



Learning at Risk? Language Teaching Under Emergency Remote Conditions

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Annotation. Low attendance and reduced classroom interaction in courses compulsorily run online pose a challenge to the teaching and learning in an English language teaching programme at a Turkish university. Based on students' and lecturers' narratives, this study explores critical aspects of this teaching modality and suggests solutions to address faced challenges.

Keywords: *English language teaching, emergency remote teaching, tertiary education, learners' perceptions, teachers' perceptions.*

Introduction

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has changed education dramatically worldwide because schools were forced to provide instruction through remote teaching *ex-tempore* due to school closures (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Schleicher, 2020). The change in the teaching modality has had far-reaching consequences, especially for but not restricted to learners from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (UNESCO 2021): Learning is impoverished or interrupted when technical infrastructure of educational institutions and home environments are insufficient, teachers, learners, school administrators or parents suffer from limited digital literacy skills, and validated assessment and evaluation measures can no longer be applied. The restriction of the immediate social contact normally provided in classrooms and school environments jeopardises learning given the significance of interaction and negotiation between teachers, learners and content to generate learning opportunities. For this reason, learners, teachers,

administrators and policymakers are forced to assess the pedagogical implications of the new situation that – perceived as both crisis-laden and permanent – has developed into a new normality (Nomnian, 2022). Contributing to a growing number of studies from different foreign or second language learning contexts aiming at examining this new way of learning and teaching (e.g. Altavilla, 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Balbay & Erkan, 2021; Doncheva et al., 2020; Famularsih, 2020; Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020; Hernández & Flórez, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020), this study attempts to respond to the “the hope that others will continue to explore the impact of this period on the ELT [English language teaching] community” (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021, p. 375), expressed in a recent review on the effects of emergency remote teaching (ERT) on foreign and second language instruction. Some rather disillusioning experiences of the researchers gained in their own instructional practices gave a strong impetus to explore whether or not ERT jeopardised learning in their own context and to explore potential impacts of ERT by examining the case of ELT pre-service teachers at a Turkish university.

Emergency remote teaching

ERT is now the established term to define the compulsory and temporary switch to online teaching that would otherwise be conducted face-to-face or through hybrid courses (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond, 2020). ERT is different from remote or distant education, which is historically traceable back to the 18th century and has gone through different stages witnessing the utilisation of, for instance, correspondence, broadcasting and computer-based means with online teaching nowadays as the prevailing mode (Bozkurt, 2019). Distant education refers to intentionally designed instruction when participants are spatially distant from each other and/or instruction is delivered asynchronously to generate learning opportunities (Moore, 1989). For this reason, the unanticipated and unavoidable transition to ERT appears to be qualitatively different from distant education as the former one is an ad hoc crutch to manage with a crisis, while the latter one attempts (or, at least, should attempt) to enrich instructional practices available with a focus on learners and learning (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Palvia et al., 2018).

This transition is reported to be imposing a variety of constraints caused by, for example, lack of technical equipment to launch online teaching (Altavilla, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Spurrier et al., 2020), limited access to schools as mobility is restricted (Metzgar, 2021), insufficient digital literacy skills possessed by teachers and learners (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020), no or inappropriate guidance on how to put ERT into practice (Toquero, 2020), unclear assessment regulations (Balbay & Erkan, 2012), or teaching and learning experiences that are perceived demotivating, ineffective and exacerbating social inequities (Shin & Hickey, 2021) and affecting mental health (Karakose et al., 2022; Sahu, 2020).

Exploring the impact of ERT on foreign or second language learning and teaching, Sayer and Braun (2020) point out that the new modality makes it especially difficult for teachers to provide comprehensible input because the full range of opportunities given

