Research Article

Spanish Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Emergency Remote Language Teaching

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study examines the perceptions of pre-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers of their skills to face emergency remote language teaching (ERLT) situations, and to determine whether these vary according to gender, age, university, or course. A cross-sectional survey model was used with 332 pre-service EFL teachers studying in two Spanish universities, an onsite institution, and a distance university. After analyzing the results, it can be said that participants' ERLT skills are moderate, and they vary significantly according to age, course, and type of university, but no statistically significant differences are found regarding gender. The results can guide teacher trainers and researchers, as they reveal the needs of pre-service EFL teachers to teach effectively in ERLT situations. **Keywords:** distance university, English language teaching, teacher education, teacher perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Today's global educational panorama is undoubtedly characterized by alarming disruptions in this unprecedented health emergency. As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, around 1.6 billion students in more than 190 countries were forced to drop out of school during the highest peak of the pandemic, whereas 100 million teaching staff were affected by the sudden closure of educational centers (UNESCO, 2021). With these figures in mind, the need to adapt education to such a concerning situation is undeniable (UNESCO & IESALC, 2020): in an attempt to secure education at all levels, governments, international organizations, and teachers themselves have directed efforts to deliver distance teaching by using a mix of technology-based resources (Miao et al., 2020).

Among the different school subjects, languages, whose learning entails not only the acquisition and development of writing and reading skills, but also listening and speaking ones (Council of Europe, 2018), might have been severely affected. Considering that the teaching of languages, particularly English as a foreign language (EFL), is underpinned by an emphasis on helping students develop their communicative competence (Thornbury, 2016), the paradigm shift from traditional onsite instruction to online education may have been challenging for language teachers due to the loss of possibilities to practice orality (Cheung, 2021). At this juncture, new terms, such as emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Hodges et al., 2020) and emergency remote language teaching (ERLT) (Huertas-Abril, 2020; Palacios-Hidalgo & Huertas-Abril, 2021), have been coined to make a distinction between online education and what is actually happening in language teaching during school closures resulting from the pandemic.

Teachers from all educational stages seem to be doing their best to ensure that students' learning process does not come to a standstill. In this light, research has examined educational stakeholders' viewpoints and

examples of technology implementation in all educational stages (Alshammari et al., 2021; Isnani, 2021). In relation to the teaching process of teachers of EFL, although some initiatives have been developed to sustain their learning and provide them with effective professional skills they may need in the short-term (Huertas-Abril et al., 2021a), literature is still scarce, up to the researchers' knowledge, when exploring future teachers' perceptions regarding whether they are being properly trained to teach under emergency circumstances.

Considering the aforementioned and paying special attention to the new challenges of society in recent times, this paper aims to study the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers to identify the potential training needs of prospective teachers in both face-to-face and ERT situations. In this respect, the research questions (RQs) discussed in the study are as follows:

1. **RQ1:** What are the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers regarding their skills to teach in ERLT situations?

2. **RQ2:** Do pre-service teachers' perceptions on how to teach in ERLT situations vary according to gender, university, age, and university course?

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

English as a *Lingua Franca* and as a Foreign Language

In the last decades, English has spread all over the world as of today's international language. Likewise, it has grown as the language of science and technology as well as the language through which a great part of educational contents is delivered. Indeed, English has become the 21st century lingua franca (ELF), and as such, proficiency in it is a fundamental educational demand (Andrade, 2016).

This spread of English, motivated by the influence of the British Empire and the power of US culture (Chacón-Beltrán, 2015), has also resulted in an exponential growth in numbers of the students learning EFL (Eurostat, 2022). Consequently, different ways of conceptualizing language learning and EFL have arisen, such as bilingual and multilingual education, understood as "the regular use of two or more languages for teaching and learning in instructional settings when bilingualism and biliteracy are two of the explicit long-term goals" (Abelló-Contesse, 2013, p. 4).

