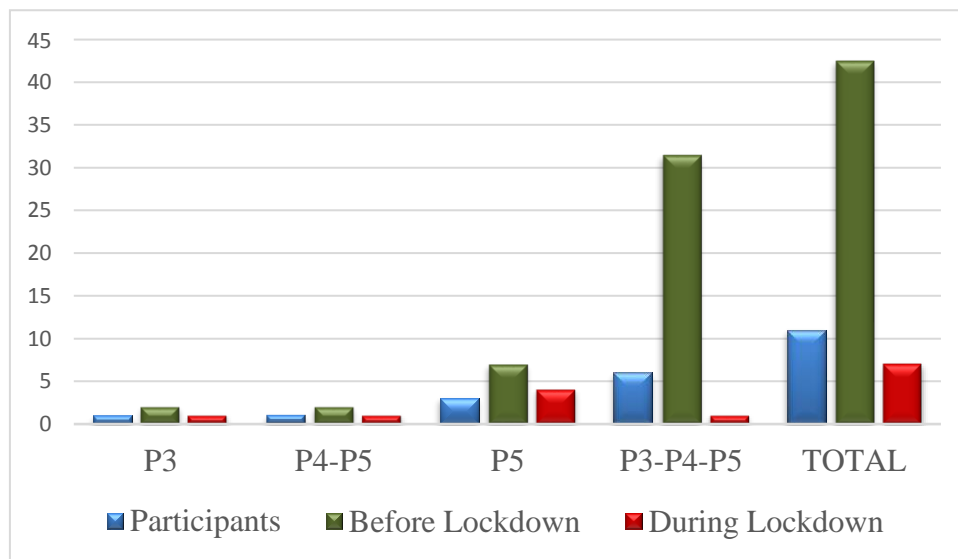


Figure 3. Time distribution of English classes per week

Table 1 shows the number of hours devoted to English classes per week according to pre-school levels before and during the lockdown period; meanwhile, figure 3 gives a graphical presentation of these numbers. Also, table 1 and figure 3 show the level of pre-schoolers participants teach. The ages of the students ranged from 3 to 6. The overall data showed that before the lockdown, 42,5 hours was dedicated to English classes, while during the lockdown period, only 7 hours was devoted to English classes. This analysis shows how the hours spent in English classes dramatically decreases during the lockdown period. Therefore, there is a negative and significant difference in the hours spent in classes before and during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Table 2. The most affected skills during emergency remote teaching (ERT)

	Skills	Number of skills affected
1	Speaking	7
2	Listening	4
3	Writing	3
4	Reading	6
Total ( the number of the affected skill is more than 11 since some of the participants wrote more than one skills.)		20