in face-to-face classrooms to provide verbal and nonverbal support is reduced, and classroom interaction, which is considered eminently important for language acquisition, is diminished. Such reduced opportunities have been reported to be due to insufficient institutional support that provides teachers with professional development to acquire digital competencies (Cheung, 2021). Digital competencies should encompass the knowledge of how to use digital tools skilfully, how to adapt teaching practices to the ERT modality and to develop a social awareness that helps establish or maintain communication with learners (Moorhouse, 2021). If the technical infrastructure is not sufficient and/or digital competencies to deliver language education effectively are not developed, learners are likely to perceive ERT-based teaching demotivating because interaction as in face-to-face classrooms does not occur (Balbay & Erkan, 2021; Seçkin et al., 2020) or, for example, feedback is not given adequately (Sumardı & Nugrahanı, 2021). As an outcome of this modality effect, a preference of reading and writing over speaking and listening as the means of instruction in virtual foreign or second language classrooms (Sayer & Braun, 2020; Zorčić, 2020; Dahmash, 2020; Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020) and language teacher education (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Bailey & Lee, 2020; Ersin et al., 2020; Moorhouse & Beaumont 2020; Öztürk-Karataş & Tuncer, 2020) has been reported.

Studies portray an inconclusive picture of ERT language teaching as teachers' and learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of digital tools differ (Ironsi, 2021; Lin, 2022), initial negative perceptions of ERT change into more positive thoughts based on teaching and learning experiences (Kim, 2021), and new opportunities to organise learning are appreciated, as instruction is no longer connected to physical presence and less connected to time schedules (Moser et al., 2021). These experiences may modify learning habits resulting in better academic performance (Gonzales et al., 2020). Teacher perceptions as well as their mental health appear to be dependent on their abilities to cope with the challenges caused by ERT (MacIntyre et al., 2020) along with previous experiences of remote teaching (Moser et al., 2021). Accordingly, teachers may experience ERT as frustrating or as an opportunity to develop professionally when they succeed in adapting their practices to the new modality (Farrell & Stanclik, 2021). In sum, ERT appears to constrain foreign or language teaching but also to provide affordances that are being and need to be furtherly explored in research to reconceptualise remote teaching as an option in language instruction beyond the pandemic (Erarslan, 2021; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021).

Methodology

The starting point for this study was our experiences as lecturers in English language teaching (ELT) at a Turkish university, gained in courses given to pre-service teachers. The courses encompassed both language courses in the English preparatory programme and courses dedicated to content knowledge given to freshmen and sophomores. We faced difficulties in adapting our own teaching to the new modality of ERT; in particular, we faced diminished interaction and attendance in our classes and heard about the same problems from colleagues and students. In short, the situation gave cause to ask whether learning was at risk. To explore this question, our study aimed at collecting the learners' and teachers' voices concerning skill learning and engagement in instruction. We decided to include students and teachers in the English preparatory programme for ELT students. Interested in the participants' narratives, we used open-ended surveys and interviews to explore the impact ERT had on the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language. The decision to employ a qualitative study and to utilise open-ended data collection tools was driven by the conviction that such an approach would be conducive to representing the multifaceted reality constructed by the research participants in their responses mirroring their experiences during ERT (cf. Corbin, 2006/2019). An account of the context, data collection procedures and analytical steps are given in the following sections.

Context and participants

This study was conducted in an English preparatory programme for ELT students at a Turkish state university. All classes in the programme were delivered online using the video conferencing tool Zoom. A total of 52 students enrolled in the programme were divided into two groups receiving three different courses: a main course (15 hours per week) based on a global coursebook, a reading and writing course (5 hours) and a speaking and listening course (5 hours) based on skills books. For all materials, iTools were available and shared during the lessons over Zoom.

According to the university's general regulations, attendance was not compulsory for students. Teachers needed to upload videos with the lessons to the university's learning management system where learners were able to access lessons asynchronously. The requested minimum length of a video for a class hour (normally 50 minutes in in-class teaching) was 20 minutes.

37 students (31 females and 6 males; average age: 19.0) and four teachers participated in the study. Table 1 shows the biodata of the participating teachers.

Table 1
Participating Teachers

	Sex	Age	Experience (in years)	Assigned course
T1	female	33	10	main course
T2	female	33	10	main course
T3	male	52	21	speaking & listening
T4	male	31	9	reading & writing

While 15 students enrolled in the programme did not participate, all teachers working in the programme participated in the study. The following section outlines data collection and analysis procedures.

Data collection and analysis

Guided by the research interest, we adopted an open-ended survey developed by Öztürk-Karataş & Tuncer (2020). The questionnaire asked respondents to state perceived advantages and disadvantages of ERT for the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking (in eight separate questions), and to decide on the most positively and most negatively affected skills. We expanded the instrument by adding questions about reasons for attending and not attending lessons. The questions of the student survey were translated into Turkish, while the teacher survey was delivered in English. Piloting procedures for the translated version included back translation, reviewing of the questions by an expert of Turkish language teaching and delivering it to ELT students who were not going to participate in the study for evaluation purposes. The surveys were then delivered to the participants over Google docs.