Similarly, the EFL classroom has been progressively invaded by new technological advances aiming to facilitate the learning and teaching process. Such are the cases of the inclusion of mobile devices (Alshammari et al., 2021), augmented and virtual realities (Karacan & Akoglu, 2021; Lan, 2020), and social media (Reinhardt, 2019), among others, which are considered effective tools not only to enhance students' motivation but also to favor the learning of the language.

Distance Education and COVID-19

If anything defines today's educational scene is certainly the sudden shift from face-to-face instruction to distance teaching and the consequent outpouring of technologies in the classrooms. Videoconferencing services, online courses, and open educational resources have become frequent solutions for securing learners' opportunities, placing the educational focus "on developing the potentials and creativity of the learners in the best possible ways" (Bordoloi et al., 2021, p. 2).

Distance education "is often synonymous with online learning, e-learning, correspondence education, remote studies, flexible learning, and massive open online courses" (Miao et al., 2020, p. 11). As current onsite teaching process, distance learning takes advantage of media and technology to foster interaction between the teacher and the learners; however, the spatial (and sometimes temporal) detachment between them makes a high degree of autonomy and learning skills essential for students (UNESCO, 2020).

Indeed, the growth in contagions caused by SARS-CoV-2 resulted in the adoption of distance education to ensure the continuity of learning processes. In this light, teachers are doing their best to support these distance-learning methods by implementing alternative tasks while also acquiring new responsibilities as emotional caregivers, learning partners, and micro-curriculum planners (Miao et al., 2020). Nevertheless, teachers do necessarily have neither the appropriate resources nor the knowledge and skills to develop this type of teaching and, in fact, research shows that there is still a lack of certain digital skills among professionals of education both when still studying and after finishing their initial training, both before and after the

outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Mcgarr & Mcdonagh, 2021). Therefore, initial and continuous teacher training on the use of technologies is still necessary.

Emergency Remote Language Teaching

New approaches to distance, online-based education have gained relevance recently. Such is the case of ERT that, unlike planned online education, refers to a temporary change from face-to-face to blended or hybrid teaching as a result of a crisis or emergency, where instruction, initially planned to be delivered onsite, is adapted to an online environment until the situation improves (Hodges et al., 2020).

Language teaching and learning have been forced to adapt to ERT situation since the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020. However, the loss of opportunities for orality has made this temporary shift to online education particularly challenging for teachers (Cheung, 2021). Aiming to facilitate the situation, the concept of ERLT has been adopted to refer to ERT in the field of language learning and teaching (Huertas-Abril, 2020).

According to Palacios-Hidalgo and Huertas-Abril (2021, pp. 73-74), "ERLT entails the use of interactive and individualized resources and tasks that students can do autonomously from their homes but in which the role of the teachers is still highly essential during the instruction" and it in turn requires "enough digital skills of both teachers and learners, technology infrastructure, teacher training to properly design activities, and family support", as well as opportunities for oral production. Precisely, teacher education is urged to train future professionals of education in order to provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to face an unprecedented situation such as the one that the world is living at the present. In this sense, despite the growth in research about how EFL is adapting to the pandemic (e.g., Isnani, 2021), specific teacher training in the field of ERT and ERLT is still very much needed.

Recent Research in the field

As a consequence of the current pandemic, several studies have been recently developed in relation to ERT and ERLT. For instance, García-Aretio (2021) reflects on what educational stakeholders think of ERT solutions during lockdowns derived from COVID-19, showing negative perceptions among students, families, and teachers as a result of some of the mistakes made when trying to guarantee the continuity of the teaching-learning processes as well as a preference for hybrid education over distance teaching. Toquero (2021) examines the effectiveness of distance education and the challenges of ERT in the Philippines, proving their potential to mitigate educational challenges during the pandemic.

In the Spanish context, Albó et al. (2020) study the experiences of primary and secondary teachers with ERT by analyzing how they use digital technologies when teaching and show that during the pandemic teachers had more opportunities for professional training and gained confidence in the use of technologies for teaching and communicating with learners and parents. On their part, Hidalgo et al. (2022) examine the opinions of undergraduate students regarding ERT as an alternative to face-to-face lessons during the 2019/2020 academic year and demonstrate among other ideas that they prefer face-to-face education, videoconferences if remote teaching is required, and using online material when face-to-face lessons are resumed.