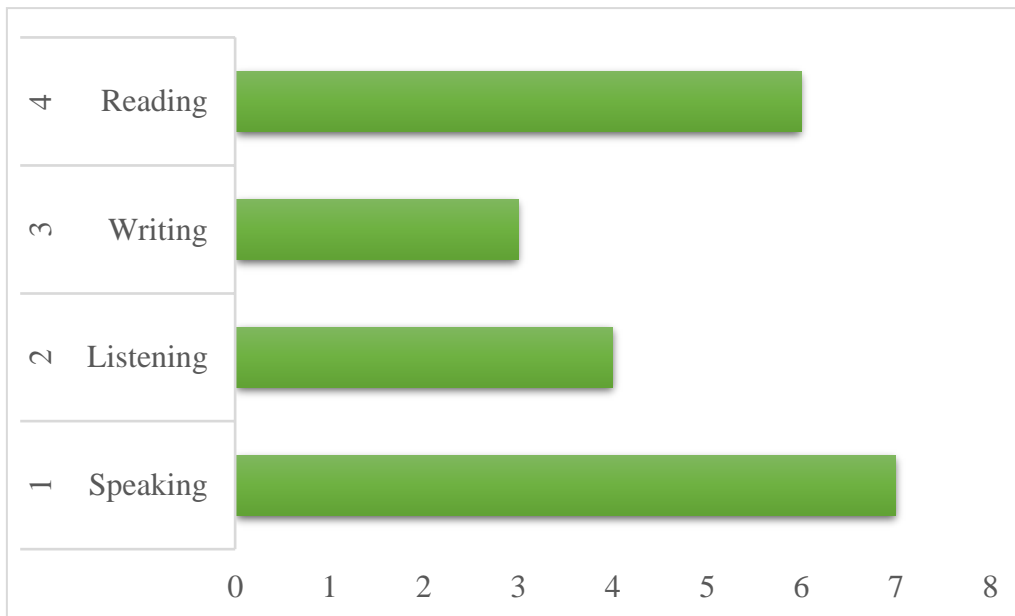


Figure 4. The most affected skills during emergency remote teaching (ERT)

Table 2 summarises the findings regarding the skills that were most affected during emergency remote teaching. In the open response questions, respondents were asked to select one or more skills that were mostly affected by COVID-19. These skills include speaking, listening, reading and writing. Speaking skills stands out as the most affect skills among the four skills. The second most affect skill is writing, which is followed by listening skills. The least affected skills by emergency remote teaching (ERT) identified is reading skills, as it was only mentioned thrice by the respondents.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of items on the effects of emergency remote teaching (ERT)

Item Number	Statements	Mean (M) (N=11)	Median	Mode <sup>1</sup>	Standard deviation (SD)
1	Students were able to connect to online classes regardless of their family socioeconomic status.	2.45	3.00	3	.688
2	Children who participated in traditional classroom were active during the online classes.	2.73	3.00	3	.647
3	Children who did not participate in traditional classroom were active during the online classes.	2.27	2.00	2	.647
4	The hours devoted to preparing and organising online classes during the lockdown were more than preparing in-class lessons.	3.18	4.00	4	1.079
5	I had to prioritise some activities over others due to time restrictions, monitoring students responses, and other online class issues.	3.18	3.00	3	.603
6	Parents, guardians and caretakers supported or were involved in children's education during the lockdown.	3.27	3.00	3	.647

<sup>1</sup> Statements answered with Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

<b>7</b>	The school provided supplementary materials or resources for distance learning, such as subscriptions to online libraries, digital training, among other online learning management systems.	2.91	3.00	3	.539
<b>8</b>	Assessment was modified during the lockdown period.	3.18	3.00	3	.405
<b>9</b>	Online classes allowed two-way communication between the teacher and the students.	3.00	3.00	3	.447
<b>10</b>	Online learning is suitable for pre-schoolers.	1.82	2.00	2	.603
<b>11</b>	Teaching reading and writing skills in English is a priority goal in pre-school level.	2.18	2.00	2	.874
<b>12</b>	Teaching speaking and listening skills in English is a priority goal in pre-school level.	3.27	3.00	3 <sup>a</sup>	.905

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<sup>a</sup> Multiple modes exist : the smallest value is shown

In order to gain a broader perspective on the data and teacher's perceptions of the challenges in delivering distance learning education, a questionnaire was sent to EFL teachers. 11 teachers completed the questionnaire, which incorporated twelve Likert scale items about integrating technology in online classrooms during the lockdown period. The teachers were asked to select one response, based on their level of agreement or disagreement, from the following: 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 agree, and 4 strongly agree. The responses are provided in table 3. The standard deviation pertains to how the data were spread out, and the values are interpreted as 0.0-1.0 = Strongly Disagree; 1.1-2.0= Disagree; 2.1-3.0= Agree; 3.1-4.0=Strongly Agree.

In the first statement, the mean score was 2.45, with a standard deviation of 0.688. This shows that the data is closely related to the mean score, thus making the data reliable. Most of the responses agreed that students could effectively connect to online classes. This implies that neither the socioeconomic status of families nor the use of distance learning devices posed as an impediment to online classes during the lockdown.