After the administration of the survey and preliminary analysis, we conducted two focus group interviews (over Zoom) with five volunteering students and the teachers. Abstaining from a fixed set of questions, we asked the participants to describe how lessons proceeded in remote education and in how far they differed from in-class instruction to elicit their views on whether or not learning was at risk under ERT conditions.

The survey data and the transcribed focus group interviews were analysed inductively, i.e. we engaged in repeated reading through the data, initial coding and coding for patterns to arrive at explanatory coding categories which would be later grouped to themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because the data set was manageable in terms of amount, the data were analysed by both researchers. This included separate data analysis with subsequent discussion on emergent codes and themes to arrive at interrater agreement.

In presenting the findings, we were guided by the intention to reflect the voices showing how differently the situation was perceived by the participants. To support the presentation, frequencies for perceived advantages and disadvantages of ERT on skill learning and reasons for attending classes are given based on the data coming from the learners. Frequencies are not given for teacher views considering the low number of teachers participating.

Results

Learner views on language learning under ERT conditions

Asked to report their views of the benefits and drawbacks of receiving instruction through ERT separately for reading, writing, listening and speaking, the learners pointed to a variety of issues, which are presented as themes in this section. It should be noted that an emergent theme was seldom mentioned by the majority of the participating learners, and all learners were well aware that ERT provided affordances and constraints. Table 2 summarises the answers for benefits by indicating how many learners mentioned a theme that was identified in the data analysis.

Table 2
Perceived Advantages of ERT on Skill Learning

	Themes	Sub-themes	Reading		Writing		Listening		Speaking	
			f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	language learning	language proficiency improved (skills, grammar, vocabulary)	12	32	7	19	8	22	14	38
2	no challenge	ERT unchallenging (explicitly stated)	14	38	9	24	8	22	8	22
3	home environment	no commuting to school; time saving; scheduling learning activities; repetition/consolidation	11	30	7	19	13	35	3	8
4	teacher	instructional practice; feedback	2	5	8	22	1	3	10	27
5	assignments	(collaborative) assignments perceived beneficial	2	5	11	30			2	5
6	digital facilities	access to internet sources (dictionaries, websites to research for topics)			6	16	1	3		
7	mode	online teaching/virtual classroom perceived activating	2	5					4	11
8	digital writing	appreciation of not writing using pen and paper; spell checker in word; readability of written texts			5	14				
9	material	materials (coursebooks, access to e-learning components)	3	8					1	3
10	peer collaboration	comparison of writings before submission to teacher			2	5				

Table 2 shows that, most often, the classes contributed to their language learning or that it was unchallenging without any further explanation. More specifically related to the language skills, an appreciation of ERT for reading appears to be connected to the home environment that suits the private and individualistic nature of reading: *“Because of the distant education we spend most of the time at home so we have more time to read books and articles. This improved my reading skills.”* (L13). Another learner stated: *“Reading in online or in-class education doesn’t make a difference to me. The development of this skill depends more strongly on the learner’s effort.”* (L24). Five students claimed that neither ERT nor face-to-face education were advantageous for the learning of reading.

Related to writing, the learners pointed to some specific advantages, for example, benefitting from the spell check function in word, the accessibility of online resources to support pre-writing and enhanced opportunities for peer collaboration because the learners write their texts in word files: *“We share our writing assignments with each other before submitting them to our teacher and correct our mistakes. This way, we can notice our own mistakes and those of our classmates. I think that improved our writing skills a lot.”* (L21). Also, the teacher’s instruction and feedback, as well as the writing assignments were perceived positively: *“We saw the texts that we had written in the class activities on the screen and this enabled us to clearly notice our mistakes. Also, we received feedback for our writing assignment and were given opportunities to talk about problems with our peers.”* (L23).

Rather few advantages were reported for listening. A point made was the access to listening recordings out of class time and the advantages generated through the home environment with devices such as headphones: *“If we were at school, we would be exposed to environmental noise and insufficient sound quality.”* (L28).