In the field of ERLT, Hajar and Manan (2022) explore the opinions of primary education students and teachers about their experiences with ERLT, showing students' criticism towards some of the teaching practices (including more homework and a lack of individual attention and cooperative tasks) and teachers' workloads, tiredness, and difficulty to assess learners' progress online. Huertas-Abril (2020) studies the perceptions of primary language teachers regarding telecollaboration in an ERLT environment and reveals that, although they think that online teaching cannot replace face-to-face education, technology can motivate and engage students. Similarly, Huertas-Abril et al. (2021) examine the perceptions of Spanish pre-service primary language regarding educational materials design for ERLT, showing a feeling of complexity and lack of experience to work in an ERLT context.

METHODOLOGY

Design and method

The objective of this paper is to study the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers to identify the potential training needs of prospective teachers in both face-to-face and ERT situations. For this purpose, the design of this study was developed under an approach of quantitative research and following a descriptive method and correlational statistical techniques.

Sampling

A non-probabilistic sample was used for the selection of the participants (n=332). The participants were selected through convenience sampling techniques (Mertens, 2014). Eligibility criteria were studying the degree in English studies: Language, literature, and culture at the Spanish National University of Distance Education (UNED), or the degree in primary education or the double degree in primary education and English studies at the University of Córdoba (UCO).

The total sample of participants was composed of 332 pre-service teachers. The mean age of the participants was 35.49 years old (SD=11.621), with a range from 18 to 64 years (18-24=24.1%, 25-34=23.8%, 35-44=26.5%, 45-54=20.8%; over 55=4.8%). Moreover, 78.3% (n=260) of the participants were women and 21.1% (n=70) were men; one participant (0.3%) identified as a non-binary person. Finally, considering their university, 19.9% (n=66) were from UCO, and 80.1% (n=266) were from UNED. Regarding the course of the degree the participants are taking, 3.0% (n=10) of the participants were in Year 1, 7.8% (n=26) in Year 2, 42.5% (n=141) in Year 3, and 46.7% (n=155) in Year 4.

Data Collection

To collect the data, a cross-sectional survey technique, and specifically the questionnaire, was used. The questionnaire was designed ad hoc for Spanish EFL pre-service teachers regarding their perceptions of ERLT. Firstly, the literature review in the field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) generated a list of 8 items. Secondly, a group of experts was selected (two experts in CALL and one expert in psychopedagogy) to validate the questionnaire using the Delphi method (Reguant-Álvarez & Torrado-Fonseca, 2016). Thirdly, after their discussion, some of the items were reformulated for the sake of clarity and adequateness. The items were rated by using a 4-point Likert-type scale (1="totally disagree", 4="totally agree"). The final instrument included a section to collect participants' demographic information (gender, age, university, and course). The questionnaire was administered in English, and it was distributed online in the Spring semester of 2021 via Google Forms, considering the advantages of this type of instrument stated by Phellas et al. (2011). Prior to participating in the study, participants were informed about the research objectives and gave written consent for the processing and analysis of their responses. In this light, responses were collected on a voluntary and anonymous basis to guarantee confidentiality and conform to ethical standards.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive analysis methods were applied in the examination of the collected data. The normality distributions of the responses to each item were examined. Skewness and kurtosis values for each item were determined to be in the range between -1.478 to +1.263. These values were in the ranges specified by Tabachnick and Fidell (2019), and in this respect the normal distribution assumptions were met. The mean and standard deviation values for each item were calculated. Besides, differences between the perceptions of the pre-service teachers according to gender[1] and university were tested using Student's t-test for independent samples, and differences between the age of the participants and the course they were taking at university were tested with one-way ANOVAs.

The internal reliability coefficient for the instrument was examined. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the resulting questionnaire was .695, confirming good internal reliability. All the analyses were carried out using SPSS v24.0 for MacOS.

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[1] Since only one of the participants in the study considered themselves a non-binary person, only men and women were used for the gender analysis.