The second and third statements focused on exploring children class performance during online classes compared to the traditional classroom setting. Accordingly, teachers agreed that children who participated in the traditional classroom were active during the online classes. In contrast, teachers disagreed that children who did not participate in the traditional classroom were active during the online classes. This suggests that there have not been changes in students' class performance since students who tend to participate in class continued doing so. In contrast, those who did not participate in face-to-face classroom settings did not participate in online classes. Therefore, distance education has not affected children's class performance. Also, these indications show that the online

environment has not modified the traditional classroom setting and student's academic achievements.

Statement four was designed to elicit views on whether preparing and organising online classes during the lockdown usually takes more time than preparing in-class lessons. In relation to this statement, the average score was 3.18, a standard deviation little over 1 (1.079). The data is still reliable and was not considered as high because the value is not above or equal to 2. Regardless of this, there is a strong agreement among the teachers that the hours devoted to class preparation were higher in number. In statement five, even though the mean score is the same (3.18) as in the previous statement, the standard deviation is lower (0.603). However, it illustrates that teachers agreed that they have had to prioritise some activities over others due to time restrictions, monitoring students responses, and other online class issues.

The mean for statement six was 3.27 (SD: 0.647), indicating a general agreement that without parents, guardians and caretakers support or involvement, children's education during the lockdown will be challenging to continue. This challenges the education system since teachers needed parents' collaboration to maintain pre-schoolers education successfully. In response, statement seven averaged 2.91 with an SD of 0.539. It showed the support given by the school in the implementation of distance learning during the lockdown period. The majority of the teachers agreed that school management provided supplementary materials or resources during distance learning.

Statement eight revealed the teacher's reaction towards assessment during this remote learning, where the mean score was 3.18 (SD: 0.405). This emphasises that most of the responses agreed or strongly agreed that the form of assessment was modified during the lockdown period.

In the case of statement nine, the average was 3.00, and the SD was 0.447. This means that online classes allowed two-way communication between the teachers and the students. Unsurprisingly, this result coincides with statement one as the students were able to connect to online classes. However, in statement ten, there is a low mean (1.82) and a relatively low SD (0.603) as to whether teachers agree or disagree on the nature of online learning being suitable for pre-schoolers, to which they strongly disagreed. This implies that teachers are aware that online learning may not necessarily be the best way for young children to learn. They are also conscious that school settings are essential for developing social skills because they allow students to interact and cooperate with other children.

Statement eleven and twelve deal with the importance of teaching English skills. Teachers were asked if they prioritised reading and writings skills. The findings indicate that the average score is 2.18 (SD: 0.874), meaning they disagree with this statement. On the other hand, they were asked if they prioritised listening and speaking skills as well. The results show that the mean score is 3.27 (SD: 0.905) and two modes as the values were evenly distributed between agreeing and strongly agreeing. This designates that EFL teaches are more interested in their students acquiring listening and speaking skills as listening forms the basis for speaking.

In relation to research question one, item two and three illustrated the consequences of distance education towards pre-school education. Likewise, item four, five and eight also presented outcomes of e-learning for EFL teachers. This suggests that emergency remote teaching (ERT) has been challenging for both pre-school teachers and pre-schoolers. Despite the fact that both parents and schools provide support for education continuity, as seen in item six and seven, teachers are not in control of their students

learning process as this greatly depends on the number of dedication parents gave to their children's education.

Concerning the second research question, items eleven and twelve demonstrate how English language skills have been affected by the lockdown period as EFL teachers highly prioritise listening and speaking skills. However, EFL teachers have also quantified that reading skills are important for pre-schoolers at this stage. Regardless of these adverse effects of the lockdown period in pre-school education, remote distance learning has enabled both teachers and students to remain in contact, as shown in item one and nine, even though it cannot be the same as in a school setting (item 10). Therefore, the results show the negative effect of online learning on pre-school education and the consequences of the lockdown period.

## **4.2 Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative analysis illustrates how open-ended questions intend to contribute to the quantitative analysis. Thus, the qualitative analysis is a way to show patterns and issues identified in the quantitative analysis. This study does not intend to generalise the results found. Therefore, this study is interested in the participant's recurrent issues to identify trends and patterns.