Compared to their responses related to the other skills, the learners’ responses directed to the learning of speaking were more elaborate and a diversity of views was noticed. A participant reflected:

In spite of the distance education, I think we improved our speaking the best. Of course, we would have been more active in face-to-face teaching, but I think we have made sufficient progress. Anyway, there is no other option to improve our speaking skills than the speaking classes. (L2)

While most of the learners’ responses implied that in-class instruction was perceived superior to ERT, some students explicitly stated that delivering speaking over online tools was better and emphasised the teacher’s role in delivering classes effectively: *“If the lessons were done in class, some students may shy away from speaking and oral participation would be unequal. However, every student spoke in our class without reservation and the teachers encouraged those who were speaking little.”* (L7). Another learner noted: *“Thanks to our speaking teacher, we could practice speaking over and over again. Especially spontaneous conversations such as discussions have bigger effects on us.”* (L22). For some students, the videoconferencing mode (displaying images of the participating learners in a lesson) is

even better than in-class instruction: “Thanks to the teacher, a more immediate environment is generated compared to traditional lessons. Even if the teacher is not really face-to-face with us, there is enhanced eye contact and I think this has a positive impact.” (L19).

Maybe somehow surprising, given the remote modality of the courses, 18 learners believed that ERT had the most positive effect on their speaking. As one participant noted: “I know it’s weird, but my speaking skills progressed the best, and the reason for this is the fact that we made discussions and talked about some specific topics.” (L22). In a similar vein, 16 learners saw a good impact on their writing, while only four and three learners stated that their listening and reading skills improved the best, respectively. Also, six learners said that two of their skills benefitted the most from ERT, five of them pointing to speaking and writing.

The learners also reflected on negative aspects. These are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3
Perceived Disadvantages of ERT on Skill Learning

	Themes	Sub-themes	Reading		Writing		Listening		Speaking	
			f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	technical constraints	poor internet connection; insufficient equipment (devices)	2	5	1	3	27	73	8	22
2	unsuitable mode	diminished interaction in online teaching/virtual classroom; no immediate feedback by teacher; focusing on lesson difficult	7	19	3	8	2	5	25	67
3	no advantage	ERT not advantageous or inefficient (explicitly stated)	6	16	4	11	3	8	6	16
4	time	not enough time dedicated for skills work; completing assignments time-consuming	7	19	3	8				
5	insufficient digital literacy	learners not accustomed to using computers			6	16				
6	exposition to screen	discomfort through exposition to screen	2	5						
7	teacher trust	teacher does not believe that student has written a text			2	5				

While technical constraints were identified as problematic most notably for listening, they played a minor role in reading and writing. For all skills, the learners reported that the modified interaction in virtual classrooms affected the learning: “Because there is no

individual communication, I had problems correcting my mistakes or engaging in deeper reading.” (L1). A similar point was made for the learning of writing:

If we had face-to-face instruction, I believe we would have learned more effectively and deeper by getting help from our teacher and classmates. Of course, the feedback given by our teacher is helpful but in face-to-face education the teacher would have more opportunities to monitor on an individual base. (L4)

Directed to the speaking class, some learners reported that the online mode discouraged them from engaging in speaking due the lack of self-confidence or technical constraints: *“At the moment I want to speak, somebody else starts speaking. There are also delays [in Zoom] due to slow internet. Even if I want to be active, I cannot call attention to myself.” (L28)*. According to 15 learners, speaking was the most negatively affected skill under the conditions of ERT (seven opted for listening and five for writing).

Asked about reasons for attending and not attending the courses in the preparatory programme, 24 learners thought that there was no problem related to attendance, while 13 learners thought there was. The stated reasons for attending classes are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4
Reasons for Attending Classes

	Reasons	Main course		Writing/Reading		Speaking/Listening	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	language learning	22	60	26	70	28	76
2	teacher	13	35	4	11	8	22
3	perceived obligation	5	14	5	14	5	14
4	assessment	2	5	3	8	1	3
5	lesson hours	2	5	2	5		
6	assessment	2	5	3	8	1	3
7	socialising	2	5				
8	materials	2	5				