RESULTS

Perceptions Regarding Their Skills and Competences to Face ERLT Situations

Table 1 summarizes the responses of pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions regarding their skills and competences to face ERLT situations.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Item	n	%				M	SD
		TD	D	A	TA		
Q01	332	7.2	23.8	38.6	30.4	2.92	.910
Q02	332	1.2	9.6	35.2	53.9	3.42	.714
Q03	332	5.7	28.3	32.5	33.4	2.94	.919
Q04	332	3.0	24.4	45.2	27.4	2.97	.800
Q05	332	5.7	28.3	42.5	23.5	2.84	.850
Q06	332	0.0	3.0	24.4	72.6	3.70	.522
Q07	332	13.0	25.9	39.8	21.4	2.70	.949
Q08	332	22.6	34.6	31.0	11.7	2.32	.952

Note. TD: Totally disagree; D: Disagree; A: Agree; & TA: Totally agree (Source: Own elaboration)

When the data in **Table 1** are examined, it can be seen that the average response of the participants to the items Q02 *(I consider synchronous (live) teaching to be essential in an online English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)* and Q07 *(I am familiar with the assessment methods that can be used in a virtual English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)* are 3.4 and above. However, the rest of the items are below three, being Q01 *(I can select the most appropriate online video conferencing platforms according to my needs as a teacher during an ERT situation)*, Q03 *(I consider asynchronous (not live) teaching to be essential in an online English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)* and Q04 *(I know how to adapt content from the subject of EFL to use it online during an ERT situation)* almost three, and being Q08 *(I consider that my university training has provided me with the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out my work as a teacher of EFL/bilingual education during an ERT situation)* the item with the lowest score (M=2.32; SD=.952).

Perceptions Regarding Their Skills and Competences to Face ERLT Situations in Terms of Different Variables

Perceptions according to gender

When examining whether pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions regarding their skills and competences to face ERLT situations differed by gender, no statistically significant differences were found (see **Table 2** and **Figure 1**).

Table 2. Student's t-test for independent samples (gender)

Item	Gender	n	M	SD	t	p*
Q01	Women	260	2.93	.891	.453	.651
	Men	70	2.87	.977		
Q02	Women	260	3.46	.699	1.942	.053
	Men	70	3.27	.760		
Q03	Women	260	2.95	.920	.487	.626
	Men	70	2.89	.925		
Q04	Women	260	2.97	.783	.414	.679
	Men	70	2.93	.857		
Q05	Women	260	2.85	.855	.686	.493
	Men	70	2.77	.837		
Q06	Women	260	3.71	.518	1.178	.240
	Men	70	3.63	.543		
Q07	Women	260	2.65	.977	-1.662	.099
	Men	70	2.84	.828		
Q08	Women	260	2.32	.940	-.154	.877
	Men	70	2.34	.991		

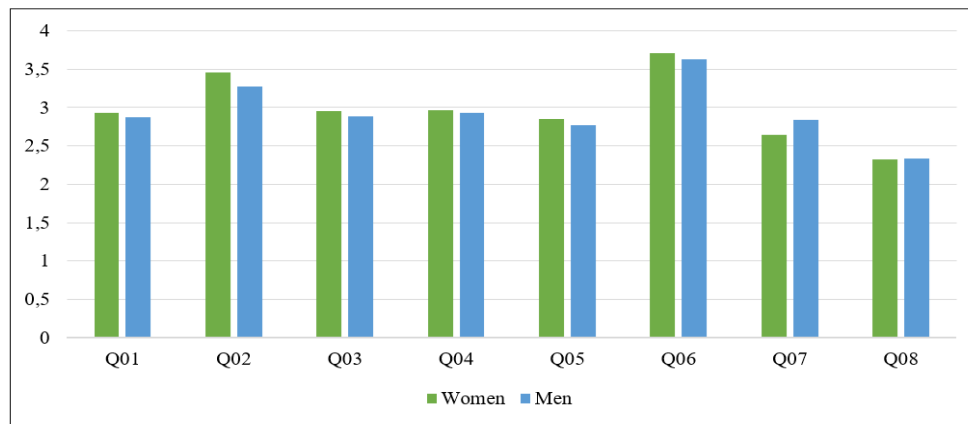Note. p<.05 (Source: Own elaboration)

Figure 1. Differences according to gender

It must be highlighted, however, that women scored higher in all the items except for Q07 (*I am familiar with the assessment methods that can be used in a virtual English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation*) and Q08 (*I consider that my university training has provided me with the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out my work as a teacher of EFL/bilingual education during an ERT situation*).