The lockdown period has affected class activities and grouping of students as these was impossible to do. Some participants expressed that:

*“before COVID-19, we did most of the exercises in cooperative groups, but this was impossible to do online”,*

*“during the distance education, we posted activities to do with the family”.*

According to the EFL teachers, English was taught through videos, songs, and games before the lockdown period. Most importantly, these teaching methods enable movement activities where children can move around the different areas of the school. For instance, a participant pointed out that *“we did most of the exercises in cooperative groups before the lockdown”*.

In addition, students engaged in experimentations and symbolic plays, which allowed them to learn to play with each other and interact with the teacher. However, online classes were different as most tasks required children’s parents to send the activities to their teachers. For example, a teacher stated that *“Another type of activity we did during the lockdown period is called: the challenges. I proposed a challenge to the students and then, they did it at home, saying a few short sentences in English; they were videotaped, and then, we shared them and commented on them together during our online sessions”*. In line with this, teachers also mentioned that they had to record videos for students who could not access online classes due to their parent’s or caretaker’s absence.

Regardless of the changes in distance education, educators emphasised that, during the confinement, the help of parents was fundamental in the student’s learning. One of the respondents mentioned that *“I looked for activities in which they could participate more (with the help from an adult), who were very motivating to their children”*. In most cases, class activities were made more straightforward to make the class more spontaneous and engaging for the children as their attention was less than in a traditional classroom. Notably, teachers found it difficult to continue with regular classes because they could not adapt or transpose the activities to the online world, i.e. a teacher stated, *“most exercises could not be adapted to the online world”*. Another instance of

teacher response to this is, “*we ended the last course at home doing online classes and recording videos. So far, we’ve been adjusting some of the activities*”. Moreover, they had to adapt to the situation using the resources the families had.

What is also clear from participants responses is that EFL teachers value cooperative groupings in-class activities as this made learning more accessible and motivating for students. However, this was affected by online teaching, and as a result, no teacher said they could successfully work with groups in online classes. For example, some respondents stated that:

*“We did most of the exercises in cooperative groups before the lockdown”,*

*“Groupings were not possible during the lockdown.”*

The teachers were also asked how the integration of technology aligns with the content taught in online classes. Although some teachers argued that, more or less, the content worked on in the online classes was the same, most responses from the teachers reveal that they indeed modified the content and the materials used in class since the online classes were not as dynamic as in the classroom setting. Consequently, this led to the reduction of content taught to pre-schoolers because they were adapted to the characteristics of the online classes. At the same time, it required more time and organisation for the EFL teachers to prepare all the materials and contents needed for the online session. Although in some cases, the contents and materials can be retained, the methodology varied.

Another aspect that the teachers mentioned is that integrating technology through online classes has hindered the four macro skills in communication, especially speaking and writing skills. The main reason given by respondents is that these skills require extra

effort (such as parent's involvement) as they cannot be enhanced through the screen. A participant responded that:

*"It is very difficult to enhance speaking through a screen",*

*"During the confinement, both speaking and listening skills were affected, as the pupils did not do English on a weekly basis",*

*"Speaking and listening skills were affected by the lack of proximity and the reduction of time for their practice",*

*"The students did not have much time to be able to express themselves in the online classes as we reduced the hours spent in English classes",*

*"We could not add more time to the online sessions because the students had to attend other subjects online".*

The fact that the school management reduced the hours used in regular class during the coronavirus pandemic severely affected these skills in general. Furthermore, online classes have proven that teachers needed more time to prepare their content and materials as respondents expressed that *"I had to add a lot more preparation time to the sessions (adapting them to the characteristics of the online classes)"*.

Also, EFL teachers had trouble assessing students online, i.e., a participant mentioned that *"Personally, assessment and observation of each student could not be done easily and comfortably"*. Another teacher said, *"through the screen, I could not see the students at the same time"*.