The learners most often pointed to the perceived benefit of the classes for their learning irrespective of the course they related their answers to. For all three courses, language learning, the course teachers and a perceived obligation—attendance was not compulsory according to the university’s regulations—counted as the main incentives for the learners to join classes. The data revealed some specific perceptions when, for example, a learner pointed to the novelty of the content covered in the writing lesson: *“Because we didn’t have writing classes at high school and because I assume that essay writing is very important for our upcoming studies, I followed the writing classes meticulously.” (L7)*. An

interviewee elaborated on this in the focus group: *“We did not practice speaking at all in secondary school. As my friend mentioned, we were only supposed to produce a paragraph rather than essays or other genres of academic writing.”* (L3). Specifically related to the speaking class, another learner noted: *“Since we don’t have a better alternative in our daily life, I attend the classes regularly and try to participate actively. Moreover, I participate because the classes and the assignments (when I complete them with classmates that I can choose) are enjoyable.”* (L4). Besides the collaborative assignments, the learners appreciated when their teachers showed effort to deliver compelling classes: *“Even though our teacher’s lesson is arduous, it is enjoyable and effective. I like my classes. He strives to make us speak.”* (L34). The perceived significance of attendance for learning was, however, connected with an awareness of the challenges caused by ERT: *“For me, speaking is the most important skill for my major. Unfortunately, we have to receive online classes and I want to improve my speaking under these unfavourable conditions. For that reason, I attend the classes regularly.”* (L27)

There are two other reasons that do not directly point to the learning of English as the driving force to attend classes. Fifteen times, participants stated that they attended due to a perceived obligation (that did not arise from school regulations): *“Even if I didn’t enjoy the classes, I would have to attend the classes, of course.”* (L36). Another factor was the number of class hours. Interestingly, this factor worked in two directions. A learner noted: *“I attend the main course because I strongly believe that the class is beneficial due to the high number of weekly class hours.”* (L4). Another learner explained to attend the writing classes because *“the lessons are short, they don’t take more than two hours. So, there is no problem, and I can join the classes comfortably.”* (L36).

The results show that quite a low number of learners were encouraged to attend classes by the circumstance that their performance was assessed by the course teachers or the coursebook materials were appreciated. In addition, two learners saw the classes as a way to socialise.

The learners were also asked to deliberate on reasons why students may not attend classes, that is, they reflected on motives that did not necessarily apply to their own situation. Three excerpts exemplify this:

They may think that online education is not beneficial or they may not have the technological facilities necessary to attend classes. (L13)

Not everyone can benefit from the same opportunities. Even if everyone had the same opportunities, there are problems in the house in terms of seriousness and focusing: some families don’t see their children as if they were at school. They pop into the room during classes and are noisy. (L12)

I assume those who don’t attend regularly don’t feel any obligation and think they can pass the courses without attending. (L14)

The excerpts show that unfavourable conditions related to insufficient technical equipment and poor internet connections (stated by 18 participants), the home environment

and attendance regulations set by the school management were considered particularly problematic. Three students referred to health issues (probably Covid-19 infections) that prevented them from attending classes. Notably, some learners stated that some students could not afford technical equipment or had side jobs. These factors, in the learners' view, changed the nature of learning as they potentially discouraged the learners from deep engagement. The home environment plays a crucial role: *"The school setting is really different. It is more motivating. We only see walls at home. Nothing more than that. The same things. I don't think that I can feel motivated or focus."* (L1). Another interviewee elaborated on this adding that ERT is a missed opportunity for the learners to develop independence from their home environment:

We are no longer children. We need to take responsibilities. I don't want to do that at home. I don't want to do my assignments at the same table and by looking at the computer screen. This feels boring and meaningless. That's why I definitely prefer face-to-face education. (L2)

In sum, the learners' views indicate both satisfaction with the education they received under ERT conditions and dissatisfaction. A telling indicator for this is that two learners in the interview said they preferred in-class education, while two said they preferred remote education.