Perceptions according to university

The responses about pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions regarding their skills and competences to face ERLT situations were analyzed to study whether there were statistically significant differences according to university, considering that–in normal situations–UCO offers on-site learning, while UNED is an on-line distance university. Statistically significant differences were found in all items, except for Q02 *(I consider synchronous (live) teaching to be essential in an online English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)* and Q04 *(I know how to adapt content from the subject of EFL to use it online during an ERT situation)* (**Table 3** and **Figure 2**).

Table 3. Student's t-test for independent samples (university)

| Item	University	n	M	SD	t	p*
Q01	UCO	66	3.32	.586	5.340	.000
	UNED	266	2.82	.949		
Q02	UCO	66	3.41	.581	-.141	.888
	UNED	266	3.42	.744		
Q03	UCO	66	2.53	.980	-3.841	.000
	UNED	266	3.04	.877		
Q04	UCO	66	2.95	.666	-.198	.843
	UNED	266	2.97	.831		
Q05	UCO	66	3.11	.704	3.293	.001
	UNED	266	2.77	.871		
Q06	UCO	66	3.52	.588	-2.871	.005
	UNED	266	3.74	.496		
Q07	UCO	66	3.06	.820	3.897	.000
	UNED	266	2.61	.959		
Q08	UCO	66	2.74	.829	4.130	.000
	UNED	266	2.21	.953		

Note. p<.05 (Source: Own elaboration)
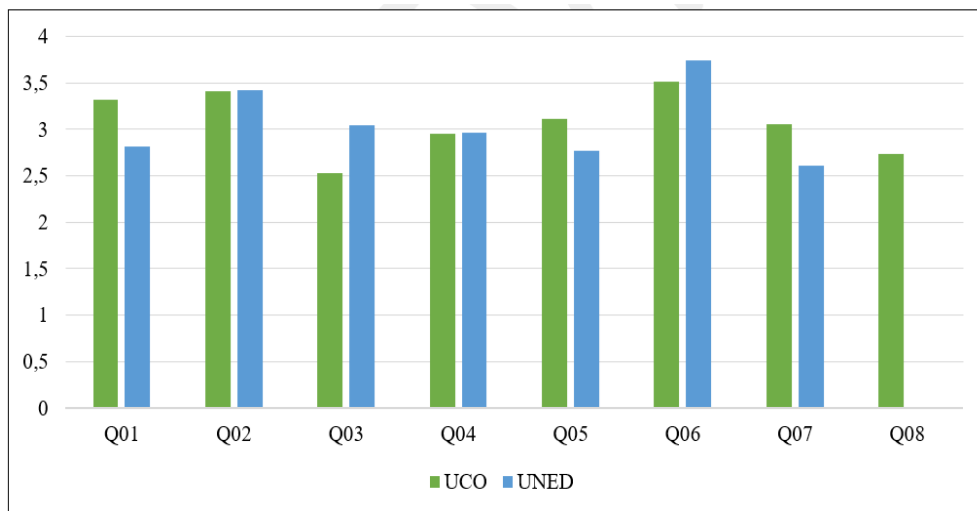
Figure 2. Differences according to university

Considering the items with statistically significant differences, UCO participants scored higher in Q01 *(I can select the most appropriate online video conferencing platforms according to my needs as a teacher during an ERT situation)*, Q05 *(I can involve and motivate students to participate in a virtual English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)*, Q07 *(I am familiar with the assessment methods that can be used in a virtual English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)*, and Q08 *(I consider that my university training has provided me with the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out my work as a teacher of EFL/bilingual education during an ERT situation)*, while UNED participants scored higher in Q03 *(I consider asynchronous (not live) teaching to be essential in an online English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)*, and Q06 *(I consider feedback to be especially important in an English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)*.