In relation to the first research question, it is clear from the responses that distance education has impacted children's education. There has been a significant distinction in how classes were conducted before and during the lockdown period. Also, the lockdown period has modified content and convergent management since class activities, groupings,

contents and materials have been altered. Concerning the second research question, teachers expressed that it was difficult to enhance English language skills through the screen. Therefore, distance education has an impact on students, parents and teachers.

## **5. Discussion**

According to the findings provided in the previous chapter (section 4), this study can offer some explanations to shed light on the data results. This chapter will answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this study and (1) interpret the data results, and (2) compare them with the literature review. Additionally, this chapter will critically evaluate the study and discuss the potential significance of the research outcomes.

### **5.1 Review of the Results**

Based on these quantitative results, the study finds three main tendencies:

1. The number of hours spent in English classes before the coronavirus pandemic was reasonably high compared to during the lockdown period, where the time spent in English classes drastically reduced.
2. EFL teachers agreed that students could access online classes, and online classes did not hinder class participation. The reason being that first, students could access online classes. Second, students that were active in class were also active in online classes, and the students that were not active in face-to-face classes were not active in online classes. However, changes have been noticed in content and convergent management since class activities and materials have reduced and adapted to online platforms, parents, and schools were fundamental aspects of education during remote distance education. Consequently, the hours EFL teachers devoted to preparing and organising online classes were more than preparing in-class. Also, the form of assessment was modified during this period.

3. Emergency online education (EDE) has mostly affected speaking and writing skills, even though teachers have also identified listening skills as one of the affected skills since teachers agree that they prioritised speaking and listening skills.

Regarding the qualitative findings, the study finds that the EFL teachers were concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on preschool education. They have made mention of six concerns about teaching pre-schoolers in virtual classes.

1. Class activities, contents and materials have been modified and made simpler in order to adjust to an online setting.
2. Group work and activities have been impossible to do online since these mostly required physical contact between the students.
3. Online instruction has hindered Total Physical Response (TPR) as some EFL teachers claim that it was impossible to be observing all the students simultaneously.
4. The collaboration of parents' has helped the continuity of children's education because they were engaged in their children education.
5. Hours spent in English classes have been reduced because long hour online classes became tiresome for the children, and school management asked teachers not to add more hours to online sessions.
6. Online classes have prevented EFL teacher to adequately assess each student as they could not observe each student individually.

Therefore, the three tendencies in the quantitative analysis (stated above) are further complemented in the qualitative analysis due to the responses given by EFL teachers.

## **5.2 Discussion of the Results**

The questionnaire results showed participant's level of agreement and disagreement on the effectiveness of emergency distance education. Also, the participants reflected on the use of online teaching at such young age for language learning purposes. All of the questions in the questionnaire deals with teacher's perceptions of and attitudes towards online education, along with its challenges were predominantly negative. Equally, this was reflected in the data regarding the selected-response questions.

### **5.2.1 In Relation to Research Questions**

The main objective of this study is to explore issues and challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic on children's education. The first research question, how effective has online English language teaching been during the lockdown period compared to traditional classroom teaching, examined teacher's reflections regarding the changes perceived during distance education and traditional classroom teaching.

It was hypothesised that online ELT would be less effective than traditional face-to-face classroom teaching. One reason was the belief that emergency remote teaching (ERT) can influence both the quality and quantity of children's education. Indeed, the study shows correlating data on this point since children's homes became the new learning environment during the pandemic. Without the parent's collaboration with EFL teachers, emergency remote teaching (ERT) would have been impossible to achieve. Even though this new situation placed a heavy burden on caregivers and parents, their influence on children's learning cannot be underestimated. They provided digital technologies, learning environments and supported their children's education. Hence,

parents can be considered one of the essential distance education stakeholders in early childhood education.

Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses have also demonstrated that EFL teachers are concerned about online education; the vast majority agreed that online learning is not suitable for pre-schoolers. One of the most significant reason is that distance education can serve as an obstacle to social interaction. This cannot only affect the psychological well-being of the children, teachers and parents (Dyrud, 2000; Hara & Kling, 2000), but it also can limit successful educational development and prevent high-quality educational content. The result indicates that flexibility and change in dynamics (in-class activities, groupings, contents and materials) are recurring problems that affected pre-school education.

Regardless of these drawbacks, emergency remote teaching (ERT) was helpful for children to continue their education because, with the help of their parents, children have been able to access online classes. This has allowed intercommunication between the teachers and the students. In addition, EFL teachers also affirmed that schools provided support and supplementary materials for distance learning such as subscriptions to online libraries, digital training, among other online learning management systems, to make teaching as successful as possible. Therefore, the qualitative data further correlate with the issues mentioned in the quantitative data.

The second research question was based on how the lockdown period affected pre-school students English language skills. The hypothesis was made that speaking and listening skills are the ones that suffer the most from online teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown period. As anticipated, the study's findings concluded that teaching online

during the lockdown period has negatively affected pre-school students speaking skills. According to the respondents, they selected speaking and reading skills when asked to choose the most affected skills.

However, statistically speaking, listening comprehension skills scored lower than writing skills. The reason being that contents and materials used was altered and/or modified according to families situations. This can be seen in the first open question in section three (see Appendix A). Respondents claimed that they “...*adapted to the situation using the resources the families had*”. Other respondents replied that “*It was not possible for us to work with the same contents and materials as we did in person*”.

Also, when asked if the teacher modify the content or materials they taught during the lockdown period, some respondents mentioned that they modified the content because “*it was also reduced as the classes could not be as dynamic as in the classroom*”. Some else specified that “*I adapted the material so that it could be shared and captured through the screen*”.

As a result, the time they spent in English classes was reduced, and this may affect their English language skills, e.g. one respondent expressed that “*there was a need to maintain a minimum as well as a maximum of time in online class since it required families to be connected to classes during the week*”. Another respondent mentioned that “*we could not add time to the online sessions, as the school management asked us not to do so*”.

The rest of the skills (reading and writing skills) were not expected to change because pre-school teachers did not focus much on these skills. For instance, a participant

stated that *“In early childhood education, speaking and listening are worked on in the English subject. During the confinement, both skills were affected, as the pupils did not do English on a weekly basis but every three weeks.*

In spite of the fact that some answers given by the participant tell us nothing since there are too short, there are some answers which highlight the importance of cooperation and mixing students. Therefore, the quantitative data matches with the qualitative data as they revealed correlating data that affected school education and prevented pre-schoolers from benefiting from online learning.

### **5.2.2 In Relation to the Literature Review**

After gathering the essential findings of the research discussed in the literature review chapter and contrasting them with the results of this study, several concerns derived from the participant’s responses can be made. As stated in the literature review chapter, many teachers struggle with technological cultures (Doucet et al., 2020). Also, Greener (2010) noted that online learning supports a flexible learning environment. However, this study has demonstrated the unlikelihood of online education at the pre-school level because ERT changed English language skills and modified content management (e.g. class activities, contents and materials) and convergent management (e.g. groupings).

Moreover, regarding the research on this issue, there is a possibility that the students may feel excluded from society as some EFL teachers reported that some students have been unable to access online classes. This can have a problematic consequence on childhood development. Based on the research results in this study, it can also be observed that group work, mixing students, cooperative groups, materials sharing, and movement

activities are relevant aspects in pre-school education, which were impossible in online teaching. This may result in the loss of social skills as many of these skills rely on interactions (e.g. facial expression, body language, etc.). Those students who spend an extensive period in virtual environments may fail to understand these social skills properly. Therefore, they find themselves less able to interact effectively with others in the real world.

Materials development play a central role in EFL learning, especially with young learners, because they effectively mediate between the course content, the teacher and students. According to Bouckaert (2018) and Tomlinson (2016), material development can also be helpful as a way for helping teachers to understand and apply theories of language learning and fostering teacher's continuing personal and professional development. On this account, there has been a vast variation in classroom dynamics (e.g. class activities, groupings, contents and materials) as the teachers could not replicate and present the same academic materials used in the normal classroom setting.