Teachers' views on language teaching under ERT conditions

Like the learners, the teachers reported a variety of perceived advantages and disadvantages that they specifically related to the teaching of language skills. For one thing, they pointed to the possibility to save time for discussing and evaluating assigned tasks during online lessons. Based on their experiences they stated that individual and collaborative assignments *"help the learners implement pre-reading strategies and facilitate their interaction with their peers and teachers"* (T2) particularly because *"they enjoy the out-of-class group work assignment of reading texts which are easier to organise in virtual classes than physical classrooms."* (T3). In addition, T2 assumed that ERT increased learner autonomy and creativity as they were encouraged to search the internet more freely. This, as T4 stated, helped them boost their vocabulary knowledge. Pointing to another advantage of the proneness of ERT to digital teaching tools, T3 appreciated the opportunity to employ tools like Google docs to give feedback on the students' draft works using the comment functions without suffering from papers with untidy handwriting so *"the students can receive/read the feedback any time and work on their paper."* Three teachers thought that writing was the most positively affected skill, while one teacher believed it was reading.

Acknowledging these advantages, three teachers reported that they encountered ERT-driven problems while teaching reading mainly due to time restrictions, the modality of remote teaching and an inadequate infrastructure provided by the educational institution. These factors resulted in failing to provide timely feedback during class time, restricted collaboration among students, reduced spontaneity and reduced engagement

of the learners in class. In order to overcome such challenges, T3 started benefitting from breakout rooms during class time to complete reading tasks in smaller groups.

T2 expressed her displeasure with the process stating “*I couldn’t really observe their real proficiency in writing as they corrected their mistakes (both grammatical and spelling mistakes) automatically in computers.*” Holding a similar point of view, T3 argued that online mode of teaching largely impedes in-class pre-writing activities which would provide them with the opportunity to walk through the classroom and monitor students’ work or to engage in peer collaboration while writing in non-virtual classrooms.

The teachers generally believed that ERT of listening and speaking provided no advantages over teaching these skills in physical classrooms. Nonetheless, T2 stated that “*it is somehow easier for the learners to focus on audio recordings thanks to the exclusion of some distractors which would likely emerge in physical classrooms*”. Concerning the problems of listening exerted by ERT, they pointed to problems in monitoring students’ progress due to the availability of the transcriptions of the listening texts (T1) or lack of real interaction (due to cameras turned off in classes) (T3), lack of student engagement in listening activities due to technical restrictions and inappropriate study place (i.e., interfering background noise) (T2) and lack of collaborative learning (T3). T3 elaborated on these issues:

When I do a listening in a face-to-face class, there is a pre-listening with much more spontaneity, and during the listening, I can see in the students’ faces if they understand or not. I think I quite often give extra help (e.g., by giving a piece of vocabulary) between the first and second listening based on the students’ reactions. In an online classroom, I can’t do this! Also, in face-to-face classes after a listening activity, I often give the students a minute or so to share with their partners what they have understood, and then we talk about the listening as a whole class activity. This is also something that online classes do not give me. So, from my perspective, in a face-to-face class I am more often sure whether the students (at least the majority) have understood a text or not. In an online class I cannot be sure of that.

The teachers considered speaking the most negatively affected skill under ERT conditions due to a variety of reasons including failure to contact and encourage reluctant students (T1), difficulties providing immediate feedback (T1), lack of real communication among the students and reduced nonverbal interaction (T2), the challenge of implementing pre-speaking activities, lack of spontaneity due to the reduced non-verbal interaction and technical restrictions (T3). In sum, the teachers pointed to the changed quality of spoken interaction caused by the modality of online teaching: “*The nature of interaction requires real engagement as you know and online courses inhibit them from seeing their classmates’ mimics, gestures or body language concretely*” (T2). T3 saw interaction changed as “*students rather give monologues than engage in conversations in virtual classes.*”

The data contains several strategies the teachers developed to overcome these challenges. For instance, T2 reported building a real communication setting for the learners

by assigning collaborative out-of-class speaking tasks which were related to the content covered in the coursebook. T3 reported avoiding screen sharing and encouraging the students to turn on their cameras and microphones to create a classroom atmosphere conducive to conversation. In addition, he tried to enhance the attractiveness of the lessons by keeping the sessions short, not sticking to the coursebook and involving students in topic selection.