Perceptions according to age

After performing one-way ANOVA test with post hoc analysis (Games-Howell method) for each age group, significant differences were found for all items except Q02 *(I consider synchronous (live) teaching to be essential in an online English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)* and Q05 *(I can involve and motivate students to participate in a virtual English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)*, as shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4. ANOVA (age)

Item		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p*
Q01	Between groups	28.634	4	7.158	9.542	.000
	Within groups	245.330	327	.750		
	Total	273.964	331			
Q02	Between groups	.917	4	.229	.446	.775
	Within groups	167.888	327	.513		
	Total	168.804	331			
Q03	Between groups	8.891	4	2.223	2.684	.031
	Within groups	270.781	327	.828		
	Total	279.672	331			
Q04	Between groups	11.434	4	2.859	4.668	.001
	Within groups	200.265	327	.612		
	Total	211.699	331			
Q05	Between groups	6.093	4	1.523	2.137	.076
	Within groups	233.124	327	.713		
	Total	239.217	331			
Q06	Between groups	2.586	4	.647	2.411	.049
	Within groups	87.688	327	.268		
	Total	90.274	331			

Note. p<.05 (Source: Own elaboration)

Table 4 (continued). ANOVA (age)

Item		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p*
Q07	Between groups	16.604	4	4.151	4.819	.001
	Within groups	281.670	327	.861		
	Total	298.274	331			
Q08	Between groups	17.222	4	4.305	4.976	.001
	Within groups	282.935	327	.865		
	Total	300.157	331			

Note. p<.05 (Source: Own elaboration)

In Q01 *(I can select the most appropriate online video conferencing platforms according to my needs as a teacher during an ERT situation)*, the youngest participants obtained the highest score (M=3.31, SD=.587), while the lowest results correspond to the oldest age group (M=2.13; SD=.885). Similarly, in Q8 *(I consider that my university training has provided me with the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out my work as a teacher of EFL/bilingual education during an ERT situation)*, the youngest participants also score the highest values (M=2.71, SD=.860), while the oldest pre-service teachers show the lowest scores (M=2.00, SD=.966).

Regarding Q04 *(I know how to adapt content from the subject of EFL to use it online during an ERT situation)* and Q07 *(I am familiar with the assessment methods that can be used in a virtual English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)*, the 25-34 age group has the highest results, while the oldest group of participants has the lowest scores. On the one hand, the 25-34 age group mean scores for Q04 is 3.15 (SD=.769) and for Q07 is 2.96 (SD=.849); on the other, the over 55 age group mean scores for Q04 is 2.31 (SD=.946) and 2.00 (SD=1.033) for Q07.

In the case of Q03 *(I consider asynchronous (not live) teaching to be essential in an online English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)*, the highest score corresponds to the 45-54 age group (M=3.07, SD=.980), while the lowest score is obtained by the youngest age group (M=2.66, SD=.980).

Finally, in the case of Q06 *(I consider feedback to be especially important in an English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)*, the highest and the lowest scores are found in the two youngest age groups: the highest score is found for the 25-34 age group (M=3.78; SD=.472), while the lowest is scored by the 18-24 age group (M=3.55, SD=.571).

Perceptions according to university course

One-way ANOVA test with post hoc analysis (Games-Howell method) was also performed for course of the degrees (Years 1-4), and significant differences were only found in Q03 *(I consider asynchronous (not live) teaching to be essential in an online English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)* and Q06 *(I consider feedback to be especially important in an English/bilingual lesson during an ERT situation)*, as shown in **Table 5**.