As a result, effective teaching and learning cannot take place successfully as the students have not been provided with a suitable environment for teaching and learning to occur. Besides, tangible resources can easily be seen and observed in school, limiting online teaching since these tangible materials do not have physical nature. The physical resources include the structure, raw materials, among other tools, which can facilitate the organisation of activities and processes (Usman, 2016).

The physical resources significantly differ in educational systems as these may vary depending on the classrooms, libraries, structure, etc. Therefore, as Okendu (2012) stated, human and material resources are to be assembled by educational administration. The school system for effective teaching and learning cannot be overemphasised because it

directly or indirectly contributes to the achievement directly or indirectly of their learning process.

Furthermore, the Emergency Remote Teaching Environment (ERTE) framework has been proposed to address moments of crisis in which there was a necessity for understanding and planning teaching and learning in an online environment. It is clear from this study that the EFL teachers have not been able to implement all the guidelines in this framework in their online classes because they adapted to the current situation the best way they could. Moreover, this framework was designed after the coronavirus pandemic emerged, so it was impossible to apply them to online classes in time. Nevertheless, ERTE can be an educational framework for the emerging COVID-19 crisis and valuable for future emergency remote teaching environments because teachers will plan and conceptualise learning in these emergent environments.

This chapter has discussed the findings in this study regarding the two research questions and related to the literature review previously mentioned. The chapter that follows will evaluate the key findings of the research, discuss the limitations of the study, explore implications of the research and provide suggestions for future research.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study began by stating two research questions that aimed to examine a relatively new topic that has evolved in EFL due to a global issue caused by Coronavirus diseases. In accordance with the research design, a Google Form questionnaire was sent out to pre-school teachers in Tarragona (Spain) to investigate the extent to which the Coronavirus pandemic has affected pre-school education. Also, the research was conducted in order to evaluate how effective emergency remote teaching (ERT) has been at the pre-school level.

## 6.1 Key Findings and Final Comments

After collecting and analysing the data, the following discoveries are revealed. Firstly, the participants in this study attested to the fact that online teaching is not suitable for pre-schoolers because group work could not be replicated in an online setting, and EFL teachers lost sight of the class performance of the group as a whole. In addition, the findings disclosed that class activities, groupings, contents, and materials were all affected during this period, mainly because the methodology in which these teaching strategies were carried out before the lockdown could not be sustained.

However, these negative responses towards the use of technology at the pre-school level did not neglect the fact that online teaching and learning was indeed practical during the lockdown period. Finally, in terms of the extent of English language skills, the majority of the participant's responses reveal that the lockdown period has significantly impacted both speaking and writing skills since the hours devoted to English language skills has drastically reduced and the online environment did not allow excellent visibility between the teachers and students.

The results of this study underline the need to examine the impact of COVID-19 and the implementation of technology in pre-school education to understand further its effect on teaching practices and student academic developments. Online learning becomes quite popular among EFL teachers and students due to the lockdown period. It became significant to study the effect of COVID-19 on pre-school education as all teachers, regardless of the subject they teach, faced challenges when teaching during the lockdown period. Therefore, as Jim Wallis stated, "sometimes it takes a natural disaster to reveal a social disaster".

## **6.2 Limitations of the Study**

One of the unfortunate limitations of the study was the number of participants that responded to the questionnaire. Though the intention was to gather as many responses as possible, however, only 11 people responded to the questionnaire. Thus, the methodological approach to the research also affected the number of respondents and the data collection method. Another significant limitation of the study was that the methodology used in this research did not favour the results since some responses to the open questions were too brief. As a result, they could not be used. In spite of this fact, some issues and categories were identified, which stressed common concerns of the EFL teachers.