Three of the four teachers faced the problem of undue absenteeism. They attributed this primarily to the fact that class attendance was not compulsory due to the university regulations (T2, T3, T4), lack of motivation because of the modality (T2, T3) and students' side jobs (T3). T2 and T3 noted in the focus group interview that the students who do not attend classes for personal excuses tend not to watch the course videos later despite having access to the videos. T3 drew the attention to his observation that some students attend classes at the beginning of a lesson but leave early due to poor internet connection or other reasons and speculated that *“especially when I share my screen, it is impossible for me to trace who is there and who has gone. So, the mode with the opportunity to leave the classroom silently and without being noticed may encourage students to leave classes”*. Both teachers attempted to encourage the non-attendant students to join the classes regularly several times. The students in concern informed these teachers that their undue absenteeism had nothing to do with their way of teaching or the structure of the courses but was extensively related to the modality of ERT. T3 came to the conviction that he would be unhappy and not look forward to the classes if he continued to care about such kinds of students, and reasoned that this was better for his well-being but might violate his own pedagogic principles.

In the focus group interview, all teachers favoured face-to-face education noting that language teaching and learning primarily required verbal and non-verbal interaction as well as collaboration among the learners, and teachers' immediate monitoring of the learners performing in-class tasks; according to the teachers, these aspects of teaching cannot be fully considered in virtual classes. T3 concluded that distant education should be supplementary rather than an alternative to face-to-face education.

Discussion

This study sought to explore whether or not the language learning in an English preparatory programme for ELT pre-service teachers is at risk in the views of learners and teachers. The results are somehow inconclusive because the learners and teachers pointed to a variety of aspects that suggest that learning is not at risk but, at the same time, they were aware of factors placing constraints on the learning and teaching of English. From a general perspective, our study is in line with other studies suggesting ERT in language teaching as providing affordances and constraints (e.g., Dahmash, 2020; Doncheva et al.,

2020; Huang et al., 2021; cf. Erarslan, 2021; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). The fact that the learners praised the instruction they received under ERT conditions as contributing to their learning along with their aim of language acquisition as the most frequently mentioned factor to attend classes shows that their motivation overrode the challenges posed by the modality of remote teaching. It is also striking that the learners counted their teachers as the fourth most important factor when referring to advantages and the second most important factor for attending classes. On the whole, our study suggests that learners show flexibility to handle unfortunate circumstances in their learning environment as long as they are motivated to successfully complete their programme (in our case in order to start their undergraduate programme), and they appreciate attempts of their teachers that help them achieve their academic aim (cf. Balbay & Erkan, 2021; Erarslan, 2021). This may explain the somehow surprising result of this study that a remarkable number of students saw their speaking skills improved throughout the course even though it has been suggested that ERT favours the learning of reading and writing at the expense of speaking (Öztürk-Karataş & Tuncer, 2020).

The constraints reported by the learners included factors referring to non-pedagogical domains (technical constraints, poor internet connections, unsuitable home environment) and addressing genuinely pedagogical concerns, i.e., the impact that the modality of ERT has on classroom interaction. Both learners and teachers considered collaborative assignments in particular as well as attempts to make lessons more communicative (e.g., by reducing reliance to coursebook materials) conducive to softening the negative impacts of ERT. Our study therefore underlines the need for teachers to develop classroom management strategies, to adapt instructional practices to the ERT modality and to implement genuine online resources in order to provide learners with positive learning experiences (Anwar et al., 2020; Cad et al., 2021; Moorhouse, 2021).

The importance that the learners attached to the role of the teachers is indirectly confirmed in the teachers' reports on how they addressed challenges posed by ERT. In other words, the instructional practice planned and realised by the teacher appears to be the main factor to overcome the challenges of ERT (Balbay & Erkan, 2021) and contributing to the teachers' professional satisfaction (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Those practices, including the design of individual and collaborative assignments that engaged learners in online research, selecting videoconferencing tools different from the institutionally provided platform, online feedback, conducting shorter lessons in which screen sharing is reduced to create a classroom atmosphere or allowing learners to select topics to be covered in classes, exemplify how teachers address challenges created in their specific context displaying "an ecology of contextual agency where the development of teacher agency is incorporated into the evolution of the environment and its relative factors" (Chen, 2022). In that sense, the teachers' reports in this study document an evidence-based trial and error attempt to cope with the challenges of ERT as shown in other contexts

(Farrell & Stanclik, 2021; Gao & Zhang, 2020). It should be noted that the participating teachers also pointed to frustrating experiences, especially related to the difficulty of establishing oral communication, so that they were not able, for example, to trace to what extent their learners were on task and to monitor their progress (Ginti et al., 2021). Given the significance of providing opportunities for teachers to learn from their own context (Philpott & Oates, 2017), the findings of our study underline the need to establish context-specific professional development frameworks in which pre-service and in-service teachers acquire the pedagogical and technological competencies necessary to deliver online or hybrid education (Cheung, 2021; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021).