Table 5. ANOVA (university course)

Item		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p*
Q01	Between groups	2.885	3	.962	1.164	.324
	Within groups	271.079	328	.826		
	Total	273.964	331			
Q02	Between groups	1.733	3	.578	1.134	.335
	Within groups	167.071	328	.509		
	Total	168.804	331			
Q03	Between groups	9.090	3	3.030	3.673	.013
	Within groups	270.582	328	.825		
	Total	279.672	331			
Q04	Between groups	1.169	3	.390	.607	.611
	Within groups	210.530	328	.642		
	Total	211.699	331			
Q05	Between groups	3.605	3	1.202	1.673	.173
	Within groups	235.612	328	.718		
	Total	239.217	331			
Q06	Between groups	2.504	3	.835	3.120	.026
	Within groups	87.770	328	.268		
	Total	90.274	331			

Note. p<.05 (Source: Own elaboration)

Table 5 (continued). ANOVA (university course)

Item		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p*
Q07	Between groups	3.130	3	1.043	1.159	.325
	Within groups	295.144	328	.900		
	Total	298.274	331			
Q08	Between groups	3.892	3	1.297	1.436	.232
	Within groups	296.264	328	.903		
	Total	300.157	331			

Note. p<.05 (Source: Own elaboration)

Regarding Q03, Year 2 students obtain the highest score (M=3.12, SD=.864), while Year 3 participants have the lowest result (M=2.74, SD=.974). With respect to Q06, the highest score is obtained by Year 1 pre-service teachers (M=3.80, SD=.422), while Year 3 participants again obtain the lowest score (M=3.60, SD=.560).

DISCUSSION

Based on the results from the full sample of pre-service EFL teachers, the answer to RQ1 (*What are the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers regarding their skills to teach in ERLT situations?*) is that the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers regarding their skills and competences to face ERLT situations is moderate. Despite having used different video conferencing platforms to receive their instruction, the participants' response regarding their competence to choose the best of this type of software is limited. This choice is neither trivial nor superficial, as after the pandemic platforms that support distance education applications have gained great importance (Cankaya & Durak, 2020). This is also directly connected to synchronous (live) and asynchronous (not live) teaching, being the former the most preferred by the participants. This result is also supported by Whittle et al. (2020), whose participant teachers overwhelmingly felt that synchronous education was the ideal. Nevertheless, when thoroughly though and design, asynchronous learning presents a valuable opportunity to engage learners in tasks and activities that may not be fully achieved in the classroom's time-constrained context (Whittle et al., 2020). Moreover, as Rahim (2020) states, asynchronous instruction should be given priority when students have varied levels of technological infrastructure quality.

Most participants feel confident enough to adapt the contents of the EFL subject to ERLT situations, which is in line with the study by Huertas-Abril et al. (2021a), where pre-service EFL teachers had to design and adapt digital materials to teach English in primary education during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is also connected with the perception of being able to involve and motivate learners, as ERLT situations should be faced by considering both learning the content and the socio-emotional needs of stakeholders (Richardson & Swan, 2003).

Findings highlight the importance of feedback, being the most valued aspect, although results are more moderate when asking the participants about assessment methods in ERLT. In this line, it is important to emphasize that "online assessment supports learning in the presence of timely, rich and constructive feedback and feedback makes the assessment effective" (Rahim, 2020, p. 63). Moreover, in ERLT situations, to achieve optimal student acquisition of competences and content, individualized learning is preferable (Benson & Brack, 2010).

To answer RQ2 (*Do pre-service teachers' perceptions on how to teach in ERLT situations vary according to gender, university, age, and university course?*), it must be emphasized that the results of this study indicated that there was no difference in perceptions regarding skills to address ERLT between men and women. This contrasts with previous studies on pre-service teachers' digital literacy, where men were found to outperform women in educational technology (Casillas-Martín et al., 2019). This difference may lie in the specific situation of ERLT, where teachers' digital literacy needs to be used for specific purposes and considering the differences with respect to 'traditional' online instruction (Hodges et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, statistically significant differences were found when considering age, course and (type of) university. The age factor has been discussed in research literature with respect to whether and to what extent it may influence the use of educational technology in class among pre-service teachers (Papadakis, 2018). The research team of the present study found statistically significant differences in certain perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers on their skills to face ERLT situations, namely: video conference platforms, asynchronous

teaching, adaptation of contents, feedback, assessment, and university training. However, only two items presented statistically significant differences when considering the course took by the participants: asynchronous teaching and feedback.