Despite these limitations, this study is an extension to the studies conducted in the field of EFL and applied linguistics because it adds to the little knowledge of the impact of COVID-19 and technology integration in pre-school education. It shows weaknesses that are embedded within online education at the pre-school level. This helps to stretch out the practical knowledge on implementing eLearning in early childhood. Also, it informs future research of the effects of integrating online learning in early childhood education, which can enhance teaching practices.

## **6.3 Implications**

The outcomes reached in this study suggest that if used adequately and effectively, online education can be extremely useful in pre-school education, especially in supporting the continuity of pre-school education and English language skills. Since there has been limited investigation on the effectiveness of online education at the pre-school level and during the lockdown period, this research should be of great interest to EFL instructors.

## **6.4 Suggestions for Future Research**

As this issue is relatively under-examined, this present study advocate for further research into the effectiveness of online education during the lockdown period. Another suggestion is to change the research methodology; therefore, instead of using a questionnaire to carry out the research, a personal interview could be held with EFL teachers to investigate this issue. EFL teachers could be interviewed through an online platform (Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp Application, etc.) in order to avoid any face-to-face Coronavirus infection.

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## APPENDIX A

### Teaching during COVID-19 Pandemic Questionnaire

To help build more information concerning foreign language learning, I would like to ask you to take a few minutes to answer the following questions. This questionnaire is conducted by a master's degree student in order to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected pre-school education. Therefore, I am only interested in your personal opinion. Please, give your answers sincerely, as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. No personal data will be published in the TFM, so your answers will only be used for anonymous statistical purposes. You can send your answers to the following email [topemuvinatavike.jimoh@alumni.urv.cat](mailto:topemuvinatavike.jimoh@alumni.urv.cat). Thank you very much for your help.

#### Section 1: Teacher's Demographic Profile

Name:

Pre-school level:

Time spent in normal English class per week:

Time spent in English online class per week:

#### Section 2: Selected Response Questions

*Please use X to mark the box below that best represents your level of agreement about the possible issues related to online classes and teaching online during the lockdown period.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1) Students were able to connect to online classes regardless of their family socioeconomic status.				
2) Children who participated in traditional classroom were active during the online classes.				
3) Children who did not participate in traditional classroom were active during the online classes.				
4) The hours devoted to preparing and organising online classes during the				

lockdown were more than preparing in-class lessons.				
5) I had to prioritise some activities over others due to time restrictions, monitoring responses, and other online class issues.				
6) Parents, guardians and caretakers supported or were involved in children's education during the lockdown.				
7) The school provided supplementary materials or resources for distance learning, such as subscriptions to online libraries, digital training, among other online learning management systems.				
8) Assessment was modified during the lockdown period.				
9) Online classes allowed two-way communication between the teacher and the students.				
10) Online learning is suitable for pre-schoolers.				
11) Teaching reading and writing skills in English is a priority goal in Kindergarten.				
12) Teaching speaking and listening skills in English is a priority goal in Kindergarten.				

**Section 3: Additional comments**

If you would like to leave additional comments about section 2 (e.g. explaining further any of the previous statements in section 2), please write it here.

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**Section 4: Open Questions**

*Provide personal reflection and thoughts regarding the changes perceived before the lockdown and during the distance education.*

- 1) Describe how English was taught before the pandemic in terms of class activities and groupings.

- 2) Describe how English was taught during the pandemic in terms of class activities and groupings.
  - 3) Did you modify the content or materials you taught during the lockdown period? Why?
  - 4) Has the lockdown affected any other aspects regarding the English that you teach (e.g. storytelling, games, teaching aids, etc.)? If yes, please specify.
  - 5) Which of the four language skills has been mostly affected by COVID-19?  
*Please, select your answers in bold and briefly state the reason for your selection i.e. explaining your answer choice. More than 1 option can be selected.*
    - A. Listening
    - B. Reading
    - C. Writing
    - D. Speaking
- 
- 

- 6) Do you think the distance teaching method has a positive or negative effect on your students speaking skills? Why?
- 7) Do you think the distance teaching method has a positive or negative effect on your students listening skills? Why?
- 8) How would you describe the overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pre-school education?