Conclusions

ERT has changed the educational landscape fundamentally. The growing body of research suggests that, in the local context, those who are involved in the delivery of education need to find and do find solutions to address the challenges faced. The results of our study contribute to the understanding of the new normality as they document a case in which the participating teachers and learners develop ways of avoiding a situation that puts learning at risk. Pointing to this result of our study, it should, however, be noted that the participating learners and teachers clearly indicated ERT-related factors that constrain learning.

These results need to be interpreted in the light of the following considerations and limitations. For one thing, our study reported on a case that may not be easily generalisable to other contexts. In particular, positive perceptions reported by the learners have to be understood against the backdrop of their need to pass the preparatory programme in order to start their major in the upcoming year: This may prevent negative perceptions from dominating the language learning experience. Different from other contexts, this circumstance is likely to force the learners to cope with the ERT constraints. Furthermore, our participants were freshmen so that they had to compare their ERT experience at university with their in-class high school experience. In other words, their perceptions have not been shaped against the backdrop of in-class experiences gained in tertiary education. Finally, 37 out of the 52 students participated in our study and we have reason to assume that only a low number of those students who did not attend classes regularly participated in our study. For this reason, more pessimistic views on learning and teaching under ERT conditions may be underrepresented, perhaps because learners who did not participate in our study were not willing to share their assumingly negative experiences with ERT. The report of two of the participating teachers according to which absent learners did not join classes because of the ERT supports this conclusion.

Exploring the context of an English preparatory programme for ELT undergraduate students, we hope that our research shows that learner ambitions and creative solutions of teachers to address constraints posed by ERT have the potential to avoid a situation in which learning is at risk. This conclusion does not exclude the necessity to equip learners and teachers with support so they develop the skills conducive to successfully engaging in remote language instruction.

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Mokymuisi gresia pavojus? Kalbų mokymas ekstremaliomis nuotolinėmis sąlygomis

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Santrauka

Covid-19 pandemija, kurios dramatiškos pasekmės švietimui jaučiamos visame pasaulyje, privertė mokymo įstaigas mokyti nuotoliniu būdu ekstremaliomis sąlygomis (angl. *Emergency Remote Teaching*, ERT). Toks modalumo pokytis turi ypatingą poveikį antrosios užsienio kalbos mokymui(si), kadangi sumažėja suprantamos informacijos kiekis ir bendravimas klasėje. Gali kilti pavojus kalbos mokymuisi dar ir dėl to, kad kalba yra ir mokymo priemonė, ir objektas. Būtent minėtos aplinkybės ir pastebėtas studentų nedalyvavimas sinchroninėse internetinėse pamokose pagal anglų kalbos parengiamąją programą, skirtą būsimiesiems anglų kalbos mokytojams Turkijos valstybiniame universitete, paskatino nagrinėti besimokančiojo ir mokytojo požiūrį į mokymą(si) ekstremaliomis nuotolinėmis sąlygomis.

Remiantis atviro tipo apklausa ir interviu tikslinėse grupėse, atliktas kokybinis tyrimas atskleidė, kad besimokančiųjų motyvacija išklaudyti kursą ir atlikti mokymo praktiką, kurią mokytojai pritaikė prie naujo mokymo būdo, kompensavo nurodytus apribojimus.

Kaip demotyvuojančius veiksnius besimokantieji nurodė technines problemas ir atstumą iki fizinės universiteto aplinkos, o dėstytojai kalbėjo apie sunkumus, susijusius su bendravimu

nuotolinėje klasėje ir besimokančiųjų stebėjimu. Darytina išvada, kad atsiranda poreikis parengti strategijas besimokantiesiems ir dėstytojams mokymosi galimybėms ekstremaliomis nuotolinėmis sąlygomis sukurti.

Esminiai žodžiai: *anglų kalbos mokymas, ekstremalus nuotolinis mokymas, aukštasis mokslas, besimokančiųjų suvokimai, mokytojų suvokimai.*

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