The analysis of data from the two universities involved in the study is especially relevant, as it is not only a comparison between two higher education institutions, but also between two types of instruction, as UCO is characterized by onsite teaching, while UNED is a distance university. Despite the differences between online/distance teaching and ERLT (Hodges et al., 2020), pre-service EFL teachers' training may have certain implications. UNED participants focus mainly on the importance of asynchronous teaching and feedback, two key elements to simulate on-site class situations (Rahim, 2020). On the other hand, UCO participants mainly focus on the importance of learners' involvement and motivation and assessment, and they feel their university training to tackle ERLT situations is better than their counterparts of UNED. Both groups, however, consider that further training should be provided regarding ERLT. This is in line with other studies that recommend infusing the curriculum with program-wide and program-deep high quality and quantity technology experiences (Foulger et al., 2017; Trust & Whalen, 2020) and providing both pre-service and in-service teachers with the opportunity to develop not only on-site teaching competencies, but also online and blended teaching competences, so that they can teach in different formats, contexts, and situations (Graham et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study was aimed to know the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers of their skills to face ERLT situations, and to determine whether these opinions vary according to gender, age, type of university or course.

As a general conclusion, it can be summarized that according to the results, pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions regarding their skills and competences to tackle ERLT are moderate, but two key elements are identified: the importance of synchronous (live) teaching and the role of feedback. Synchronous online teaching and learning allow lessons to occur much like an on-site class situation (Rahim, 2020), providing learners with a "a structured and immersive learning environment" (Wintemute, 2021, para. 8). Similarly, high-quality feedback not only allows students to correct themselves, but it also facilitates the learning process while fostering and maintaining learners' motivation (Benson & Brack, 2010). Furthermore, based on participants' responses, it must be stated that further teacher training is needed so that pre-service teachers feel prepared to tackle ERLT situations. This general finding is in line with Huertas-Abril (2020) as well as with Hodges et al. (2020), who state that "the possible need for ERT must become part of a faculty member's skill set, as well as professional development programming for any personnel involved in the instructional mission of colleges and universities" (para. 43).

Regarding the comparisons between groups, no statistically significant differences associated with the gender of the participants were appreciated, which implies that when facing potential ERLT situations both groups present similar perceptions and skills, despite the fact that certain elements analyzed here are manifested in a more appreciable manner by one group or another. Nevertheless, the other factors analyzed–university, age, and course–presented statistically significant differences. These issues should be considered in the training provided in teacher training programs, so as to help reduce the differences in a more personalized learning context.

The study provides new insights about ERLT, as it not only extends the existing body of research in the field, but also encourages researchers to keep on examining the perceptions of teachers that will have to face these new teaching situations. Moreover, the results obtained allow exploring the training needs of future EFL teachers and, in turn, improving the training offered by universities and teacher education institutions.

The findings presented in this paper, however, should be interpreted in the context of three limitations. First, due to the nature of an exploratory study, as a starting point, only pre-service EFL teachers from two Spanish universities were considered as the target population, and consequently these findings may not be applicable to other participants from different backgrounds or contexts. Future research should consider recruiting pre-service EFL teachers from different countries and sociocultural backgrounds so comparisons with the current research could be carried out. Second, the study is only quantitative; qualitative data could

complement the results presented here, and qualitative analysis may warrant more potential independent variables. Third, the quantitative findings were only based on self-reported data, so they may be affected by respondents' subjective opinions about the phenomena studied. For this reason, further research should obtain information through additional sources to obtain more reliable data.

In this line, the current study yielded several future lines of research into teacher training and pedagogy, and longitudinal studies considering both pre-service teachers' competences and perceptions could be suggested in order to better understand the perceptions of teachers regarding distance and online teaching and ERLT, as well as to enhance teacher education and preparedness to integrate technology into the classroom.

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